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.....

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.....

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26



Features

26

Ali Imsirovic Fights His Way To The Top Of
The High Roller Circuit
By Julio Rodriguez

The Inside Straight

8

Poker News Recap

12

Live 2021 World Series Of Poker Officially
Announced For Sept. 30 - Nov. 23
By Erik Fast

14

Player Of The Year Update
By Erik Fast

18

Women In Poker: Dealing With Adversity
At The Table
By Craig Tapscott

22

Poker Strategy: Omaha Eight-Or-Better
Fundamentals With Randy Ohel
By Steve Schult

Strategies, Analysis & Commentary

30

Bankroll Management:
How Much Do You Need To Play?
By Jonathan Little

31

Deuce to Seven Triple Draw Lowball:
Turn Fundamentals
By Kevin Haney

33

Contracts and Poker: Where Are You?
By Scott J. Burnham

34

WSOP Schedule Hype!
By Gavin Griffin

36

A Memorable Loss To Grandpa
By Greg Raymer

18



22



Also In this Issue

4

About Us

37

Tournament Schedules

38

Poker Leaderboards

Tournament Hand Matchups

28

Kyle Cartwright vs. Stephen Strout

28

Jake Ferro vs. Dustin Holladay

28

Kyle Cartwright vs. Johnny Landreth
vs. Stephen Strout

28

Johnny Landreth vs. Brian Arbaugh

Correction:

Issue #8 Cover of Ronnie Bardah & Qing Liu photos
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the INSIDE STRAIGHT

News, Reviews, and Interviews From Around the Poker World

PHIL HELLMUTH DEFEATS DANIEL NEGREANU IN FIRST ROUND OF HIGH STAKES DUEL

By Steve Schult

Despite facing what many would consider an insurmountable chip lead early on in their heads-up match, Phil Hellmuth completed an epic comeback to win his first high-stakes heads-up match against Daniel Negreanu at the Aria on the Las Vegas Strip.

On the final day of March, the 15-time *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner took home \$100,000 after staring at a more than 9:1 chip deficit halfway through the match, which was aired as part of the *High Stakes Duel* series on PokerGO.

At the end of the six-hour match, when Hellmuth's pocket nines faded Negreanu's open-ended straight flush draw, Negreanu said that he would take the option to play Hellmuth again. Per the rules of the series, the losing player has the option to challenge the winner for double the stakes. The winner can't decline a rematch until he has won three straight matches prior to round 6, or two consecutive matches after round 5.

"Good match, buddy," Negreanu said to Hellmuth after the final card was dealt. "There will be a rematch. You can guarantee that."

The second match will have a \$100,000 buy-in, in contrast to the \$50,000 that both players fronted for the first one. During Hellmuth's first go-around on the series against Antonio Esfandiari, he won the first three matches and profited \$350,000.

Negreanu dominated the early portion of the match. Without any hands of significance going to showdown, he opened up a 2:1 lead in the blink of an eye. The six-time *WSOP* bracelet winner extended it to 3:1 about an hour into the match.

The Canadian pro had a prime opportunity to put Hellmuth away when Hellmuth limped in on the button with 9♦ 9♣ and Negreanu raised to 1,500 out of the big blind with 6♦ 4♦. Hellmuth three-bet to 3,700 and



Negreanu called.

The flop was 4♠ 4♥ 3♥ and Negreanu checked. Hellmuth bet 4,000 and Negreanu called. Both players checked the 8♥ turn card and the 5♠ came on the river. With 15,400 in the pot and just 12,000 left in Hellmuth's stack, Negreanu bet 5,000 and Hellmuth called. Negreanu tabled his trip fours and dragged the pot.

Hellmuth was down to just 7,000 of the 100,000 total in play and bled off another few thousand chips, leaving himself with just 5% of the chips in play. But instead of opting to go for it all with his trips, Negreanu gave Hellmuth the opportunity to mount a comeback.

It was an opportunity Hellmuth took full advantage of. Hellmuth picked off a bluff to get back to 10,000, bluffed Negreanu off pocket queens on an ace-high flop, and then scored a double up with Q♣ 6♣ against 10♣ 5♣ on a 4♣ 3♦ 2♣ flop to get back into the match.

From there, everything started going Hellmuth's way. He rivered middle two pair against Negreanu's top pair and the match was almost even. About four and a half hours into the match, Hellmuth rivered a flush against Negreanu's top pair to take the chip lead for the first time.

Negreanu never recovered and eventually was in the

© PokerGO



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same hole Hellmuth dug out of a few hours earlier.

Hellmuth limped in on the button and Negreanu shoved his last 15 big blinds into the middle with 7♥ 6♥, and Hellmuth snap-called with 9♠ 9♦. There was a sweat for Negreanu on a J♣ 8♥ 5♥ flop, but the K♣ on the turn and the 8♣ on river failed to improve his open-ended straight flush draw and sent the match to Hellmuth.

The entire reason for the match stems from controversy sparked by Hellmuth's comments in the aftermath of Negreanu's loss to Doug Polk a few months ago. Over 25,000 hands of \$200-\$400 heads-up no-limit hold'em on WSOP.com, Negreanu ended up losing a seven-figure sum.

"I was disappointed in the way that Daniel played," said Hellmuth in February.

He went on to say that he thought Negreanu should've stuck to the strategy that he used to win for more than two decades, instead of switching to a more game theory optimal approach to the game.

Negreanu heard the comments and took the opportunity to challenge Hellmuth to a match of their own, eventually agreeing to battle on *High Stakes Duel*.

On Twitter, the two went back-and-forth over the perceived talent level of their opponent. It quickly became personal as Hellmuth was clearly upset about Negreanu and others in the community criticizing his play. During the pre-match interview, Hellmuth defended himself, calling it "apex predator shit."

Hellmuth's ability has been a lightning rod topic among high-stakes tournament pros for quite a while. Last October, high-stakes legend Phil Galfond tweeted praise for the Wisconsin native and was met with criticism for his opinion from other well-respected pros.

The banter culminated in a Negreanu offering a \$400,000 bet that Hellmuth wouldn't be a winner in the \$25,000 buy-in tournaments at the Aria over a 50-tournament sample. That bet will likely start this summer and finish in early 2022. ♠

ACCUSED POKER CHEAT MIKE POSTLE DROPS \$330 MILLION DEFAMATION SUIT

By Steve Schult

The alleged cheating saga surrounding Mike Postle looks like it has finally come to an end as Postle is dropping his \$330 million defamation lawsuit against many in the poker community, including whistleblower Veronica Brill.

Postle filed the request on April 1 with the Sacramento County Superior Court. Marc Randazza, a Las Vegas-based attorney who was representing Brill in the defamation case, tweeted a photo of the filing and said that since Postle is no longer pursuing the defamation case, he will lose the Anti-SLAPP lawsuits he was facing from a couple of the defendants in the case.

"You can't just cut and run," tweeted Randazza. "You automatically lose the Anti-SLAPP motion if you do that."

Brill and poker pro Todd Witteles, who were both listed as defendants in the defamation case, filed anti-SLAPP motions against Postle. SLAPP is an acronym for strategic lawsuit against public participation. According to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, SLAPPs have become a tool used by some to intimidate and silence criticism through an expensive and baseless legal process.

