



“When you’re travelling round with your mates on tour, it’s really good. This weekend, we’ve had a right laugh...”


Heads-up


Neil Blatchly & Rupinder Bedi

Two Gala Casinos British Poker Tour champions in a row hail from Leicester and play in the same home game. We found them at the Liverpool leg of the GCBPT where they were trying for a repeat performance while keeping their feet on the ground...

Bank worker Rupinder ‘George’ Bedi adopts a brute force attitude at the poker tables and is a big fan of table banter. A keen online player, he has cashed at the APAT European Amateur Championship in Luton as well as Sheffield’s Owlerton May Festival.

His close friend and home game compatriot Neil Blatchly has a head for figures. The Leicester-based accountant has been enjoying a run of form as of late, cashing at the Dusk Till Dawn Deepstack Festival and in a £200 side event here in Liverpool.

Both players were keen to strike gold again at the most recent leg of the GCBPT, but found time to have a chat with *WPT Poker* and share a few trade secrets along the way...

First off, how long have the two of you known each other?

Neil: About two-and-a-half years isn’t it?

Rupinder: Two-and-a-half or three years yeah...

Neil: We only met through playing poker.

Rupinder: Yeah, I’d seen Neil down the local casino a couple of times and played a few pots with him. And then Kev, who is part of the home game as well, he introduced me to the home game, and Neil was there.

Did you have a friendly rivalry going on in the pots you played, before you knew each other properly?

Neil: Yeah, there were one or two times down the local casino... [chuckles]

Rupinder: I mean, you identify good players. Playing at local casinos, there’s not too many of them, to be fair. So you identify good players, and I identified Neil as a good player, so you sort of...

Neil: Faces become familiar don’t they?

Rupinder: So you don’t want to get into too many pots with him. He knows what you’re doing, so you know you can bluff him and things like that.

How long have the two of you been playing?

Neil: Well I actually started playing on Betfair. I used to trade on their site an awful lot, and did quite a bit of work on them for my dissertation at uni. And then when they started the poker site I actually followed it on to there, started playing online and then wandered down to the local casino. So I’ve probably been playing about just under three years – coming up to three years now.

Rupinder: I’ve been playing about six years. I put \$200 on Pacific Poker and about a week later took down a big multi. I have no idea how I would have won that, because I had no idea what I

was doing. And ever since then I’ve been... I was an online player for a long time, and I hadn’t played live pretty much at all for the first two years. And then the local card room, the Gala Leicester, the card room there... I got really excited again, really nervous. I used to get really nervous about playing live.

Neil: It’s more the social side that goes with it. When you are travelling around with your mates on tour, it’s really good. Although this weekend hasn’t been too good for us, we’ve still had a laugh and had a bit of a result.

Rupinder: We’ve had a right laugh.

Neil: It’s been really enjoyable, despite not running good in the main event. But we had a decent run in the £200, and we’ve had a really, really good weekend.

Rupinder: We’re a bit gutted. We were looking forward to this one.

Neil: Really wanted the follow-up win, didn’t we?

Rupinder: Yeah, we wanted another one, and for neither of us to make Day Two is disappointing. You can’t win them all though. Tournaments... it’s variance.

Neil: We should still be thankful for the last two.

Rupinder: Yeah, yeah, but we are like most poker players, we still moan. ▶

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► Playing in a £20 comp and you get outdrawn: 'oh, I never win...'

[Laughter]

Would you say that the British casino poker tours have had a big impact on the amateur game in the UK?

Neil: If it wasn't for the two tours, I really don't think that the British poker scene would be anything like it is. I think that there were something like 52 online and satellite qualifiers playing in this event. You're talking almost a quarter of the field. Basically it gives everybody a chance to play at the top level. There are some really, really good players out there who simply can't afford to play in these events, and if it wasn't for the satellites and the online qualifiers, I really don't think that the local players would be that interested.

Rupinder: I think the fact that you can pay £500 or £1,000 – and I know that the EPT probably has a slightly better structure – but you're paying £500 for what is essentially a structure that the top pros play in, and there's a lot of value out there. And the exposure you get as well – I mean, we've had massive exposure since we won, and you can't buy that.

Do you think that the standard of play has got better as a result of the tours?

Neil: The standard at our local place has

got a lot better. It used to be appalling. It really did use to be bad – to the point where you just couldn't play there.

Rupinder: I think that your average player is a lot better than they were two or three years ago, because there's so much out there to learn from, and people are always studying the game. Don't get me wrong – you still get an awful lot of people who don't know what they are doing, but your average player is better now than they were, say, even two years ago, I think.

Neil: There's been a big improvement.

Rupinder: Yeah, I'm quite a student of the game. I know Neil's not read any books, he's sort of taught himself, but I taught myself initially and then thought that I need to tighten my game up. There's a lot of pros writing a lot of good books out there, and even if you only learn one thing from a book, it's going to benefit your game, so it's worth spending that money. I mean I've spent that much on tournaments, you might as well spend a bit on learning the game.

Neil: I physically can't sit still and read books. It just does my head in. I read quite a bit of the online stuff – mainly when I'm at work – but I do read quite a bit...

Rupinder: Don't put that in the interview...

[Laughter]

After you've had a big win, is there the temptation to go pro and ramp up the action?

Rupinder: I've got a family that keeps me grounded. I'm under no illusions. I know that I'm a good player, but I'm perhaps not good enough to cut my teeth with the best of the best. I enjoy playing, and I enjoy the fact that I can play as much as I want without actually having to worry about whether I win or lose. We know a few people who are tearing their hair out – they play for a living – and if it mattered so much I don't think that I'd enjoy it.

