

The Good are Lucky and the Lucky are Good

BY KEN ADAMS

“When the river brought a queen, it looked as if Lady Luck had abandoned Bonetti in favor of Bechtel.”

John Bonetti was the talk of the 1993 *World Series of Poker*. In the \$10,000 no-limit Texas hold'em championship event, he had a massive chip lead at the end of the second day, with \$506,000 in chips. The closest competitor was Robert Turner with a distant \$143,100. Bonetti continued to lead the field at the end of the third day, going into the final table with \$913,000. Only Jim Bechtel was close with \$631,000. The remaining four players had a total of \$659,000 among them. All but one of the former champions had been eliminated, and forced to take their place at the rail.

Among the railbirds, opinion was sharply divided. Was Bonetti that good, or was he just lucky? One camp pointed to Bonetti's impressive record of victories over the years, including two *World Series* titles in 1990 and 1993, and the 1993 *Queen Poker Classic*. Just the previous week he had taken third place in the \$2,500 limit Texas hold'em event, and the week before that had won the \$1,500 pot-limit Texas hold'em event. The opposing camp pointed to the number of times Bonetti had gotten involved in large pots with the weaker hand, only to outdraw his opponent. Conversely, whenever he held the better hand going into a large pot, none of his opponents had been able to turn the tables and outdraw him.

An Tran, who has been called one of the best Asian players on the tournament circuit (see "The Best Asian Poker Players," by Jesse "The Artist" Lacsamana, in the *May 7 Card Player*), complained that he put Bonetti on the path to success in a first-round pot in which Tran went all in with pocket aces. Bonetti called him with K-Q. The flop came K-X-X. The turn card was a blank, but Bonetti caught a lucky queen on the river, eliminating Tran and nearly doubling his own stack.

That pattern continued for three days. Bonetti called Walter Threadgill's all-in bet before the flop, holding A-4. Threadgill showed A-Q. When the flop came K-Q-8, Bonetti was drawing slim. But there were two hearts on the flop, and two more fell on fourth and fifth street. Bonetti's ace of hearts gave him the nut flush and knocked out another tough opponent.

Next, Steve Lott went all in with A-Q. Again, Bonetti called with a leaner hand, A-6. The flop was 10-10-4, making Lott a big favorite. But the board paired with another four on the turn, and Bonetti split the pot.

When Marsha Waggoner raised all in with a suited A-K, and Bonetti called with A-7, it looked like his lucky streak might end. After the flop, which came 3-6-9, Bonetti needed a seven or a four and five to win. When a seven fell on fourth street, he was still at risk if a king hit on the river. Instead, a safe five fell, and Waggoner was eliminated. It began to look like Bonetti was destined to win.

Next, Jim Voigt raised all in with pocket queens. Bonetti called with 10-9. The flop came 10-9-X. No queen came to save Voigt, and he took his place on the rail with Tran, Threadgill, Waggoner, and the other victims of Bonetti's march to destiny.

Lott, whose A-Q had split the pot earlier with Bonetti's A-4, went all in with pocket jacks. This time Bonetti had the superior

hand — pocket aces. No jack came on the flop, and Bonetti caught a third ace on the turn, cinching a victory. A similar scenario developed later, when Turner took his pocket jacks up against Bonetti's pocket kings. Neither player improved and another tough opponent was eliminated.

At this point, close to the end of the third day, Bonetti had a massive chip advantage over the remaining six players. Then came the hand that turned the tide and foreshadowed what would occur at the final table on Day Four.

Bonetti raised \$25,000 with A-10, and Bechtel called holding pocket eights. Before the flop, it was a toss-up between Bechtel's pair and Bonetti's two overcards. But when the flop came 4-5-6, Bechtel was a huge favorite. Bechtel checked, and called Bonetti's \$50,000 bet. Could Bonetti do it again — outdraw another opponent as he had done so consistently for three days? For the first time, fortune abandoned Bonetti in a major pot. The turn card was a four. Both players checked. The river brought a queen, improving neither player's hand. Bechtel bet \$40,000 and Bonetti called. That pot put Bechtel within shooting range of Bonetti, and deprived Bonetti of the ability to muscle Bechtel with what had been an overpowering chip advantage.

Not long after that hand, Bechtel raised Thomas Kreilein all in with a suited Q-10. When Kreilein showed the A♦ K♦, Bechtel needed the kind of good fortune Bonetti had enjoyed earlier in the tournament in order to overtake Kreilein. When the flop came 6-3-2, with two diamonds, Bechtel had only four outs. The turn card, a seven, helped neither player. When the river brought a queen, it looked as if Lady Luck had abandoned Bonetti in favor of Bechtel. Kreilein was eliminated, and Bechtel went into the fourth and final day only \$300,000 behind Bonetti, who still led the field with an impressive \$913,000 in chips (out of a total of \$2,200,000).