Anti-SLAPP laws are intended to protect people exercising their free speech from these proceedings.

"Mike voluntarily dropped the case against me and many others," tweeted Brill. "Now he owes me my legal fees."

Postle filed a \$330 million defamation case last October. He was seeking damages and injunctive relief for defamation and slander, trade libel, false light, intentional interference with prospective economic advantage, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

The suit listed Witteles, Brill, six-time *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner Daniel Negreanu, high-stakes gambler Haralabos Voulgaris, poker personality Joe Ingram, *ESPN*, and Poker News media as defendants, as well as training sites Upswing Poker, Run It Once, Crush Live Poker, Solve For Why, and Poker Coaching, which are run by poker pros Doug Polk, Phil Galfond, Bart Hanson, Matt Berkey and Jonathan Little, respectively.

Just two months after the case was filed, it came to light that Postle's lawyers filed paperwork to drop him as a client. Witteles' lawyer, Eric Bensamochan, said that the filing likely stemmed from a lack of payment by Postle. In January, a judge upheld the request and Postle no longer had repre-

sentation for the suit.

Many have accused Postle of cheating in a low-stakes live streamed poker game at Stones Gambling Hall in the Sacramento area. He reportedly won upwards of \$250,000 in mostly \$1-\$3 and \$2-\$5 no-limit hold'em games on Stones's live stream through very unorthodox play.

Brill and many other prominent professionals broke down hours of footage and illustrated how they thought Postle was cheating. While there was no concrete answer as to how it was being done, the consensus from those looking at the footage was that Postle was obtaining information about his opponents' hole cards from the live stream.

Gambling attorney Mac VerStandig undertook a \$30 million lawsuit, representing Brill and 88 others against Postle, Stones Gambling Hall, and Justin Kuriaitis, the casino's Tournament Director who was also in charge of the live stream.

Despite the overwhelming consensus from the poker community that he was guilty, a California judge ultimately dismissed the charges against Postle, and most plaintiffs accepted a settlement offer from Kuriaitis and Stones Gambling Hall. ♠



NBA LEGEND PAUL PIERCE GETS FIRED OVER RAUNCHY POKER HOME GAME VIDEO

By Steve Schult

A wild night at a home poker game and the decision to stream parts of it on social media has cost NBA legend Paul Pierce his job with *ESPN*.

The 10-time NBA all-star, who retired after the 2016-2017 season, is an avid poker player. Pierce has competed in many high-stakes poker tournaments, including events at the *World Series of Poker* and the \$25,000 *PokerStars Players Championship* in 2019.

In early April, however, Pierce played in a home game. He posted videos to his Instagram account that showed the 43-year-old smoking what appeared to be marijuana, and being entertained by scantily clad women. While he didn't show any actual footage of a poker game, there was an empty poker table in the background and he was clearly sitting at a table with other people.

Clips of the videos made their way around other social media platforms and the story picked up steam as they were constantly shared.

For the last several years, Pierce has been one of the rotating hosts on *ESPN's NBA Countdown* and *The Jump*. A few days after the video surfaced, *ESPN* announced they would be parting ways with the 2008 NBA Finals Most Valuable Player.

According to a report from the *New York Post*, the



decision had more to do with the fact that Pierce himself shared these videos. If they had been leaked by someone else, the company may have continued to employ him.

Despite his enthusiasm for poker, Pierce doesn't have a recorded tournament cash on his resume. He built a huge stack in the 2013 \$10,000 pot-limit Omaha championship at the *WSOP*, but busted before the money. He also fell a few spots shy of a cash in the 2014 *WSOP* main event. In 2019, he also took part in a *Poker After Dark* cash game on *PokerGO*.

Pierce played 19 seasons in the NBA and had his number 34 retired by the Boston Celtics. ♠

2008 WSOP MAIN EVENT RUNNER-UP TONY MILES WILL TAKE SECOND SHOT AT AMERICAN NINJA WARRIOR

By Steve Schult

According to his social media account, 2018 *World Series of Poker* main event runner-up Tony Miles will be competing on *NBC's American Ninja Warrior* for a second time.

Miles, who won \$5 million after getting bested by John Cynn in the main event nearly three years ago, posted on his Instagram page that he was in Washington to compete on the newest season of the show.

It was a homecoming of sorts for Miles as the Orlando, Florida resident went to high school in Tacoma. He first competed on the television show in Atlanta during the summer of 2019 after booking a bet with good friend and 2018 *WSOP* Player of the Year winner Shaun Deeb. Miles wagered that he could not only get on the show, but complete the qualifying course.

The terms of the bet were based over a three-year timeframe for Miles. He got 25:1 on his \$5,000 for the first year, 20:1 for the second, and 15:1 for the third and final year. He trained for months for the opportunity before competing in Atlanta, and managed to make it through the first two chal-



© Tony Miles

lenges in Shrinking Steps and Off The Hook, before falling on a balance obstacle called Block Run.

Miles was able to get the prop bet mentioned on air, and had sideline reporter Zuri Hall hold \$5,000 in cash while he ran the course. Although Deeb was never mentioned by name, his \$125,000 payout was allegedly waiting for Miles in a suitcase had he made it through.

Although the results are unknown to the public, the new episode will air on May 31. ♠

MACAU CASINOS SEE 58 PERCENT JUMP IN MARCH REVENUE

By Steve Schult

The world's largest casino market is beginning to see signs of a recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to numbers released by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, casinos in Macau reported \$1.03 billion in revenue during the month of March. Those numbers reflect a 58% jump in year-over-year revenue.

It's the second consecutive month of year-over-year growth after revenue more than doubled in February. It wasn't a completely apples-to-apples comparison in February as the former Portuguese colony forced its casinos to shutter for 15 days last year to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The casinos reopened during the third week of the month and stayed open for all of March 2020, making March the first time since June 2019 that there was a bump in year-over-year gambling revenue where the market was open for the duration of both periods.

Casinos are still earning much less than they were before the coronavirus outbreak, however. In June 2019, the market reported winning \$3.2 billion from gamblers, which was just a 1.8% jump compared to a year prior, but more

than three times what was reported in March 2021.

The pandemic and the lack of tourism to the region is the main factor in the depressed numbers, but that is starting to change. Last month, Macau saw its highest single day visitor tally since before the pandemic with 32,647 people arriving in the special administration region on March 26.

And the government expects those numbers to continue to increase. According to a report from the *Macau Daily Times*, the local government just recently finished upgrades to the airport in anticipation of renewed tourism.

Macau's Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said that the special administrative region is a "healthy, safe destination" and believes that it is the most preferred destination for citizens of mainland China.

Foreigners are still pretty much banned from entering Macau, but mainlanders and natives of Hong Kong make up 90% of gamblers at Macau casinos. The government recently eased restrictions on visitors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, which should spark the industry's recovery. ♠

First Tribal Casino In Las Vegas Opens For Business

By Steve Schult

The first Las Vegas casino run by a Native American tribe opened in late March as the Mohegan Sun Casino at Virgin Hotels Las Vegas officially allowed customers in its 60,000-square foot gaming venue.

The casino is located just east of the Las Vegas Strip where the Hard Rock Casino used to be located. In 2018, billionaire entrepreneur Richard Branson, and owner of Virgin Group Ltd., announced that he bought the Hard Rock Casino for an undisclosed amount and would remodel the property into a Virgin Hotel location.

