



Steve Weinstein is the youngest player on the Fleisher team, and also the youngest player ever to win an NABC event (the Life Master Pairs in 1981 when he was 17). He has since won many other NABC events, as well as finishing 5-8 in the Bermuda Bowl & 2nd in the World Open Pairs.

Steve has been married to Liz Davis since 1993 (they have been together since 1986). He lives in Andes NY “the middle of nowhere” with 2 dogs, Zeke and Luther, and Archie the cat. After leaving Wall street in 2002, he has pursued a career as a professional bridge and poker player. He won the Borgata winter open poker tournament in Atlantic City in 2009 but is primary a cash game player.

Online Poker: Interview With Steve 'Thorladen' Weinstein

Before getting involved in poker, [Steve "thorladen" Weinstein](#) was involved in both the stock market and the professional bridge circuit. If that doesn't sound like a recipe for the perfect poker player, I don't know what does.

Weinstein left a lucrative career on Wall Street after 9/11. He had been head of derivatives and a partner at a major firm, but he said that he simply "didn't want to be there" after the earth-shattering event. As far as bridge is concerned, he is undeniably a master. He was won the Cavendish, bridge's version of the *World Series of Poker* main event, five times.

Getting into, and eventually crushing, poker seemed to be in the cards for Weinstein. So far this year, he's taken down the Full Tilt *Sunday Mulligan*, earning \$26,000, and has earned an extra \$31,000 aside from that in Online Player of the Year-qualified finishes alone. This is especially impressive considering the fact that he plays few tournaments, favoring cash games, which he considers more lucrative. Weinstein got on the phone with *Card Player* to talk about his beginnings, whether poker or bridge requires more skill, and some strategies for on the felt:

Shawn Patrick Green: Where does your screen name come from?

Steve "thorladen" Weinstein: My screen name came from my first two dogs as an adult; one was named Thor and the other was named Wotan. They're both Nordic gods, and Wotan's nickname was Laden, so I just put together for thorladen.

SPG: You have a lot of history with some other prominent online poker players. What got you started getting involved in the community?

SW: The cash-game community was a very small community. When I started playing online,

\$3-\$6 no-limit hold'em was the biggest game they had on PokerStars, and many of us moved up the ranks together. I had played \$1-\$2 with Ozzy87, Bushman, and bet2win, some of the best players in the game today. As we moved on and met each other, we became friends. I'm very friendly with many of them and we work very hard on our games together.

SPG: Which big online players have you mentored?

SW: I've mentored a lot of them, actually. I take the top young bridge players and I train them to be top poker players. That's a pretty new thing, though. There are a couple that are doing well. One of them, boykee, has become a really terrific player. johnnykran is a great player, as well; he came in fourth in an event at the *World Series* the day after he chopped the Bellagio \$1K event. But, as far as mentoring famous players, I'd say that I'm very close with many of them and we work on our games together, but I wouldn't exactly say that I'm a mentor to any of them.

SPG: Were *you* mentored, or how did you get started?

SW: I started playing online at \$1-\$2 no-limit hold'em. I deposited \$500 and I just screwed around; I wasn't really winning or losing. I decided, "Well, the reason that I'm not winning or losing is because I'm not really taking this seriously." So, I looked up poker coaches online and I found the name Bob Ciaffone. I contacted him and said that I was very serious. I gave him my background in bridge and he said, "Yes, you are very serious. I know who you are; I'm a bridge player." So, that was pretty funny. What actually ended up happening was ... it wasn't really that he mentored me, but getting involved with him made it so that I had some accountability with someone. And once the accountability was there, I just started playing more seriously. I probably only went over about 10 hands with him in my life, but just having him available to me changed my outlook on the game, and I realized that I had to play the game on a serious level.

SPG: What makes you so good?

SW: I'm really, really good at games. I'm the all-time money-winning bridge player in history. And, with my Wall Street training on the floor, you make a lot of split-second decisions and a lot of mistakes, but you also do a lot of things right. So, in that sense, poker really fit my skill-set very well. I think I'm good at it because I'm pretty well-trained for it.

SPG: Are you big on prop betting?

SW: Well, that's the legend, anyway. I wouldn't say that I'm big on it, I would say that I'm comfortable making a large prop bet when I think that the situation is correct.

SPG: What's the craziest prop bet that you've been involved in?

SW: I actually had one that was really crazy on the floor of the American Stock Exchange. I

don't remember the year, but I probably should, because it was the year that the Mets made the playoffs. This guy had bet me that Bobby Valentine [manager for the New York Mets at the time] was going to get fired after the season. We made a pretty large bet. Then they won the first series of the playoffs and he came up to me and said, "Hey, I just wanted to tell you that I got inside information. I *know* he's getting fired, I just found out. I didn't have the inside information when I made the bet." So, I was kind of in a tough spot there because I just didn't see how he could possibly be getting fired when he'd just won the opening series. I didn't really want to get suckered, so I picked up one of the phones on the Exchange and I made a fake phone call and told the guy to wait a second. I said, "Hey, even though you have that inside information, my friend here is interested in making a large bet with you, as well. Are you interested?" If he said "Yes," I would get out of my bet and say that my friend changed his mind. If he said "No," I was going to keep my bet. He said "No," I kept my bet, and I won.

