

A Tale of Two Closings

by Jim Follis

The Regency Casino, Laughlin, Nevada and the Sports World Casino (formerly, the CBS Sports World Casino) in Las Vegas, Nevada, are now both closed, but interestingly enough the chips and checks of one are still “in-play,” while the chips and checks of the other are, by most measurements, obsolete.

Some time ago (May/June 2001) the word got out that the Sports World Casino was closing its doors; going out of business. Its fate appeared tied to an earlier court ruling where the sports bar and casino had been sued by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) for infringement on their Registered Trademark of “CBS”. For reasons that escape me, the Sports World Casino owner, a Mr. James Ronald (Ron) August, when he first opened the operation named it the CBS Sports World Casino. Perhaps it was a media ploy, an advertising gimmick,

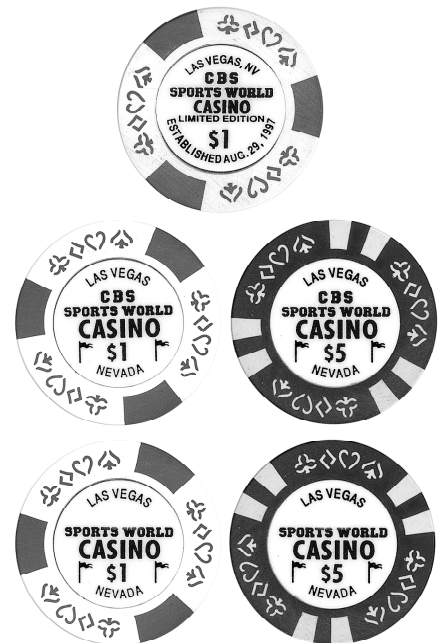


Soon after hearing about the closure I noticed an ad in the Las Vegas Review and Journal announcing an auction for the gaming equipment, furnish-

ings and kitchen equipment of the Sports World Casino. The auction would occur at the casino’s property, located in a strip-mall on Las Vegas Blvd., just barely on The Strip. A prime piece of property, but not necessarily for a casino/bar, where parking is always at a premium and the bar had to compete with the liquor store next door.

or maybe he just didn’t watch too much television and was unaware of the media icon. However, I suspect he had some sort of business motive.

Apparently, that was in 1997 and Ron’s 1st issue house chips included “CBS” on the inlays. The house chips were also accompanied by some special, Limited Edition \$1’s and \$5’s, also with the “CBS” acronym. After the lawsuit was settled, Ron was required to pull the “CBS” chips and he replaced them with a 2nd issue, sans the “CBS,” but not in all denominations, and none were special, Limited Edition chips. Having been to the place on several occasions, I was struck by the lack of patronage, so when I heard that the place was closing, I only assumed it was because of a lack of clients and a costly result of the suit. Evidently I was wrong!



So on July 21, 2001, my wife and I attended the Sports World Casino, going out of business auction, at which time I got to meet and speak with the owner James “Ron” August. A rather striking individual, at just over six feet, all dressed in black, and sporting a very neat and trimmed pencil-lined moustache. To look at him he reminded me of a mixture of past television series characters portrayed by Burt Reynolds (“Dan August”) and Robert Ulrich (Dan Tanna, in “Vega\$”).

As a casino owner (or past owner?), he is a rather interesting individual. And so too is the now, past owner, of the Regency Casino in Laughlin, Nevada, Mr. Larry Long. A comparison of these two men is a different as night and day, almost literally if not figuratively. Ron August being tall, dark haired, and dressed in black, while Larry Long is on the shorter side, white haired and dresses in white-on-white shirts. Of course there is an age difference between the two, and I imagine the levels of experience in casino ownership are very, very different. Although many of you may recall that the Regency Casino was originally owned (and opened) by Robert Soper (a Nevada gaming icon) in 1979, and it was after Soper’s death that Larry and his wife (Soper’s daughter) took over operations the Regency and residual elements of

Montgomery Pass Lodge and one other past Soper-owned casino.

Many collectors (and players for that matter) familiar with the Regency Casino are impressed by two significant aspects of the property. First and foremost is that it was in operation, especially for as long as it was, there in the shadows of the much larger Flamingo Laughlin and Edgewater properties. Secondly, it’s physical size. The Regency’s property line was situated on the banks of the Colorado River (well, about 100 feet of the West bank anyway) and extended into the town of Laughlin, all the way to Casino Drive (at least 100 yards). It was quite a hike from Casino Drive to the casino’s front door in the noon-day sun in the middle of July! And once inside you have to navigate the casino to get a cool drink at the bar in the rear. From the river-walk pathway the structure appeared to be a run-down bar, and although you could walk from the river-walk to a “Casino Entrance” using a zigzag, inclined pathway, most “passers by” simply did just that... pass by.