Branson decided that his company would only take charge of the hotel operations and outsource the gaming side of the business. In September 2019, Branson announced that he would bring on the Connecticut-based Mohegan Tribe to run the casino.

Last October, the Mohegan Tribe was approved by the Nevada Gaming Commission and received a gaming

license. It marked the first time that a tribal entity received a license to operate a casino in the state's history.

The tribe already owns and operates Mohegan Sun, one of Connecticut's two major casinos that opened in 1996. It also recently entered into an agreement with Connecticut that will allow the tribe to offer sports betting, both online and brick-and-mortar, as well as online gaming in the state.

The grand opening of its Las Vegas property kicked off with a ceremonial door unlocking followed by the allowance of guests onto the gaming floor. Actor and TV host Mario Lopez threw the ceremonial first dice roll at the craps table and several other celebrities were on hand for the event, according to a press release from the company.

There are more than 650 slot machines and more than 50 table games, however there is no poker room at the property.



Virgin Hotels was originally slated to open last fall but was pushed back to January 2021. That date was postponed by a few months because of the pandemic and the government restrictions that came with it.

The hotel eventually opened in mid-March, a couple weeks ahead of the casino. The hotel features a "No Nickel and Diming" policy, which includes free Wi-Fi and "street priced" minibars in the rooms. There are no resort fees of any kind. ♠

LIVE 2021 WORLD SERIES OF POKER OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED FOR SEPT. 30 – NOV. 23

By Erik Fast

It's back! A live and in-person *World Series of Poker* will officially return for 2021, after the 2020 *WSOP* was moved exclusively online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WSOP organizers delighted poker players all over the world after announcing that this year's live series will be held from Sept. 30 – Nov. 23. In previous years, the series was played out over the summer months between May and July.

"This year, more than ever, we embrace our role at the *WSOP* to deliver memorable experiences and bring this community of poker lovers back together. In 2021, the theme is, get vaccinated and get back to Vegas," said *WSOP* Executive Director Ty Stewart.

The Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino will once again play host to the biggest tournament series of the year, despite recent news that the venue will soon be rebranded into a Hyatt Hotel.

The exact schedule of events has not yet been revealed for the 2021 *WSOP*, but organizers said that the first weekend of the series, "is expected to feature a special charity event to benefit frontline health workers, a \$25,000 H.O.R.S.E., and a \$5 million [guaranteed] no-limit hold'em event billed as "The Reunion."

The \$10,000 no-limit hold'em main event that players know and love is currently planned to start Thursday, Nov. 4, with the event running through Wednesday, Nov. 17. There will be four starting flights spanning Nov. 4-7. Players participating on the first two starting days will combined for day 2 on Monday, Nov. 8. Those selecting the second two flights will play their day 2 on Tuesday, Nov. 9, with the fields combining for good on Wednesday, Nov. 10.

According to the release, "specific COVID-19 safety protocols and other related 2021 tournament policies will be reviewed with gam-



ing regulators in the lead-up to the event. The *World Series of Poker* will be compliant with all directives from the state of Nevada regarding social distancing and capacity limits on the tournament dates."

More details about the full schedule are expected to be released by this summer.

The decision to host a live series comes after tournament organizers faced criticism last year for their online offerings. Non-hold'em players were disappointed by the lack of mixed games on the schedule, and American high rollers had limited options on the U.S. facing site.

When an additional hybrid online and live main event was announced last-minute in November, it bothered online main event champion Stoyan Madanzhiev and others who felt he was the rightful title holder. When the event actually ran, it was marred by controversy that included one international player failing to show up for the live final table, while another was disqualified for testing positive for coronavirus.

Ultimately, the win went to Argentina's Damian Salas, who previously finished seventh in the 2017 *WSOP* main event. Salas earned \$2,550,969 as the champion in the event, which was televised by *ESPN*

in February.

The turnout numbers were strong, however, and the relative success of the 2020 *WSOP Online* has led organizers to continue that new tradition in 2021.

As with last year's offering, the 2021 *WSOP Online* will offer a full slate of gold bracelet events throughout the summer. The events will once again be split between the International-facing *GGPoker* and the US-facing *WSOP.com*, which will hold the domestic tournaments on its all-american poker network beginning Thursday, July 1.

In addition to the live *WSOP* in Las Vegas and the online series in the summer, the *WSOP Europe* is also expected to return in 2021. The King's Casino in Rozvadov is set to host the series again, with a 15-bracelet-event schedule that will run Friday, Nov. 19 through Tuesday, Dec. 8, subject to regulatory approval.

"We hope and anticipate travel restrictions will ease by the fall," said Stewart. "It's important to us that we have an excellent tournament schedule available to our European players."

Expected highlights on the schedule will include the €10,000 buy-in *WSOP Europe* no-limit hold'em main event and a €50,000 buy-in high roller tournament. ♠

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2021 Card Player Player of the Year Sponsored by Global Poker



PLACE	PLAYER	POINTS	FINAL TABLES	POY EARNINGS
1	Qing Liu	3,271	8	\$1,038,007
2	Sung Joo Hyun	2,172	2	\$531,744
3	Joseph McKeehen	2,000	2	\$716,060
4 ↑	Ali Imsirovic	1,654	7	\$1,380,610
5 ↓	Ilyas Muradi	1,620	1	\$620,000
6 ↓	Fernando Rodriguez-Vazquez	1,488	5	\$283,293
7 ↓	Ankush Mandavia	1,420	2	\$309,800
8 ↑	Artur Martirosyan	1,396	3	\$416,550
9 ↓	Timothy Gilliam	1,392	2	\$233,105
10 ↑	Sean Perry	1,370	7	\$731,700
11 ↓	Robel Andemichael	1,350	1	\$545,500
12 ↓	Roland Rokita	1,216	1	\$363,235
13 ↑	Nicholas Pupillo	1,215	5	\$122,252
14 ↑	Tuan Mai	1,200	7	\$146,898
15 ↓	Will Failla	1,180	2	\$209,668
16 ↓	Scott Stewart	1,120	2	\$199,167
17 ↓	Anselmo Villarreal	1,087	2	\$255,941
18 ↓	Ronnie Bardah	1,080	1	\$566,135
18 ↑	Hal Rotholz	1,080	1	\$180,986
20 ↓	Matthias Auer	1,050	1	\$323,408

QING LIU EXTENDS HIS LEAD WITH EIGHTH FINAL-TABLE FINISH OF 2021

Qing Liu has made more POY-qualified final tables than any other player so far in 2021. The *World Poker Tour Venetian* \$5,000 buy-in no-limit hold'em main event winner has now cashed for \$1,038,007 in POY earnings, with \$752,880 coming from that marquee victory in Las Vegas.

Liu most recently finished fifth in a \$1,100 buy-in no-limit hold'em tournament during the final week of the *DeepStack Showdown* series at Venetian. He earned \$18,900 and 200 POY points for his latest deep run, and in the process strengthened his claim on the top spot in the 2021 POY race standings. He now sits 1,099 points ahead of the nearest competition in Sung Joo Hyun.



