

Last Woman Standing

TRISHELLE CANNATELLA

IT TOOK TRISHELLE CANNATELLA THREE years to figure out how best to approach the World Poker Tour's Celebrity Invitational, but in 2010 she finally got it right. As documented during her time on *The Real World: Las Vegas* in 2002, Cannatella is a very social creature who doesn't like missing out on any fun. At the WPT Celebrity Invitational, this can be a real problem.

"That particular tournament is all about fun, right?" she explained. "The first two years that I played, I was just like, *Oh cool, you get to hang out with a bunch of really cool people.* There are a lot of interesting characters there. It's sort of like a party the first night. I never made it to Day Two because I always had so much fun the first day I'd bust out so I could go hang out with everyone."

While this attitude helped her enjoy some memorable moments, it also wasted all the hard work she had put in learning the game. Like so many others, Cannatella started playing poker in the wake of Chris Moneymaker's victory at the 2003 WSOP. A friend of hers bought her *Poker For Dummies*, and, using it as a reference, she taught herself to play. Evidently, she's a good teacher because she won the first live tournament she ever played in, an \$80 buy-in event at Caesars Palace.

She has also been playing on the internet since the early days of online play. How early? Two words: Paradise Poker.



"I would play the dollar tournaments and stay up all night. I would play those and freerolls just trying to get better, then I started moving up a little bit. I'm not really great at cash. I'm better at tournaments. But I'm getting lessons very soon from a big online player so I'm going to start playing more cash."

Thanks to her growing proficiency at cards and her lingering celebrity status, Absolute Poker gave her a sponsorship deal in 2009. Infused with newfound confidence, she saw her game dramatically

improve following her signing with the online poker site. "In the three tournaments I played following that, I final-tabled all of them and won one of them."

Realizing how much her game had improved, she decided to take this year's WPT Celebrity Invitational a bit more seriously than she had in previous years. "I went into the second day with an average stack, and I really started playing the second day like no fun, no partying, just straight poker. My goal the second day was to be the last woman standing.

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Ricki Lake and I were the last two, and after I busted her I was like, *Okay, now I want to make the final table.*"

After outlasting 558 other players, a healthy percentage of whom were professionals, she succeeded in doing just that. At the final table she played well, making smart decisions, until her luck simply gave out. With three players left she got all her chips into the pot with a pair of queens and 8-7-5-5 on the board, but LeRon Washington called her with 7-6 and the four of clubs on the river gave him a winning straight.

"I had a couple lucky hands to get to the final table so I figured it would probably come around like that," she said. "LeRon had been getting super lucky, so was I surprised? No. It was frustrating, but he was so happy I couldn't be mad about it and I was happy with the way that I played."

She picked up \$20,000 for her third-place finish and, perhaps more importantly to her, the respect of the poker community. Joe Sebok and Scott Huff invited her to talk about her impressive showing on their show *Poker2Nite*—but her appearance was overshadowed by the mock fight she and Sebok got in.

"That was fake," she said, setting the record straight. "I can't believe people think that was real. The producer was like, 'Hey, I think it would be funny if Joe pissed you off and you stormed off the set.' Now everyone's blogging about it: 'Oh my God, Trishelle and Joe Sebok hate each other and they got in a fight.' We played along with it on Twitter. He was like, 'I'm really, really sorry,' and I was like, 'You're a jerkface.' No, Joe is my friend. I have known him for years. He has pissed me off a couple times in the past for different reasons, but that particular day it was all in good fun."

For Cannatella, perhaps it's a good thing that people in the poker community remember the fake fight with Sebok more than the reason she was on the show. Now she can continue to educate those who underestimate her at the poker table. ♣



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