

Online Poker In 2016

By **Alexander Baron** - Jan 7, 2016



52
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Once upon a time there was a thriving on-line poker enterprise. Sites such as PokerStars, Party Poker, Ladbrokes, William Hill, UltimateBet and its sister site Absolute Poker did brisk business offering players all over the globe a wide variety of games: principally no limit hold 'em but Omaha and Omaha hi lo were also popular; seven card stud – once extremely popular in the real world – could be played on a number of sites, a few even offering pot limit stud. Some offered five card stud including at pot limit, and one site, Ladbrokes, even offered **pot limit razz**. Then came Black Friday. Uh oh.

On April 15, 2011, poker players logged onto PokerStars, Absolute and UltimateBet only to find their domains had been seized by the American authorities. Additionally, the men who ran these sites had been branded criminals, accused of sophisticated money laundering schemes much the same as major drug dealers or terrorists.

Eventually some sort of sanity was restored, but several sites folded, including UltimateBet and Absolute. Full Tilt Poker was in limbo but was eventually taken over by

PokerStars. The current situation is complex for American players, and there is a renewed attempt to outlaw on-line poker in **the country of its birth**. Crazy or what? American players who wish to take an active role in opposing this madness might consider joining the **Poker Players' Alliance**. Founded in 2005, the PPA claims to have nearly a million members, and to be the only organisation to represent American players at a national level.

Black Friday was probably not the only cause of the decline of on-line poker, there have been other changes. The market was unquestionably saturated, poker sites seemed to be springing up every few weeks. The CryptoLogic Network which hosted *inter alia* the England-based William Hill disappeared; William Hill moved to the iPoker Network, as did Ladbrokes, which was formerly independent. This has led to a restriction of games, and cannot be good. Other sites have disappeared.

Whatever the causes of the above, the greatest controversy outside of the persecution by the American authorities currently is the restructuring of the PokerStars loyalty scheme. PokerStars is by far the world's largest poker site, and like most others rewards frequent players. Most sites use a points system, on PokerStars these are or were called Frequent Player Points, but are now being replaced by something called StarsCoin. Is this significant? Certainly not for recreational players, and probably not for all except that tiny number of players who play high stakes games day in/day out. These are members of the Super Nova Elite; ordinary players are allotted Bronze status; it is not too difficult to make Silver, but Gold and above require many hours at the table every month.

The one thing that is really likely to hack off micro-stakes players is the axeing of the 4 times a day privilege freerolls, which were fantastic value, easy to qualify for, and a great advertisement for the site.

Super Nova Elite players have been granted all manner of **special privileges**. Understandably they are not happy about these privileges being severely curtailed; at the beginning of December they staged **a mini-revolt**. It remains to be seen if they will have any success.

From the corporate to the personal; Phil Ivey was once regarded by some as the best poker player in the world, but since 2012 he **has lost** a staggering \$6.3 million on-line. Controversially, he has also been **accused of cheating** at baccarat on two continents; the basis of these allegation is that he has eyes like an eagle and is able to spot tell-tale defects in the cards. Whether or not Ivey has seen the film *Kaleidoscope*, this charge seems more than a little unfair, but don't cry for him just yet, he has had some big wins in real world tournaments, and is still one of the big all-time winners. But for the man who has everything there is only one thing left to do – to lose everything. Remember that before you sign up with PokerStars, Full Tilt, or any other gaming site.

52
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