The final table started out with six players, in the following positions:

Seat No. 1	..... John Bonetti	..... \$913,000
Seat No. 2	..... Mansour Matloubi	..... 138,000
Seat No. 3	..... Thomas Chung	..... 146,000
Seat No. 4	..... Glenn Cozen	..... 215,000
Seat No. 5	..... Jim Bechtel	..... 631,000
Seat No. 6	..... Mick Cowley	..... 160,000

It was not long before Cowley was eliminated, and the two chip leaders went head-to-head at the final table. Bechtel was in the small blind, Bonetti in the big blind. Bechtel called with A-K against Bonetti's A-10. The flop came A-Q-8, with two clubs. Bechtel checked, and Bonetti bet \$15,000. Bechtel called. When the 2♥ came on the turn, Bechtel checked again, and Bonetti bet \$120,000. Bechtel called. The river brought the Q♣. Bechtel bet \$150,000. Bonetti called and lost a huge pot. For the first time in three days, Bonetti was not the chip leader. He never regained the lead.

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Not long after that decisive hand, Bechtel and Bonetti were heads up again in the blinds. The flop came A-A-10. Bechtel checked, and Bonetti bet \$20,000 holding pocket queens. Bechtel called. The turn card was a four. Both players checked. The river card was a seven, and Bechtel bet \$70,000. Bonetti called, and angrily flung his queens into the muck when Bechtel showed A-3. For those who hoped fortune had not abandoned Bonetti, this hand dashed their hopes. Now it was Bechtel whose strong hands were holding up, and who was catching the cards he needed to outdraw his opponents when they held the stronger hand.

When former champion Mansour Matloubi went all in with pocket sevens, and Bonetti called with Q-10, the railbirds fully expected a queen or ten to fall, and that Matloubi would suffer the same fate as Tran and the others. But Lady Luck was looking the other way, and Matloubi won the pot when neither hand improved. Instead it was Bechtel whose A-Q knocked out Matloubi, when an ace fell on the flop to beat Matloubi's pocket jacks.

Bonetti then tried to knock out Glenn Cozen, who raised all in with K-J. Bonetti's pocket nines were beaten when a king came on the flop, and a second king fell on fourth street for good measure.

Shortly thereafter, Cozen raised before the flop, and both Bonetti and Bechtel called. At this point, only the three of them remained. Bechtel led with about \$1,300,000; Bonetti had about \$800,000; and Cozen was a distant third with only \$100,000. It seemed only a matter of time before Cozen would be eliminated, and Bechtel and Bonetti would go head-to-head for the championship, the

bracelet, and the \$1 million first prize.

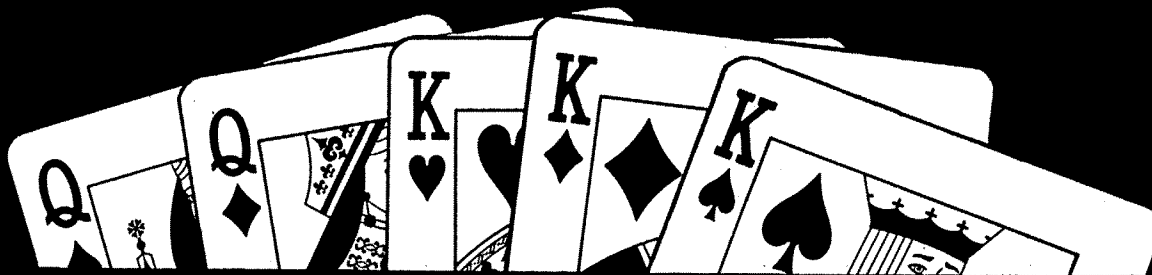
The flop came K-6-4, with two spades. Bonetti made a sizable bet, holding A-K. Cozen eyed his dwindling stack of chips, and folded. Bechtel called. When the J♠ fell on the turn, Bonetti moved all in, representing a flush. Bechtel called and showed pocket sixes! Bonetti's luck had run out. Cozen, with only \$65,000 in chips remaining, landed in second place thanks to his judicious decision to fold after the flop.

The end came swiftly. With the blinds at \$5,000-\$10,000 and the ante at \$2,000, Cozen could not afford to wait long for a hand. On the third deal, out of desperation he went all in with a 7-4. Bechtel called with a J-6. Neither hand improved, and Bechtel became the 1993 world champion.

An old friend of mine once silenced a player in our group who always lost and moaned about how unlucky he was, with the observation, "The good are lucky and the lucky are good." A world-class poker pro put it another way when he said, "Luck is the intersection of skill and opportunity."

The railbirds will spend the next year second-guessing Bonetti's play. Was Bonetti good enough to win, but unlucky at the end? Or was he lucky to get as far as he did? The railbird debate undoubtedly will go on until next year's tournament. ♦

Editor's note: When Ken Adams is not playing poker, he works as a litigation partner in a major Washington, D.C. law firm. His article about the 1992 *World Series of Poker* appeared in the October 16, 1992, *Card Player*.



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