

Team Americas Gets Its Revenge at 2011 Caesars Cup

Team Americas Rains Down on Team Europe's Victory Parade at WSOP Europe

Cannes, France (19 October 2011) – It rained today on the French Riviera. Thick clouds of dark gray were cast above what is normally a sun-drenched holiday playground for the rich and famous.

The atmosphere was even darker for some inside luxurious Hotel Majestic Barriere, which hosted the second edition of the Caesars Cup. This was especially true for the five members of Team Europe which suffered a pungent payback at the hands of (and from the cards played by) Team Americas.

This was the second edition of the Caesars Cup, which has quickly matured into an exciting bi-annual poker competition played exclusively at WSOP Europe. Similar in design to golf's Ryder Cup, just being selected as a team member is an honor. The international match has no prize money or gold bracelet at stake. Instead, pride and bragging rights are on the line (*Writer's Note: Okay, maybe there's just a tinge of side action between a few of the players, just to make things a little more "interesting"*).

Following their decisive 3-1 victory in the best-of-five match-play format, the triumphant members of Team Americas were ecstatic. The team comprised of four Americans and one Canadian -- included Phil Hellmuth, Jr. (Team Captain), Ben Lamb, Jason Mercier, Johnny Chan and Daniel Negreanu. Team Americas' fabulous five bested an all-star lineup from Team Europe -- which included Bertrand "ElkY" Grospellier, Jake Cody, Max Lykov, Gus Hansen and Tony G.

The action began Wednesday during the early afternoon. The first team to win three matches was to be declared as the champion.

MATCH 1: The first match went to Team Americas. The duo of Ben Lamb and Jason Mercier defeated Team Europe's Tony G. and Jake Cody. The key hand occurred when Team Americas made two pair versus what turned out to be a busted flush draw by the Europeans. TEAM AMERICAS LED 1-0.

MATCH 2: At the first edition of Caesars Cup, the tandem of Phil Hellmuth and Daniel Negreanu lost what turned out to be a critical match to Team Europe. Hoping for revenge, the two poker superstars faced Team Europe's Gus Hansen and Max Lykov. If insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result, then Hellmuth and Negreanu are lunatics. Same players. Same result. The critical hand for the Europeans was being dealt A-5 in an all-in situation versus Team Americas' K-T suited. Team Europe made a full house and then closed out the victory a few hands later. SERIES TIED 1-1.

MATCH 3: The Heads-Up match was expected to be a decisive moment in the competition. That fact was even more pronounced as Bertrand “Elky” Grospellier took the European flag against poker legend Johnny Chan. Indeed, Chan was chosen in the anchor spot in an effort to shake Grospellier’s confidence and seize momentum for Team Americas when it was needed the most. The plan worked masterfully. Grospellier had Chan all-in a few times, but lost a big pot late in the 30-minute encounter when he overplayed a mediocre hand. About a dozen hands later, Team America took the lead when Chan’s 4-4 topped Grospellier’s A-6 in an all-in situation for the Europeans. TEAM AMERICAS LED 2-1.

MATCH 4: Team Europe desperately needed the final two matches in order to retain its title. Russian poker pro Maz Lycov was selected to anchor the heads-up match against Phil Hellmuth, who entered the confrontation in the midst of a personal losing streak, dating back to the previous Caesars Cup. “I have a hunch about this,” Hellmuth declared confidently as he took a seat versus the stone-faced Ruskie. After about 30 minutes of back-and-forth play, the final hand was dealt when Hellmuth got lucky with his Q-T against Lycov’s K-9. All the chips were in when a queen flopped, good for top pair for Team Americas -- which scooped the final hand of Caesars Cup 2. TEAM AMERICAS WON 3-1 AND DECLARED THE WINNER.

While great poker playing was expected, what was arguably even more entertaining to many viewers was the inimitable personal interplay between many of the unique characters who were cast in the perfect poker drama for television. Many final tables tend to be stately and ultra-serious. But this international grudge match turned into more of a circus, given the bombastic collection of poker ringmasters, lions, and even a few clowns.