Neil: I think it takes something away from your game. It takes the edge or something. As enjoyable as it is, I'm just literally about to sign for my first house, and I don't think I'd be able to do that if I had the poker pro status and having to rely on that for an income. It's nice having a guaranteed income and then just playing for fun.

How difficult is it to keep your discipline and keep your feet on the ground after a big result?

Neil: It's pretty tough. Straight after winning Bristol, I was on a flight to Vegas the next day, which was pre-booked. I was quite impressed with myself, actually, for taking most of it as a cheque, so it wouldn't clear until the time I came



▲ Neil and Rupinder have contrasting playing styles



PRO ON PRO

back, which was probably quite sensible. It can be quite tough. I mean you can always sit down and chuck your money into a cash game...

Rupinder: I'm quite a grounded guy anyway, so I've not got carried away at any point. Sometimes, though, you just see all these big comps and think: well, I could have a go at that. Like the EPT London. But then I could also lose a hell of a lot. But if there's any sponsors out there who'd like to give us a go, we'd be more than happy to make them some money [chuckles]...

Has your win changed the way you approach the game or the way you play?

Neil: I wouldn't say that it's changed the way I play, but it's given me a lot more confidence in my game. On this tour, so far I've played how I wanted to play, and I've been a lot more confident. And I think that the results have come through because of that. Possibly last year I gave everyone a little bit too much credit, and I think that's possibly where I went wrong. But I think confidence is the major thing.

Rupinder: Yeah, I agree. I mean sometimes you can go on a run where you don't cash and you start to wonder, 'am I actually as good as I think that I am?' Winning a big event gives you that confidence, and now I'm really determined to prove that it wasn't a fluke. I know Neil's win wasn't a fluke. I've got so much respect for Neil's game – we play the game quite differently. Neil's a bit

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more methodical and probably a better hand reader than I am, whereas I'm a little bit more brute force at times [chuckles].

Neil: I think it comes from our backgrounds, though. With your online game, it certainly lets you read more into betting patterns than I do. Whereas I see a lot more into physical tells of the player and how they react to certain things. I think we should combine our games...

Do you find that people play back at you harder, now you've had some success?

Rupinder: It's a mix. You get those who fear you in pots, who don't want to play with you, who know you're a good player. Then you get those who think 'this guy's the Nottingham champ – I want to take some chips off him...' The first Sunday I played afterwards, at my local casino, everyone was playing pots with me.

Neil: You get a few of the locals coming up to you and saying 'remember that hand that I took off you?' and you're, like, 'erm... no.' But on this tour I found that there were one or two that were out gunning for me, but I don't think that things have changed that much for us.

Rupinder: Not really. Like I say, you get a mix of players, I mean we're both quite, I don't want to use the term 'nice guys', but we'll got on with anyone at the table, and I had some really good banter on my first table yesterday. We were having a laugh.

Neil: It's just more respect for the way you approach the game, and they probably give you a bit more credit, which is always nice. Almost like a licence to steal. It does help once or twice, but then again...

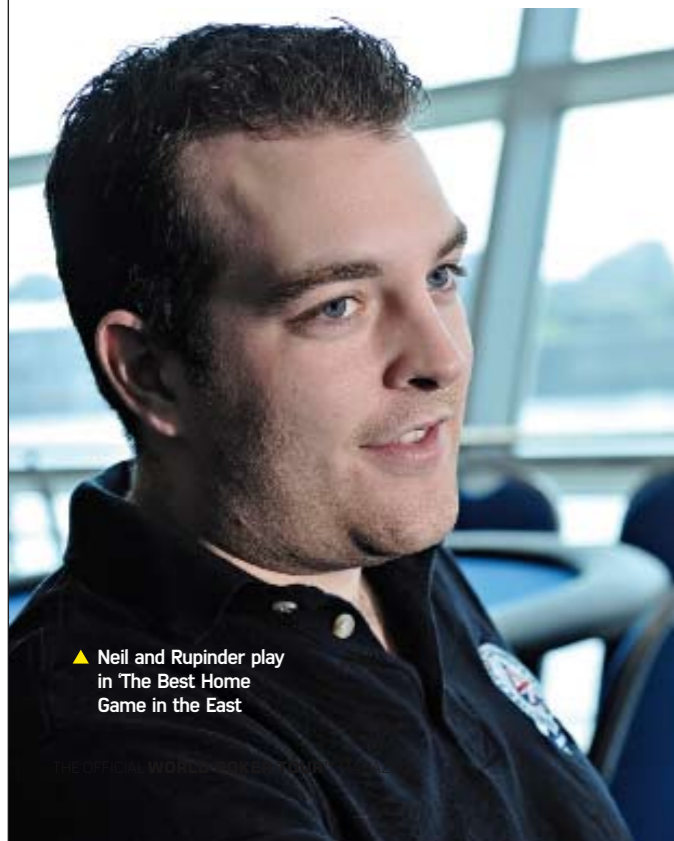
Rupinder: Again, don't print that...

[Laughter]

What are your plans for the future then? Are you going to keep yourself quite grounded and just play poker for fun?

Rupinder: Well, like we said, sponsorship is what we want. We also want to be the first winner of a Gala and a Grosvenor title – no one has done that yet. It would be great if one of us could be the first to win a title on both tours.

Neil: So obviously it would be good to follow it up – but to win one from each tour would be great.



▲ Neil and Rupinder play in 'The Best Home Game in the East'

