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Tour goes big league with stats

Players can subscribe to Web gaming site, too

By Mike Bambach
USA TODAY

Move over, passer rating and earned run average, there's a new statistical formula in town: poker's aggression index.

The World Poker Tour, which considers itself the major league of poker, has partnered with Stats LLC to produce the poker industry's first sports-style database. Stats LLC provides data collection and analysis for 85 leagues, including the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball.

"In poker, we all think we're better than we are," said Steve Lipscomb, chief executive officer of the WPT. "We're going to develop statistics that will allow you to compare one win against another.

"The first stats you're going to get are rather basic, telling you what your ranking is based on the strength of field. All we have now are the WSOP bracelets, but some of those are smaller buy-in events.

"If you won a World Series of Poker tournament years ago with 150 people in it, how does that compare to a WPT event with 500 people in it? This will tell you."

Lipscomb also sees poker statistics, which are available at worldpokertour.com, as another way to validate poker as a sport.

For example, take the aggression index.

"It's a mathematical formula at how many times you raise in certain positions with what hand," Lipscomb said. "We all know poker is infinitely nuanced, but that's no different than baseball.

"The audience has adopted poker as a sport. But the next step is how we talk about it in sports parlance. We're learning how to talk about this."

The WPT, which Lipscomb credits for launching the global poker phenomenon by making it a mainstream spectator sport, also will unveil a subscription-based gaming platform in which players can legally compete online for as much as \$100,000 in prize money every month.

But the website, clubwpt.com, will not be accessible in all 50 states. Lipscomb said the website will operate under sweepstakes laws in 38 states and the District of Columbia on a state-by-state basis. He says people can join the site for free and play for free in all 50 states.

Federal laws restricting wire transfers for Internet gaming have not prevented "enormous amounts of money being made in Internet gaming," Lipscomb said, estimating revenue at \$2 billion to \$4 billion.

"We have not felt comfortable taking those bets," Lipscomb said. "With comfort, we can provide something that the Justice Department says is not illegal."

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