When Team Americas took an early lead, the barrage of bravado ensued. Hellmuth, beaming with his usual self-confidence (or out-of-control ego, depending upon one’s perspective) constantly battered the Europeans with trash talk. His adversaries weren’t having any of it. “Tony G,” hand-picked by Team Europe in order to provide maximum implied tilt odds with his derisive commentary, never shut up once – even when he was not sitting at the table.

But perhaps the best line of the day went to former gold bracelet winner Gus Hansen who heard enough of Team America’s smack talk at one point and after seeing a few pots in a row go the wrong way declared, “It’s not about winning the most hands. It’s about minimizing the losses. That’s why we’re the champions.”

But Hansen’s needling failed to inspire a victory for the Europeans. Ultimately, the posturing and verbal insults faded out and what remained was an atmosphere more reminiscent of the Olympic games. As the players for Team Americas hoisted up their Caesars Cup victory trophy in celebration, the defeated members of Team Europe stood and politely applauded (*It should be noted that Tony G. had left the room by this*

point). In the end, it was a great fun-filled day for the game of poker and yet another chapter in WSOP Europe's emerging traditions and prestige.

Still, poker curmudgeon Tony G. would have none of it.

"I had no input in what happened here today," Tony G. snapped, arms folded and peeking back inside the room as the members of Team America's toasted their victory. "Look at them over there. All I can say is, at least Hellmuth won something this year," a ridiculing reference to Hellmuth's three second-place finishes at the 2011 WSOP, played in Las Vegas.

"Instead of finishing second, he's finally managed to get very lucky and win. I'm soooooo impressed," Tony G. added, his voice dripping with obvious sarcasm.

And so, the record now stands at 1 to 1. The next edition of Caesars Cup is expected to take place in 2013.

MORE ABOUT CAESARS CUP

The inaugural Caesars Cup was played two years ago in London, England. At Caesars Cup 1, Team Europe, captained by Annette Obrestad, demolished Team America's, captained by Daniel Negreanu.

When millions of viewers tuned into the initial broadcast of the first Caesars Cup competition they witnessed a spanking delivered by Europe's best poker players on many living legends of the game. The defeat was a rude wake-up call for some that poker is not really just an American game, any longer.

Moreover, the global epicenter of poker has certainly shifted towards a new Euro-super continent booming with major tournaments just about every week and millions of players who are enjoying the freedom to play poker both live as well as online. Alas, the victory of Team Europe over Team Americas symbolized a number of emerging trends, in fact - - ugly realities -- if you happened to be a player from North America.

The European victory was not just endemic of a geographic shift, but a generational one, as well. Last time out, the younger lesser-known European team not only beat an American team loaded with far more bracelet winners with loads more playing experience, they humiliated each and every player on Team Americas. Team Europe also exposed the very real vulnerability of players above a certain age and instilled seeds of doubt that they may not be quite as good as the game's newer, younger wunderkinds.

Two years have since passed. The Europeans have rightfully been celebrating. They

currently retain bragging rights as the premier poker team in the world. Conversely, Team Americas has been simmering in frustration for 24 long months. They've been waiting for the opportunity to exact revenge, regain their wounded pride, and restore themselves as the kings of the green felt.

"I know we have the best team here," said Bertrand "Elky" Grospellier, the Captain of Team Europe. "I picked out the players I think can beat each of the Americans. They have a lot of talented players. But we have the advantage. Our players are better as a team, which is very important when you are playing the team format."

Naturally, Phil Hellmuth, the captain of Team Americas took exception to Elky's views. "We're going to win this time," Hellmuth boldly stated. "Last time, there was a lack of team unity. This time around, we are much more focused. It was really humiliating to go through that, two years ago. We are not going to let that happen again."

TEAM AMERICAS LINEUP (challengers):

PHIL HELLMUTH, JR. (team captain)

BEN LAMB

JASON MERCIER

JOHNNY CHAN

DANIEL NEGREANU

TEAM EUROPE LINEUP (reigning champions):

BERTRAND "ELKY" GROSPELLIER (team Captain)

JAKE CODY

MAX LYKOV

GUS HANSEN

ANTANAS GUOGA, a.k.a. "TONY G."

Note: For those who were unable to tune and watch the live stream at wsop.com, the Caesars Cup was also taped for international broadcast. The finale will be shown in December on ESPN, and other networks.

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