

Foreword by <b>Vince Van Patten</b>	6
Preface	10
Introduction	12
1 Hooked on Action	14
2 A Forked Family Tree	16
3 The Sporting Life	20
4 Pack up and Get Out	29
5 College and the Army	33
6 Back to the Ballroom	38
7 Turning Pro	43
8 Off to Vegas	49
9 Amazing Gambling Stories	54
10 Transition to the Business Side of Poker	79
11 The Story of partypoker	87
12 The World Poker Tour	112
13 The WSOP (the First 30 Years)	120
14 Gamblin' on the Golf Course	166
15 David "Chip" Reese	184
16 Doyle "Texas Dolly" Brunson	195
17 Walter Clyde "Puggy" Pearson	205
18 Stu Ungar	214
19 Billy Baxter	225
20 Big Action!	232
21 In Conclusion	261

# Foreword

by *Vince Van Patten*

I've had the privilege of co-hosting the World Poker Tour (WPT) with Mike Sexton since day one. We're now heading into Season 15. You couldn't find a better partner to work with. The energy, excitement, and enthusiasm you see from Mike on television is real. He has a passion for poker like no one I've ever seen.

Like Mike, I grew up playing poker. We really are poker guys who became poker commentators – not commentators who became poker guys. And Mike is as professional as they come. In 14 seasons, he's contributed greatly to the success of the WPT, both on camera and behind the scenes, and he hasn't missed one televised final table in the history of the WPT.

*Life's a Gamble* tells the story of Mike's life and how "action" has been a part of his life all his life. It also lets you in on the key roles he played in the development of online poker with partypoker, which he helped grow to the number-one site in the world, and televised poker, with the WPT. But to me, the highlights of the book are the countless gambling adventures that he shares with the readers. These stories, involving some of the most legendary figures in poker history, are fun to read and extremely entertaining.

Once you start the book, it's hard to put down. You'll keep reading, wondering, and asking for more. And when you think his stories can't get more fantastic, they do. He tops every story with a better one.

Mike is a visionary who saw the future of poker years ahead of everyone else. He is a writer, lecturer, philanthropist, and amazing

poker player, and has been one of poker's premiere ambassadors for over 20 years. And when it comes to ideas to help grow the game we love, he's not a talker, he's a "doer". He has a sign in his office that reads, "Those who achieve success are those who take a dream and make it come true." That's Mike.

He was integral to the creation and success of two mega events in the poker world, the Tournament of Champions of Poker and the partypoker Million. He was also a key player in the growth of Party-Gaming, a company whose success was mind-blowing. In less than four years after the launch of partypoker, that company went public on the London Stock Exchange for \$8.5 billion, the largest float in five years!

Mike was a star gymnast at Ohio State and following college, he joined the Army to become a paratrooper. His patriotism shines when he pays tribute to those who served, as well as with the work he does for the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Wounded Warriors, the Special Olympics, as well as other charities.

Throughout his life, as you will learn in *Life's a Gamble*, Mike has been an action man. Danny Robison, his buddy growing up, steered him into a "bet on everything" lifestyle, and he's lived it. He is accustomed to a life of winning and losing a lot of money on the turn of a card, the roll of a golf ball, a bet on a football game, or a prop bet involving untold sums.

I'm an action man myself. Mike and I have made side bets on nearly every outcome of WPT final tables, including the "over and under" of what time the table will finish. Hey, we're action guys.

What can I say?

Few writers can tap into our vicarious lust. Mike Sexton gives us permission to enjoy it and keep it our little secret. In the book, you'll get an insight into the high-stakes poker players' insatiable need for action. His tales about high rollers, celebrities, and the rich and famous run rampant throughout the book.

I'm confident that you will enjoy his humble and humorous style of story-telling. His way of telling golf stories will make you feel like you're on the course and right in the middle of the high-stakes action. You'll actually feel the "thrill of victory and agony of defeat".

Mike divulges the ups and downs of gambling. He also talks about his success and mistakes along the way. He knows he's not the only man in this layered mirror of life. Many a man has left the table with pockets full of money and chips. Others, not so lucky, leave penniless, homeless, and drug-addicted. A number have died lonely deaths after reaching heights we can only dream of.

High-stakes gambling is like walking the high wire or traversing a minefield. Danger lurks with every step along the way. Life's a gamble, but this book isn't.

Enjoy!

***Vince Van Patten,***

*WPT Commentator*

*Writer, Director, Producer*

# Introduction

Many of you know me as the commentator and co-host (with my partner, Vince Van Patten) of the televised WPT. In my 50-plus years of playing poker, I've done well as a cash game player and have had my share of success on the tournament circuit.