ALI IMSIROVIC AND SEAN PERRY DOMINATE THE ARIA HIGH ROLLER APRIL SERIES



Ali Imsirovic

Ali Imsirovic dominated the four-event high roller series held in early April at ARIA Poker Room in Las Vegas. The 26-year-old poker pro made it down to heads-up play in three consecutive events. Incredibly, he faced Sean Perry for the title each time.

Imsirovic won two of the three heads-up showdowns, cashing for \$721,300 along the way. The Bosnian-born American accumulated 922 POY points across his three cashes during this series. He has now made seven POY-qualified final tables so far in 2021. In fact, of the 14 high roller events held at Aria so far this year, he has cashed in eight and won four. With 1,654 total points and \$1,380,610 in total cashes up to this point, he has surged into fourth place on the POY leaderboard for the time being.

Imsirovic kicked off his spree with a runner-up finish to Perry in the second of two \$10,000 buy-in high rollers on the schedule, earning \$111,300. The following day he came out on top in the first of two \$25,000 buy-in events to secure the title and the \$310,000 top prize. He closed out the series by winning the final \$25,000 buy-in for another \$300,000.

Like Imsirovic, Perry now also has a total of seven POY-qualified final table finishes to his name in 2021. With 1,370 points and \$731,700 in year-to-date earnings, he currently sits in 10th place in the overall POY race standings. His previous best score came in 2017, when he earned \$504,090 for fourth place in the *WPT Five Diamond World Poker Classic* main event.



Sean Perry

ARTUR MARTIROSYAN WINS EUROPEAN POKER TOUR SOCHI MAIN EVENT

Artur Martirosyan emerged victorious from a field of 852 total entries to win the 2021 *PokerStars European Poker Tour Sochi* 175,000 RUB (\$2,352 USD) buy-in no-limit hold'em main event. The 23-year-old Russian poker pro secured his first *EPT* main event title in the process, becoming just the sixth player from Russia to win a main event on the tour. He also took home the top prize of 24,633,000 RUB (\$325,370 USD), which increased his recorded tournament earnings to just shy of \$1.5 million.

In addition to the title and the money, Martirosyan was also awarded 912 POY points for his second title of the year. Both of his wins took place at the same venue: Casino Sochi. Just over a month prior to his *EPT* victory, Martirosyan won a 57,750 RUB (\$762 USD) buy-in no-limit hold'em event during the *WPT Russia* festival to earn \$41,417 USD and 228 POY points. With these two titles and another final-table finish under his belt, Martirosyan now sits in eighth place in the rankings with \$416,550 USD in POY-qualified earnings and 1,396 points.



Artur Martirosyan

NICHOLAS PUPILLO CLIMBS TO 13TH PLACE WITH MSPT RIVERSIDE FINAL-TABLE SHOWING



Nicholas Pupillo

The 2021 *Mid-States Poker Tour Riverside* \$1,100 buy-in no-limit hold'em main event drew a total of 862 entries to build a prize pool of \$834,672. In the end, the lion's share of that was awarded to 27-year-old poker pro Daniel Sepiol. He earned \$162,781 and 912 POY points as the champion in this event. This was his second POY-qualified score of the year, having final tabled a \$1,500 buy-in event at Bally's just days into the new year. Sepiol currently occupies the 30th-ranked spot on the POY leaderboard.

While Sepiol came out on top, he was not the only player to make moves in the POY standings as a result of this event. Nicholas Pupillo finished sixth for \$31,716 and 304 POY points. This was his sixth POY-qualified final table of the year, and it was enough to see him move into 13th place for the time being.



TUAN MAI MAKES HIS SEVENTH FINAL TABLE, MOVES INTO 14TH PLACE

There are only five players that have made seven or more final tables so far in 2021. Three of them are currently ranked inside the top ten in the POY race in Qing Liu (1st), Ali Imsirovic (4th), and Sean Perry (10th). David Larson has also made seven final tables, but they have all come in events with buy-ins below \$500, and as a result he is not quite as high on the leaderboard.

Tuan Mai became the fifth player to make this short list when he finished as the runner-up in a \$1,100 buy-in no-limit hold'em 'DoubleStack' event at the Venetian *DeepStack Showdown*. He navigated his way through a field of 336 entries in that event

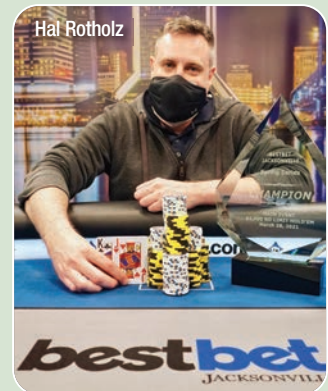
to earn \$55,066 and 400 POY points. This was the largest score of his 2021 campaign. It was enough to see him climb into 14th place in the POY race, with 1,200 total points and \$146,898 in POY earnings so far.

HAL ROTHOLZ WINS BESTBET JACKSONVILLE SPRING SERIES MAIN EVENT

A total of 401 entries were made in the 2021 *bestbet Jacksonville Spring Series* \$2,500 buy-in no-limit hold'em main event by the time registration officially closed, building an \$898,242 prize pool.

Hal Rotholz took home \$180,986 and 1,080 POY points as the champion. This was his first live tournament score of the year, but it alone was enough to see him climb into a tie with *World Poker Tour Lucky Hearts Poker Open* main event third-place finisher Ronnie Bardah for 18th place in the 2021 POY race standings.

Both runner-up Jacob Ferro (\$120,658 and 900 points) and third-place finisher Kyle Cartwright (\$88,761 and 720 points) also picked up enough points to move inside the top 35 in the rankings.



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HEAD GAMES

Women In Poker: Dealing With Adversity

By Craig Tapscott



The Pros: Xuan Liu, Jamie Kerstetter, Danielle Andersen, and Linda Johnson

Craig Tapscott: Women can sometimes experience a different set of challenges at the poker table. Can you discuss a few experiences that made you a stronger player?

Xuan Liu: I've had a love affair with poker and strategy games since childhood, and I first started playing poker for real money during the Moneymaker boom. I had other friends who were just as interested in the game as me, but I was by far the most studious, and I immersed myself in every poker book and resource there was at the time. When you grow up without much and have always worked in jobs that pay hourly wages, the potential to make tuition or cover your entire rent for the semester in one session becomes really attractive. Not surprisingly and somewhat ironically, I couldn't maintain my grades because of all the distraction and lost my scholarship.

When I first played in the United States I struggled immensely. I was angle shot and got hustled left and right. I was even held at gunpoint by the LAPD. I learned to put up a wall and am grateful those lessons happened relatively early in my career. I was fortunate to have people who believed in me and lent a helping hand when I was down.

Jamie Kerstetter: I'm not sure that experiencing adversity at the tables has really made me a stronger player, in that it hasn't taught me anything strategic about the game itself. But I think some of the annoyances that happen from time to time to women can provide opportunities for self-reflection. It raises the questions: Is poker something I still want to do? Is it still fun? Am I still passionate about learning and improving?

It is usually after an unpleasant experience coupled with a losing session or downswing that I think about things like this, something I should be

doing frequently anyway to make sure I'm spending my time and my life on a worthwhile endeavor that will lead to fulfillment.