As far as in the poker world, I have this "legendary" bet with Ozzy87. Right now, Ozzy and I are very good friends and this could never happen, but when I first met him, at Turning Stone, he was talking about Gigabet winning the August tournament leader board [on PokerStars]. I wasn't really involved in tournaments and I didn't really know much about it. I looked at it [the tournament leader board] a little bit and he wanted to bet \$1,000. Then, I took a closer look and said, "This seems ridiculous, let's bet \$100,000." Once I found out how this tournament leader board worked, I got involved with a couple friends of mine, one of whom had an account that had won the *Sunday Million*. The account wasn't obviously in the leader board race, so I got some partners and said, "Let's make sure that *we* win this race [with that account], and then it won't be a problem." What actually ended up happening was that we got involved in the race, and then, when it was clear that Gibabet would not win, we dropped out. So, we never really had an interest in winning the tournament leader board, we just had an interest in making sure that Gigabet *didn't* win. I took up some small partners, but I certainly held the majority of the bet. It wasn't that I wanted the action or anything, it's just that I believed that I was 95 percent to win the bet.

SPG: You're big into cash games, right?

SW: Yeah, I'm a cash game player. I play tournament more for fun than anything else. I think any top cash-game player is basically wasting his time when he's playing tournaments, because his theoretical edge in each cash game is much higher. Tournaments can be for a release of tension or for fun or for ego, but it's not really for money.

SPG: What cash games have you been playing most often, lately?

SW: Usually \$25-\$50 and up when I play online. Sometimes \$100-\$200; all no-limit hold'em. When I play live, I play some very good games. I play \$50-\$100 and \$200-\$400. In general, when I go to Vegas, I go to Bellagio, and once I played a \$1,000-\$2,000 mixed game there.

SPG: What are the easiest ways to go broke playing in cash games?

SW: I think poor money management is the easiest way. What it comes down to, and this is what I teach, is that if you're better than your competition and you have proper money management, you really can't lose. Every hour that you play, you win. The problem is when you play stakes that are higher than your bankroll or you're not as good as your competition.

SPG: Well, so let's say that someone is playing \$1-\$2 no-limit hold'em, what kind of bankroll would you suggest for that?

SW: I tell people \$5,000 for \$1-\$2. I think that's a pretty reasonable bankroll. It's not like if they drop down to \$4,000 that I want them to move down to \$0.50-\$1, but if they drop down to \$3,000 I think that they should move down in stakes. I haven't really seen downswings of more than 20 buy-ins. I know that it could happen, and I'm sure that I've been reasonably lucky to have not had one, but at any level that you're playing at, assuming that you're a winning player, I think that you should be able to handle a 20-buy-in downswing.

SPG: A lot of people reading this are probably low-limit cash game players. It makes sense that in the higher limits you want to mix it up to outfox your opponents, who are likely fairly skilled, but do you think that you should play creatively in the lower limits? Or is a solid, straightforward approach the best way to make money at that level?

SW: I absolutely think that you should play *less* creatively. To make fancy plays and to do things like floating flops to raise turns and other things where you're trying to create an impression of your hand, you have to assume that your opponent is thinking at a reasonable level. I have experience at the \$1-\$2 games because I train at that level and I've played enough of it to know what it's like. I am confident that the straightforward approach, not being fancy but being fundamentally sound and plugging leaks in your game, can make players a lot of money.

SPG: It's kind of a poker cliché that pocket aces either win a small pot or lose a big one. What are your thoughts on that?

SW: I don't really agree with that. I feel like that *is* the cliché, and we've all heard it, but every poker hand is unique, including aces. It's not that you have aces on the button, it's that you have aces on the button versus a particular opponent, or a particular *few* opponents. Or you have it under the gun or you have it against the overly aggressive guy ... it's all very situational, and I don't think that ace-ace is ace-ace in every hand. I think you can win a big pot with aces and lose a small pot with them. Aces, when misplayed regularly, will lose big pots and win small pots.

SPG: What about kings through jacks? They can be tricky to play on flops, especially when an overcard appears. Any suggestions, here?

SW: It's a very good question. I think it depends on whether there's a preflop raiser or a caller, whether it's a sixhanded game or ninehanded ... There's really no correct answer on how to

play a poker hand. I think that you have to be careful and I think that you have to be aware of your opposition and your opposition's tendencies. If you play jacks in the standard way, here's what can happen: you're going to raise preflop, you're going to get a caller, the flop is going to come K-x-x, you're going to bet, he's going to call, the turn is going to be a blank, you're going to check, he's going to bet, and you're going to fold. I'm not saying that's correct, I'm saying that would be standard. Now, I think that it could go very differently. It could go: you raise preflop with jacks, he calls, the flop comes K-x-x, you bet, he calls, the turn brings a blank, you check, he bets, you raise, and then *he* folds.

I can give the standard lines for low-limit players that you can't lose money playing a certain way, but as you moved up in the stakes you have to mix up your play.

SPG: Did you ever have a poker epiphany? Something that you learned that just clicked and made you play so much better or plugged a hole in your game?

SW: That's a great question, and the answer is both "yes" and "no." I've played many, many games and what always ends up happening, whether it be Wall Street, bridge, or poker, is that I feel like I'm awful in the beginning. And then, at some point, I'm like, "Wow, I'm getting really good. I'm better than these people." So, the epiphany is that I go from awful to good without even knowing how.

SPG: You're also a master at the card game bridge. Which is harder to get good at, poker or bridge?

SW: Bridge is a far more difficult game. You really can't be a prodigy in bridge like you can be in poker. It takes years to become anywhere near a master at bridge.

SPG: So, you think bridge requires more skill, then?

SW: Yeah, it does. Bridge is a terrible gambling game because it's very obvious when people are better than you. Poker has similarities to backgammon where people can just roll the dice, and poker is a tremendous gambling game because there's a lot of skill, but it's not a game of absolute information and absolute skill. Bridge also doesn't have absolute information, but there's much more because you have 13 cards per person with four people, and the combinations are just so extreme that ... bridge is by far a much more complicated and more difficult game.

SPG: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview, Steve.