I learned the game at the age of 13 and became a full-time professional poker player in 1977. What is not generally known, however, is the story of how my early passion for cards and gambling eventually led to my induction into the Poker Hall of Fame, to my involvement with one of the world's most lucrative and innovative internet gaming companies of all time, PartyGaming, and my role in helping bring the WPT to fruition.

Now that my parents have passed away and I have become the father of a young son (Ty Michael Sexton), I feel that the time is right to tell what happened in between: how my early life shaped me to become who I am today and about the cast of characters I had the good and, sometimes, ill fortune to know, and to recount the incredible but true stories of the remarkable ventures in which I was involved or witnessed.

These true stories come from the poker table, the golf course, and gamblers who, in their quest for action, create bets on everything – even weight gain or loss. The trip I took down memory lane while writing this book was a bumpy one. I was hooked on “action” at 13. In reflecting, I remembered things that made me smile and a few things that made me sad. But most of all, I was able to recall things that have helped me understand how gambling came to define me. Life's a gamble and this is how it all began...

What makes his record even more compelling was that he had a *huge* drug problem for 20 years. It's well known that he was high many times on Day 1 as big tournaments were taking place, including the last tournament he ever played, the '97 main event at the WSOP – which he won. You have to wonder what he might have accomplished in his career without his personal issues.

I can remember meeting Stuey in 1978 when the high-stakes action was at the Dunes. Once, my friend Danny Robison and Stuey were playing together in a Seven Card Stud game. Stuey quit the game. I had been sweating Danny and he asked me if would go with Stuey to his room and bring him back something. I said, "Sure, be glad to."

Stuey and I went up to his room. We entered the room and as I looked over and saw his desk, which had a glass top on it, I thought someone had spilled a pile of sugar on it. It was cocaine! (I was quite naive when it came to drugs.) I couldn't believe it. There was so much of it. And there wasn't even a "Do Not Disturb" sign on his door. All I could think was *if security comes in now, I'm going to jail*. I said, "Stuey, give me whatever you've got for Danny. I want to get out of here." He handed me a brown paper bag and I took it back down to Danny and said, "Don't ever ask me to go to Stuey's room again."

## A Railbird's Dream

I remember the first time Amarillo Slim held his Super Bowl of Poker. It was at the Las Vegas Hilton in 1979. I was in Vegas then, so I went over to the Hilton. I was between bankrolls and was standing on the rail watching Stuey playing \$100/200 Seven Card Stud. He was killing time while waiting to get in a bigger game. He was on fire, playing every hand, seemingly betting or raising on every street, and winning nearly every pot. Stuey would always say, "Rush, rush, play the rush." And he did.

There was a big crowd on the rail watching this game. Stuey was putting on quite a show. Finally, Stuey had to go to the restroom. He could not stand the thought of missing a hand, so he turned around,

saw me, and said, "Sexton, come pick up a hand for me." I looked like Edwin Moses hopping the rail. (Moses won 107 consecutive 400m hurdle events between 1977 and 1987, and two Olympic gold medals. He was also from my hometown, Dayton, OH.)

Stuey took off to go to the restroom and, on the first hand, I picked up 9-10-J with two diamonds. The bring-in was the deuce of clubs and the first guy raised with a 6-up and I called. The guy behind me raised, an ace capped it, and everyone called. On the turn, I caught the 8 of diamonds for an open-end straight and a three flush. Again, the pot was capped and no one got out. On fifth street, I caught a queen for a straight in five. Nobody had a pair on the board nor was there a possible flush draw. At the moment, I had the nuts.

The ace led out and the guy who started with the six raised him. About this time, I see Ungar racing back to the table. My heart was pounding. I knew if I could win this pot that something good might happen for me. Just as Stuey was near the table, I announced, "I raise." Stuey saw the size of the pot and my three-bet, and even though he didn't know what I had, he hollered out, "Yesssss!" The fourth player got out but the other two called.

On sixth street, nobody helped but the ace led out again, the other guy called, and I raised again. They both called. On the river, they checked, I bet and held my breath. They both called. One guy had aces up and the other was rolled up with three 6s. I won the pot with a straight. Yes! I felt sooo good. I got up and let Stuey sit down.

I can still hear Stuey laughing. As he was raking in the pot, he roared, "I can beat you guys even when I'm in the shithouse!" Stuey then looked over at the next table and said, "What are they playing over there?" I said it was a \$50/100 Stud 8 or Better game. He counted out \$1,500, handed it to me, and said, "Here. Get in that game and play for us."

I got in the game and beat it for \$2,300. Stuey gave me \$1,200. Not only did I have a small bankroll again, but from that day forward Stuey and I bonded. I'll never forget that day. It pays to be in the right place at the right time.