Danielle Andersen: I feel blessed that just by happenstance the first seven years of my career as a poker professional were spent playing online. Honestly, I wasn't very in tune to the happenings of the poker world, so I didn't even really process being a female was unusual. Behind the computer screen, we're all the same. By the time I sat in my first live game I considered myself a successful, confident poker player. So, it was surprising to me that I initially felt uncomfortable and intimidated as (usually) the only female at the table.

There was no reason for me to feel this way. I knew I had a better resume and more experience than many at the table, yet I felt like an imposter who didn't belong. There was no single incident that helped me overcome this feeling, but every single day I just



Danielle Anderson



Xuan Liu



Jamie Kerstetter

forced myself to show up and every single day I grew more comfortable and confident.

I know firsthand that the poker table can be an intimidating place for a female, especially one who is new to the game, but I think the biggest growth in poker and in life comes from pushing the limits of our comfort zone. I could have just run home and continued clicking buttons from the comfort of my office, but I suspected that if I could overcome my own insecurities, I'd grow to love live poker. And I was right. The cumulative experience of all those sessions where I faced an uncomfortable environment until it became a comfortable environment, allowed me to become a stronger (and happier) player.

Linda Johnson: Things have changed a lot for women in poker throughout the years. When I first started playing back in the '70s, I was living in Southern California and playing in Gardena poker rooms. It was rare to see another woman at the table. I remember one man yelling at me and berating me for "intruding where I wasn't wanted." He went on to tell me that "poker is supposed to be a man's game."

My scariest moment happened at the Las Vegas Club in the early '80s. I entered a \$22 tournament and was apparently the first woman to do so at that venue. The card room manager said to me, "Welcome, honey!" The men were not too friendly. When I made it to the final table, we took a break, and I could see my eight opponents huddled up and conspiring

how to bust me from the tournament. There were even some horrible threats tossed my way about what would happen to me if I won.

Back then, there were only a handful of women in Las Vegas playing professionally. I encountered three types of men. The first type was hostile against any woman who played. I learned to develop a thick skin and not let their comments affect me. The second type was condescending. The third type was protective and almost "fatherly." Unfortunately, there was less of the third type.

Today's atmosphere in the poker room is very welcoming toward women, although you still occasionally encounter a man who thinks he is superior and tries to make it uncomfortable for them to play. I think that overall, the dealers and floor people are better trained to handle these situations and I encourage more women to play our fabulous game.

Craig Tapscott: What was the first experience you had with poker that really inspired you to go deeper into learning the game? And how did you go about improving?

Xuan Liu: My first several *European Poker Tour* experiences were solo trips, but I quickly gravitated towards good players after seeing the same faces at each stop. At that time, I was still doing all of my mental math in Mandarin Chinese, so it was a little difficult for me to discuss hand histories, even though I hung out with all these elite players. I've always been a great observer, so I doubled down on that skill and learned a lot through osmosis.

Looking back, I wish I had been more engaged and asked more questions. I definitely had a complex where I was worried about sounding stupid, and I really wanted to be liked. That in combination with my staunch independence and stubbornness meant I learned a lot about the community, myself, and finances through trial and error. In the beginning I just wanted to get better and learn, so I made sure to never give anyone a reason to gossip or say something about me that would damage my reputation and close doors. I eventually realized that what others choose to think is beyond my control, and I can only make decisions based on the information I have at a given time.

Some people think women objectively have it easier because we can use our social skills and distinguished advantages to network and have access to the best poker minds. While that may be true if you're young, attractive, and socially adept, the portion of the gender that don't check those boxes can expect standard treatment to range from simply being ignored to blatantly harassed and gatekept out of the elite community.

But of all the unsavory things I've witnessed and experienced in the industry, the dynamic that guts me the most is when other female players at an equal or greater level than you see you as competition. The industry perpetuates an aura of scarcity and structurally pits us against each other. One of my biggest pet peeves is when someone tries to give me a compliment by putting someone else down.



There's plenty of room for everyone to shine.

Jamie Kerstetter: Moving to Rosarito Beach, Mexico a year after Black Friday, and being surrounded by some very successful online players who lived and breathed poker was my first introduction to how complicated poker could be. I also learned how hard the best players were willing to work to be the best. It was the first time I really felt like I was fully immersed in poker, instead of telling myself I was just playing poker "between jobs" or treating it like a hobby as I had always done in the past.

No matter how hard we all tried to take mental breaks from the game, there would always be a stray hand history discussed over dinner or at the beach. Being around people for the first time who truly loved poker and who were willing to discuss not only strategy to use in-game, but also their overall approach to studying the game, was invaluable at the time.

Danielle Andersen: I was a broke sophomore in college when I won my first \$100 pot playing online poker. I remember practically floating to my next class, adrenaline rushing through my veins. That night I distinctly remember having a conversation with my boyfriend (now husband), Kory, about how this poker hobby might actually be a viable way to make some extra money. We excitedly discussed how much stress it would relieve if I could just grind out \$100 a month.

What I should have done at that point was dive into some books, join poker forums and watch some strategy

videos. But I didn't, because frankly, that just didn't sound fun, and I couldn't be bothered to stop clicking buttons long enough to study. Thankfully, Kory also loved poker and took a more studious approach to the game. He understood concepts like pot odds, bankroll management and variance before I did, and he tried his best to pass on valuable information to me. I wasn't the best student (I was certain sitting with half of my bankroll on the table at once would end up just fine!) but he was a persistent teacher and eventually I started to grasp some of these important concepts on my own.

Working with poker author and mental coach Tommy Angelo was a pivotal turning point that really changed how I think about poker. I was really struggling with the emotional highs and lows of being a professional gambler. My moods off the table were often dictated by my results on the table, which was unfair to my family and to myself. Tommy really helped me learn to have better control of my emotions which led to less tilt, higher profits, and a significantly happier home life. I've seen so many poker players who were far more strategically talented than I fail as professional poker players because they didn't have the emotional fortitude to handle the ups and downs. I highly recommend players looking to improve to not overlook the importance of working on their mental game.

Linda Johnson: When I turned 21, I started going to Las Vegas to play blackjack. My father told me that if I wanted to gamble, I should learn how to play poker so I would not be playing against the casino. I bought myself a few books (there weren't many available at the time) and learned the basics of how to play. I knew right away that I would love the game.

My first live experience was with my coworkers at the Post Office. Eventually, I became a constant winner and was no longer welcome to play. I started going to the Gardena cardrooms after work and would fly to Las Vegas on my days off. Poker was my niche, and I knew I could excel in it with a lot of work and study. I realized that poker was a game that could be beaten if I played better than my opponents.

I bought every poker book I could find, talked poker with my friends, and attended poker seminars. I played

poker every spare minute of the day and I loved it! I eventually felt that I could support myself from poker, so I quit my secure, high-level government job at the Post Office to move to Las Vegas. That was the best decision of my life.

Poker is my passion. I never stop learning and studying. I have read hundreds of poker books. I joined some poker discussion groups. I attended and then eventually taught *WPT Boot Camp*. Today there are a lot more resources for people to improve their poker skills than when I first learned the game. There are magazines, online training sites, videos, coaching sites, etc. Unlike roulette and craps, poker is a game that can be beaten if you are willing to do the work and put in the time to learn the game. ♠

Xuan Liu is an instructor at Poker Powher and operates her own real estate business. She has more than \$3 million in combined live and online tournament winnings, including a \$600,000 score at the PokerStars Caribbean Adventure and another \$524,000 earned at the EPT San Remo main event. Liu lives in Vancouver, Canada with her rescue mini-poodle Didi.