It was during one of my once every two months (or so) visits to Laughlin that I found out about the Regency’s closure. At the time, and for many years before, I would always stop (very briefly) at the Regency, hoping to find the table games open for the possibility of acquiring some chips at face value. Unfortunately,



The Regency Casino is ‘tagged’ as CLOSED. Inside, Larry Long and his last employees are standing by to take in Regency chips and tokens, as required by Gaming for the duration of the Redemption period.

table games were only open for special events. River Run Days were a natural because the town swelled in size as tens of thousands of bikers filled every room, bar and table in town. This was the gas, chrome and leather crowd and the Regency’s ample parking lot could hold many a Harley. And not to be left out was the hay, rope and leather crowd of Rodeo Days, where the parking lot would hold many a barley. Those and other commercial events sponsored by the casinos of Laughlin (and the Chamber of Commerce), and the steady flow of Charter Bus Junkets, keep Laughlin afloat. The Regency is at about the geographic center of Laughlin, so during those events it enjoyed plenty of walk-in traffic. Additionally, the tables would occasionally be open as a function maintaining the Gaming License, which typically happened on a Friday night. But more often than not, only the one-armed bandits of the Regency were available for gaming action.

Now I cannot speak for any other places, but I think the Regency was perhaps the last of the elevated Pit Boss observation platforms. On those rare occasions that all four blackjack table were in operation the Pit Boss functioned more like a magistrate or police station’s desk sergeant from high atop the observation



chair. The observation roost was a wooden chair that was firmly attached (nailed) atop a two-foot high wooden box that just fit under the four legs of the chair. The Boss would sit in the chair and could then observe all four dealers whose tables were aligned in a square pattern before him. Each dealer was facing outwards from the square (each had another dealer to his back and one to his side). The Boss was located adjacent to one side of the square where he could see all four dealers (two on his left side and two on his right) and his view was without obstruction by the tables or patrons. From this position he had a pretty good perspective on the players, but the feeling was one of monitoring the dealers.

At the Regency, as long as the tables were open, the “vault” was open, and if the vault was open, it was possible to get chips. If the tables were closed, then better luck next time! More often than not the cage made you go to the tables to get chips, and the \$1’s and \$2’s were never available. In fact, while I was interviewing Larry for this article, (in September, after the closure, but during the chip/token redemption period) I asked him to autograph a couple of \$1 Regency chips that I happened to have with me. He obliged and remarked that no \$1 or \$2 chips had

been redeemed during the redemption period. In fact, up until that time (about a month away from end of the redemption period), less than a rack of chips had been turned back-in. Of that partial rack, most were \$5 chips (about forty of them) and about fifteen \$25 chips.

From a previous visit, I had heard from a Regency employee that the \$2 chip was

designed and ordered with chip collectors in-mind and were never actually used on the tables. Larry said that that was incorrect, and that they really had been used on the tables, but not for quite some time. I also asked him about the non-denominated purple, H&C, “RC” (in script) chips (TCR N3429 and N3433) and whether or not he could provide positive attribution of those chips as being Regency chips. After several minutes of trying to recall events in the past, he finally said that he could not recall using or not using the chips. Perhaps we will never know for sure.

He did recall a brief period of time when the Regency had a craps table, and for awhile they even had a roulette wheel, but the wheel was quickly removed when it produced disastrous results for the house! The craps table saw the usage of two different logo’d dice, while the roulette wheel used generic chips, three different colors of “A” chips. Larry still has many of the generic chips and several boxes of the dice, still wrapped in foil, 5-per stick.

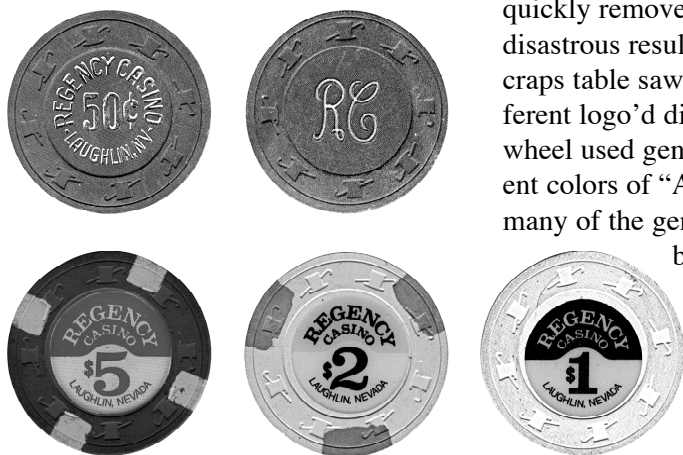
Since the place was deserted - only Larry and few



Larry Long standing in front of a handcrafted Wheel of Fortune. To his left is an old slot machine that was originally located in Montgomery Pass Lodge.

other employees were present for the occasional walk-in wanting to make good on the redemption period- I took the opportunity to ask him if I could take a picture of him and the casino. At first he wanted to decline, but when I said that I wanted the picture for an article for the Club magazine, and that we could use a picture of him inside the casino or a picture of the hand-written “CLOSED” sign out front, he opted to pose for my camera. We walked around the darkened casino looking for a nice spot to take a picture. It was rather eerie as the majority of lights were off, all the slant-top slot machines were powered off, and their lift-top doors stood propped open, ready for inspection. This exposed the inner works of each machine and provided ready proof that all the coin hoppers were empty. The place was silent, and for a casino, I bet there were very quarters to be found anywhere.

