



## Everyone wins at Jenkins' poker event

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By Tom Singer / MLB.com

SCOTTSDALE – The weather was cool, the cards were hot and the camaraderie sizzled. The big boys and girls cut the deck, and little boys and girls in the Phoenix area definitely got the best of this deal.

New Philadelphia outfielder Geoff Jenkins and 42 of his closest friends gathered on Monday night to call and raise the roof of the Jackrabbit Lounge with a little game of poker.

The first Geoff Jenkins Celebrity Poker Tournament buzzed late into the night for the benefit of the Boys and Girls Clubs, raising an estimated \$60,000 for local kids.

The charity – and the instrument – was a natural for Jenkins, a resident of nearby Paradise Valley.

"As athletes we have a chance to do some good," said Jenkins during a break from his meet-and-greet duties as the cozy nightclub filled up. "Why not do it with something everyone enjoys doing anyway? It was easy rounding up guys to participate in this."

The roundup included football players, musicians, local celebrities – and plenty of baseball players. Representatives of 14 Major League teams were dispersed among the six oval tables set up on a floor normally elbow-to-elbow with energetic dancers.

That this wasn't regularly the milieu of card players was evident by the large mirrors hung on the walls ringing the room, tilted down. Reflections and poker hands aren't usually a good mix.

Participants included Aaron Boone of the Nationals, Paul Konerko of the White Sox, Russell Martin of the Dodgers, Brian Roberts of the Orioles, Ryan Garko of the Indians and Mike Hampton of the Braves. And, yes, a Card, Randy Flores.

They were all dedicated to Jenkins' cause, but not all were card sharks. Javon Walker, the Denver Broncos wide receiver, exemplified both.

"I was over in England when I got a text message reminding me about this event. I went, 'Oh, is that now?' So I got on a plane and came right here," Walker said. "I'll get back to Denver later."

Walker then excused himself. Coach Bill Hall was waiting for his ear. The Milwaukee third baseman was ready with a crash course in poker for Walker, obviously a novice to the game.

That was obvious because Hall began his lecture with, "Now, if you've got an ace and nobody has a pair, you win. Then three of a kind beats a pair ..."

By the time Hall got up to the "straights and flushes" part, Walker appeared more befuddled than ever – and just a little intimidated.

"Just don't leave his side," Jenkins told Hall, nodding at Walker.

Some egos may have gotten bruised, but no one left the Jackrabbit Lounge a loser.

"We've got 42 athletes and 19 sponsors," Jenkins proudly said. "The guys each bought in for \$1,000, and the sponsors chipped in \$5,000 to set up each table."

Those sponsors, in addition to the host club, included Marquis Jet, All Bases Covered Sports Management, **Desert Sky Development** and the Players Trust.

"And this is all going to charity," Jenkins said. "I've wanted to do something like this for a long time, and I'm real happy we were able to get it together. I hope to make it an annual event."

He may have to hurry if he wants to pen the Second Annual Geoff Jenkins Tournament into a busy poker calendar. Riding the mushrooming popularity of the game, it is becoming the venue of choice for the charitable efforts of many athletes.

In fact, another installment, Royce Clayton's Poker Celebrity Bowl, is just around the corner. That will be held Feb. 1-3 at the nearby Harrah's AK-Chin Casino Ballroom.

Jenkins will be there, with new teammates Ryan Howard and Jimmy Rollins, among others, due to attend.

In compiling the players list for his event, Jenkins – who ended his 10-year stint in Milwaukee when he signed as a free agent with Philadelphia a month ago – may have gotten trapped in a between-teams warp.

Though none of his new mates were in the room on Monday night, those intently watching the flops included longtime Brewers teammates Chris Capuano, J.J. Hardy and Hall.

Before the cards started flying, each athlete affixed his autograph to a panel in the center of each of the six tables – sure to bring a nice price in the near future from bidding collectors.

Auction, later. Action on Monday night. Altruistic activism always. Good deal.

*This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.*

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