Jamie Kerstetter is a professional poker player and broadcaster, commentating for a variety of poker tours including the WPT, PokerGO and the WSOP. For the past two years, she worked the WSOP main event on ESPN alongside Lon McEachern and Norman Chad, receiving a Global Poker Award nomination for Broadcaster of the Year. She is host of The Rake, a Run It Once podcast.

Danielle 'dmoongirl' Andersen began playing online in 2003 and is one of the highest earning female online cash game players in history. She was featured in the 2013 film Bet, Raise, Fold, which documented the rise and fall of online poker in the United States. Andersen is part of the LearnWPT instructor team.

Linda Johnson is known as the 'First Lady Of Poker' and has a World Series of Poker bracelet. She is a proud member of the Poker Hall of Fame and Women in Poker Hall of Fame, and is also a co-founder of TDA (Tournament Directors Association) and co-founder of Pokergives.org. She was a studio announcer for the World Poker Tour during its first six seasons. Johnson is also a partner in Card Player Cruises and a former publisher and owner of Card Player Magazine.

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POKER STRATEGY

Omaha Eight-Or-Better Fundamentals With Randy Ohel

By Steve Schult



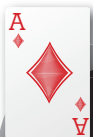
The *World Series of Poker* is typically the one time of the year where all of poker's variants are on display at the highest level. Randy Ohel is a regular in the high-stakes mixed game scene, both in tournaments and in cash games.

Ohel has a *WSOP* bracelet from his victory in the \$2,500 2-7 triple draw in 2012, and has cashed in several other variants, including runner-up finishes in the 2018 \$10,000 2-7 triple draw, the 2016 \$10,000 seven card stud eight-or-better championship, and the 2014 \$10,000 H.O.R.S.E. championship.

The Florida native and Las Vegas resident has more than \$2 million in live tournament earnings, almost exclusively in mixed events. Ohel has delved into the coaching realm of poker and is currently taking students to learn non-hold'em games. He can be found on *Twitter* @RandyOhel.

In an effort to provide readers with a solid fundamental strategy of mixed games, *Card Player* sat down with Ohel to break down a hand from the 2018 *WSOP* \$10,000 Omaha eight-or-better championship between four-time bracelet winner Eli Elezra and Omaha specialist Kyle Miaso.

The Hand

							
Kyle Miaso 1,400,000				Eli Elezra 3,050,000			
							
							

Limits: 100,000 – 200,000 • Players Remaining: 4

The Action

Four-handed at the final table, Eli Elezra raised from under the gun and Kyle Miaso called from the big blind. On the flop, Miaso checked, Elezra bet, and Miaso called. On the turn, Miaso checked, Elezra bet, and Miaso check-raised.

Elezra called the check-raise and Miaso bet the river as well. Elezra raised and Miaso called. Both players held the nut low, but Elezra took three-quarters of the pot with a nine-high straight.

Steve Schult: In a previous piece we did about 2-7 triple draw (2-7TD), you mentioned that opening from the cutoff short-handed is different than opening from the cutoff in a full ring game because there are very specific cards that will hit the muck in that game, leaving many of the good cards left for the players in the blinds. Does this same principle apply in Omaha eight-or-better since Eli is raising from the cutoff, or under-the-gun, four-handed?

Randy Ohel: It applies, but not as strongly as in 2-7TD. There is definitely an element of it because the ace is such a key card, but it's not as powerful as an effect. You're thinking along the right lines though.

SS: Let's just touch on pre-flop hand selection in general. What would be considered a premium hand in this game? What should Eli be opening



Kyle Miaso



Eli Elezra

from the cutoff?

RO: Eli is going to be opening a lot of hands because he's Eli, but everyone is going to open quite a few hands four-handed from the cutoff, or whatever you want to call that. Premium hands are going to be considered suited aces with a wheel card and a Broadway card, pocket aces with wheel cards, and the other obvious hands.

Low rundowns are playable [from Eli's position], and you could open a high card with three wheel for sure. He'll definitely open some combi-

nations of two Broadway, two wheel, or something like that.

SS: When you say "three wheel cards," are all wheel cards created equal? Is something like K-2-4-5 the same as A-K-5-4.

RO: When I say three wheel cards, I meant aceless in this case. The ace hands are good, obviously. But when you look at hands that are a little bit weaker that you can still open, these are the ones that don't contain an ace. For example, K-4-3-2 double suited is a much stronger hand than 10-5-4-3 rainbow. And there

is a continuum there in between those.

SS: Kyle defends his big blind. How much should he be defending here?

RO: He's going to be doing this a lot. In Omaha, equities run very close together. It's not easy to be a 60-40 favorite, or much more than that, so you have to defend a lot. And Kyle is an absolute wizard at this game. He's going to be defending properly wide and playing well post-flop, especially since he's going up against another wide range. He knows that Eli is going to be opening very wide as well.

SS: Kyle was third in chips with seven big bets and the short stack had four big bets remaining at this point, while Eli and Paul Volpe had massive chip stacks. How much does ICM affect Kyle's preflop decision making?

RO: Eli is going to win the blinds way more here than he would in a cash game. Kyle can't defend nearly as much here as he would in a cash game because he would like to ladder up obviously, but it's not like no-limit where all of a sudden his whole stack is going to be at risk. He can still see a flop and proceed with caution and try and figure out how many bets he wants to put in at that point.

SS: Kyle defends and the flop is 8-7-3 rainbow. Forgive me if I'm using no-limit hold'em terminology in a game where it doesn't apply, but does this board favor the raiser or the big blind defender? Who has the range advantage here?

RO: That's definitely an important factor in any flop game. This is a better board for the opener. He has more A-2 and A-4 in his range. He also has fewer high-card rundowns

than Kyle will.

SS: Eli will have fewer high-card hands? So, would he not be opening something like K-J-J-10?

RO: That particular hand is openable, but there are definitely more high-type hands that Eli won't open that Kyle will defend with. And Kyle will have fewer A-2's, so it will be much harder for him to be aggressive.

SS: Kyle checks, Eli bets, and Kyle calls. I'm guessing this is standard since the board favors the raiser?

RO: On this texture, yes. The most common board texture that the big blind would lead are like high-high-low boards. That would be considered the best texture for the big blind in this spot.

SS: Is Eli going to have a check-back range here?

RO: For sure.

SS: So Eli wouldn't be betting this with a range advantage just to take advantage of ICM considerations?

RO: No. He's just not winning the pot enough. Also, his worst hands are blocking the sorts of hands that Kyle would check-fold and unblocking the sorts of hands that Kyle would continue with. Let's pretend that Eli has K-Q-J-10, which is the worst hand you could have on this board. Having those cards blocks Kyle from having the cards that would check-fold. And it simultaneously unblocks the types of hands that Kyle would continue with.

SS: Given the board texture, when Kyle check-calls, does this mean that the hand is automatically going to showdown? Wouldn't he almost always have at least a low that he will check-call three streets with?