Over to one side of the casino there was a customized Wheel-of-Fortune wheel, which Larry told me was hand-made quite some time ago and was used to award bonus prizes to patrons, based on a drawing or a jackpot. It was rather ornate and used a lot of metal. It was flanked by two very old one-armed bandits, which



Larry said were originally in the Montgomery Pass Lodge. Older slot machines, like these (which I believe were Mills) are nearly one hundred percent mechanical and stand in pre-historic tribute to modern-day, multi-denominational, multi-play, electronic video slot machines of today. None of which were present at the Regency, but most certainly populated the Sports World Casino back in Las Vegas. And just as the owners of these two casino are worlds apart, so too are the reasons for the demise of each establishment. While the Regency was being closed so that Larry could retire, the Sports World Casino's furnishings was up for auction for quite a different reason. It seems that the Sports World Casino will undergo a metamorphosis, and will re-open at a later date. While the Regency property has been sold and the building will be razed. Larry can now sell-off the contents of the building, while Ron just simply had an auction. A sort of out with the old, and in with the new.

The process for the Sports World Casino auction was very unlike the Annual CC>CC auction. There were no color brochures, the inspection period was for one day only (the day before the auction), and nothing was cataloged or collected into a convenient place. Instead of having an auctioneer's podium, he was armed with a shoulder-carried microphone and speaker. Starting at the doorway he simply went around the casino (a single room) in a clockwise fashion and auctioned off every item he encountered. If there was a picture on the wall, he

would auction it off. If a slot machine was in his path, then it would go. If there was a trash can or floor ashtray, it was auctioned off, and so it went until everything was sold.

Because of licensing stipulations IGT was present for the auction to ensure that winning bidders carried-on (accepted) the licensing agreement for some of their video poker machines (three-play and five-play machines). This did not apply to all slot machines sold in auction that day, but certainly to the several multi-play, multi-denomination, multi-game video poker machines made by IGT. In addition to IGT's licensing requirements, the State of Nevada (through gaming laws) stipulated other requirements for the sale and purchase of slot machines. Individuals can only buy three slot machines in a year. Companies can buy more, but must be licensed to do so. For the slot machines, the auction was not *cash and carry*, as there is a waiting period for the new owner(s) to clear Gaming.

Meanwhile, everything went. A bank of slot machines, a set of chairs, a box of drink glasses, the sporting memorabilia off the walls, and even the two limosines parked

outside. The auctioneer's procession around the room included an assistant or two, a throng of bidders and Ron August. At one point I approached Mr. August and asked about the casino's chips and tokens.

"Were they part of the auction?" I asked. He told me no, and went on to say that he still had them, even all the old "CBS" stuff. I asked if Gaming was going to make him destroy them, or what? He said that he had not talked to Gaming about the chips, but he wanted to get them into the collector market. I asked about redemption and learned that there was no plan for redemption. I then asked, how can you be going out of business and not have a redemption period? He explained that the auction was only to eliminate debt. The property was still his (or the right to use it) and that he planned on re-decorating (re-themeing) the casino/bar once he put some financing together.

I looked around and saw that there was nothing in the place that was both gaming and marked "Sports World Casino". No matches, no napkins, no cards, no nothing. Perhaps chips are the only linkage. But it was an auction for the demise of another element to the gaming history of Las Vegas. Therefore I needed something to take away with me. And the something ended up being one of the sports memorabilia pictures from the wall. An auto-graphed and mounted picture of famed San Francisco Giants pitcher, and Hall of Famer, Gaylord Perry. Although I do not collect such stuff, I simply needed something (other than chips) from the defunct Sports World Casino



With the Stardust tower in the background, "Ron" August (back to camera) goes over last second instructions to the Auctioneer, with the stretch limo being up next on the block!

(formerly the CBS Sports World Casino) of Las Vegas, Nevada. In addition to the picture, I also got Mr. August's autograph, not on any chips (like Larry Long of the Regency) but instead autographed my bidder's card.

Unlike Larry Long, Ron August was going to be around the Las Vegas gaming scene and perhaps later on I will be able to get his autograph on a Sports World Casino chip. But as for Larry Long, his future was retirement, and that retirement was going to be in Oregon and it only includes horses; no gaming. With Larry's departure from Nevada gaming, he was but one of only a few of the of privately owned, casino operators in Nevada.

Being a collector, I asked Larry what he was going to do with the Regency chips and he said that he too was going to make them available to the chip collecting community, by bringing them (and other residual material from the other Soper casinos) to the various chip shows. Larry was familiar with the CC>CC's Annual Convention (and Show), so who knows, he may end up at the Tropicana in June 2002.

Ron August, on the other hand, was looking to contact chip dealers in the Las Vegas area and make his deal(s) through them. However, according to Nevada Gaming, all of the chips from the Sports World Casino (and its prede-

cessor, the CBS Sports World Casino) are *live*, meaning that they can be turned in for face value. Trouble is, where to turn them in. And the bigger question for collectors is, would you want to turn them in?

All-in-all, it was very interesting to witness the final days of two links to Nevada's gaming history, and to meet both of the owners. One new and one well seasoned, but both with a cache of chips.