RO: Often yes, but not automatically. If he has



something like 4-5-6, which would be a weak low and a wrap. He probably wouldn't call down unimproved, but he would likely call a flop and turn bet.

SS: The turn is the Q♥. Kyle check-raises, and in my mind, that card looks like a brick. So what would he be check-raising in this spot?

RO: If this were like a six-way pot or something like that, it would change a lot less than when it's a heads-up pot because it introduces a new top pair. Something like A-Q-2 just became very strong. Or he could have A-Q-4 or A-Q-5. Those types of hands just shot up in value.

It's not like he's up against a nine-handed under-the-gun range, where the under-the-gun player always has A-2. He's up against a much weaker range than that, and more lows can be good. So he needs to get value from two-way hands like A-Q-4-7 or something like that. It's possible that he was slow playing on the flop, but that is much less likely.

SS: In your opinion, what is the worst hand to

check-raise the turn with?

RO: That's a good question. Probably A-Q-4 or something like that.

SS: Eli calls the check-raise. How much does that narrow down Eli's holding?

RO: He could have a number of hands. He doesn't have his strongest hands because he didn't three-bet and he doesn't have his weakest hands because he didn't fold. He just has everything in the middle.

SS: If he were to three-bet the turn, what would be some of his strongest possible hands?

RO: Any A-2 with two pair. Or A-K-K-2 or A-A-2-X. Maybe A-4 with queens-up, actually.

SS: The turn brought backdoor hearts. Does that change ranges much when the check-raise comes into play?

RO: Flush draws are always a possibility and they factor into the equity and there might be certain hands that Eli has that picked up hearts that he would continue barreling with that he wouldn't have if he didn't. Those hands do exist.

SS: Are there going to

be river cards that will make Kyle check? Let's imagine the river was a king, should he still be betting?

RO: I can't think of any rivers that he wouldn't be betting. I guess if he gets counterfeited, he still has enough protection where he has a pretty good low and two pair since he would make queens-up with an A-5. I don't think there's a river he would be checking.

SS: When Eli raises, is he just always representing a straight?

RO: Yes.

SS: What happens to the value of Kyle's hand when he gets raised?

RO: Would you rather just get called? Sure. Once you get raised, you're never scooping and you're never winning three-quarters. Those options have disappeared. But he definitely has plenty of options to get half. You're not happy to get raised, but you're still calling. It doesn't really matter.

SS: I just wanted to go back to the turn real quick because I think that's the most interesting part of the hand. Is turn check-raising a commonly used play in this game?

RO: He basically had a one-way hand on the flop. And remember, he doesn't have a ton of chips, so even if he had A-2-4-X, he'd be more inclined to raise then when he has A-2-5-X because there are fewer bad things that can happen. When you're shorter on chips, you have to be more cognizant of all the bad things that can happen. He check-raised the turn just because he picked up top pair and a flush draw and now has a two-way hand.

SS: If Eli had three-bet the turn, is it still just a call down by Kyle?

RO: Unless Kyle

improved again, yes. I think he would lead the river if he hit a heart, and I think he would lead the river if an ace came, since he would have top two and second nut low and is now scooping a lot of the hands that were beating him on the flop.

SS: Kyle did get pretty unlucky on this river.

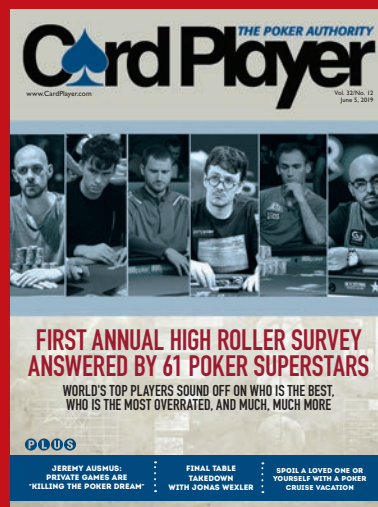
RO: Yes, and imagine what happens if he's up against A-2-7-8 and an ace comes on the river. He goes from getting quartered to scooping.

The Outcome

Miaso was ultimately eliminated in fourth place, earning \$129,648. It was his second-best finish in the event, behind the runner-up performance he made in 2015 worth \$241,691. He also final tabled the 2019 \$1,500 triple draw event and the 2019 \$1,500 pot-limit Omaha eight-or-better event.

Elezra went on to finish in second place, banking \$258,297 and falling just short of his fifth career bracelet. Elezra, who has \$4 million in career live tournament earnings, won his bracelets in the 2007 \$3,000 stud eight-or-better, the 2013 \$2,500 triple draw, and both the 2015 and 2019 \$1,500 stud events.

The eventual title went to longtime tournament grinder Paul Volpe, who took home \$417,921 for the fourth-largest score of his career. This was his third bracelet win, following victories in the 2014 \$10,000 no-limit 2-7 low-ball and the 2016 \$1,500 eight-game mix events. He has \$8.5 million in live tournament earnings, which includes runner-up finishes at the 2013 *L.A. Poker Classic* main event and the 2018 *WSOP* \$10,000 six-max no-limit hold'em event. ♠



\$39⁹⁵
26 ISSUES

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ALI IMSIROVIC FIGHTS HIS WAY TO THE TOP OF THE HIGH ROLLER CIRCUIT

26-Year-Old Talks About Record-Breaking Million-Dollar Pot

By Julio Rodriguez



Almedin 'Ali' Imsirovic was only a teenager when he found poker in 2011, an interesting time to discover a game that was facing major disruptions in the U.S. after Black Friday. It was another five years before he could even play poker in a Las Vegas casino. But despite his limited time on the felt, the 26-year-old now finds himself among the very best in the game today.

"It's hard to say exactly where anybody is, but I'd be hard pressed not to have myself in the top 10," he reluctantly said. "And yeah, the goal is still always to be the best. That's what drives me to study constantly and get better."

It's been a meteoric rise for the Washington State-raised Imsirovic, who seemingly came out of nowhere to win the *Poker Masters* and the purple jacket in 2018. Since then, he's only further established himself on the high roller circuit with 16 career titles and nearly \$11 million in live tournament earnings.

Imsirovic recently appeared on *Card Player's* Poker Stories podcast to talk about his unusual start in the game, becoming a high roller crusher, and what it felt like to drag a million-dollar pot. Highlights of the interview appear

below. You can listen to the full episode on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, or any podcast app.

Poker Beginnings

Ali was just three years old when his family fled the war in Bosnia, ultimately settling in Vancouver, Washington. His father had been a successful businessman in his home country, but was forced to start over from scratch and work numerous jobs to keep the family afloat.

Imsirovic had hopes of playing basketball at a high level, but ankle issues kept him off the court and looking for somewhere else to focus his competitive drive. His father would play small-stakes poker with his friends, but whenever Ali asked to play, he would be told no.

"He was very opposed to me doing anything gambling related," Imsirovic said.

Ali passed some advanced placement tests, allowing him to graduate from high school at the age of 16 and enter college early. He enrolled at Washington State University, and ultimately left just one semester shy of earning his degree. The reason? Poker.

Coasting through school, Imsirovic would spend his



days reading poker books. He would even skip school to get home early enough to play online freerolls. When he turned 18, he started making trips to nearby Final Table Poker Club in Portland. It was a tournament win there that kickstarted his career.

"It was Valentine's Day, and I was supposed to go on a date with this girl," he recalled. "I was headed to her place, and we were arguing about something. I told myself, 'F**k this, I don't want to go on this date anymore.' And right next to her place, was this [cardroom]."

He walked in and saw a tournament running with a \$60 buy-in. 'Perfect,' he thought to himself, as his father had given him exactly \$60 to fix his guitar. Six hours later, he had won the tournament.

"I won it for more than first place!" he boasted. "I had 90 percent of the chips in play four-handed, and they wanted to chop, so I asked for \$100 more than first place."

(This was not the last time Imsirovic would run away with a tournament win. At a recent high roller event, he held 80 percent of the chips in play even though late registration was still open!)

Becoming A Poker Master

Imsirovic has always jumped in head first, and wasted no time getting started with his professional career. He recalled an early trip to Choctaw Casino in Oklahoma where he lost half of his bankroll.

"I was kind of always okay with going broke, just because

I had no responsibilities, and I had friends that were always willing to back me if I needed it. I was okay with trying to run it up, or with going broke and starting over."

He remembers his first shots at the high rollers, and admits that he moved up too soon.

"I played in two \$10,000 events and one \$25,000 event, and I had no business playing those at the time. I remember I had Justin Bonomo on my left and he was just destroying me. I was like, 'I don't belong here.' I didn't play the rest of the [series] and just went back to studying, trying to get better."

After a few false starts, he began to find his way. He had a string of final tables in 2017 to boost his bankroll, and then won events at the *PokerStars Caribbean Adventure* and *Borgata Spring Poker Open* to give him some major confidence and momentum. In late 2018, he won two events at the *Poker Masters* and cashed for nearly \$1.3 million, earning the purple jacket as the overall player of the series.

Less than two years after his first major tournament score, he had already broke through to the high roller circuit.

"It's kind of hard not to be confident at that point when you just win back-to-back high rollers against these tough fields. I was like, 'I belong here. These guys now know who I am.'"

Imsirovic continued to fire, cashing in the \$300,000 buy-in *Super High Roller Bowl* and then winning a \$25,000

"It's hard to say exactly where anybody [ranks], but I'd be hard pressed not to have myself in the top 10," Imsirovic reluctantly said. "And yeah, the goal is still always to be the best. That's what drives me to study and constantly get better. "

event at the *U.S. Poker Open*. After a couple of close calls at the 2019 *World Series of Poker*, he took runner-up in the *Super High Roller Bowl London* for the largest score of his career, banking \$1,089,000.

Winning A Record-Breaking Pot



Imsirovic was too young for the first online poker boom, but he took full advantage of the second boom during the lockdown. With live poker shut down around the world, online poker traffic surged, as did high roller action for both tournaments and cash games.

In August, Imsirovic found himself playing in a massive game of \$500-\$1,000-\$2,000 no-limit hold'em, sitting on a stack of nearly \$600,000 against the likes of Jake Schindler, Chris Brewer, and Wiktor "limitless" Malinowski.

"I was just playing tournaments most of quarantine, but then these cash games showed up on GGPoker. At first it was \$500-\$1,000, and I knew I could afford [to play] and the games were good. And then they made it \$500-\$1,000-\$2,000! The stakes were so massive and it was very stressful. But the hourly, the amount of money you could win in that game was insane."

When Tan Xuan opened to \$4,278 in the cutoff, Imsirovic looked down at A♠ K♠ in the big blind and three-bet to \$21,000. Xuan called, and the flop came down 9♠ 5♥ 5♦. Imsirovic continued for \$15,425, and Xuan raised to \$53,700. Imsirovic called, and the J♠ hit the turn. This time he checked, and Xuan bet \$101,046. Imsirovic called, and the river was the 8♠.

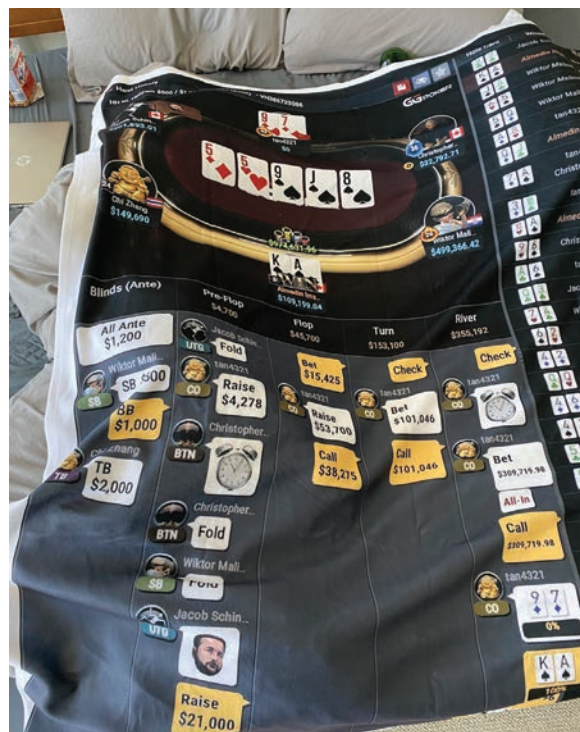
Holding the nut flush, he checked, and couldn't click call fast enough after Xuan shoved for his remaining \$309,719. The board was paired, but Imsirovic wasn't worried about a full house, and indeed, Xuan had turned his flopped top pair with 9♦ 7♦ into a bluff. A bluff worth a record-breaking \$974,631 for Imsirovic!

"When the river came, I was like, 'no f***ing way!' I called, the pot went to me, and I literally just screamed at the top of my lungs."

Even though the result was great, Imsirovic admitted that he had the wrong read overall.

"I thought he had air, just the way things were going," he said. "I thought he just didn't have anything. If the river bricked, there was a chance that I was just going to call it off with ace high, and lose to his nine. Honestly, if the river bricked, I might have lost a million-dollar pot with ace high."

Before the pandemic, the previous record for a no-limit hold'em online cash game pot was \$723,941, held by Di "urindanger" Dang in a Full Tilt Poker hand that took place



© Ali Imsirovic

back in 2008 against Tom "durrrr" Dwan. (The record for largest overall pot still belongs to Patrik Antonius, who won 1,356,947 in a hand of pot-limit Omaha against Viktor "Isildur1" Blom in 2009.)

It took 12 years for the hold'em record to be broken by the aforementioned Malinowski, who got it all in with pocket aces against the pocket kings of Michael Addamo for \$842,438. Less than a week later, the record belonged to Imsirovic.

"I didn't expect to be playing so big, but I'm very glad I did. I mean, I didn't win that much, probably like \$2.5 million total. But for those stakes, that's like 10 or 12 buy-ins. It's a lot of money, don't get me wrong, but it's not like I crushed the game for 30 or 40 buy-ins."

To celebrate the record, one of Ali's friends had a custom quilt made up, featuring the hand history and a screenshot of the online poker table.

"It might be the best gift I've ever received."

Picking Up Where He Left Off

Imsirovic was already one of the most feared players on the circuit before the pandemic, finding particular success at the Aria High Roller series, and he had no problem jumping right back into the winner's circle once casinos re-opened their doors.

In fact, the Aria has hosted 14 high roller events so far in 2021, and Imsirovic has already managed to win four of them, cashing in eight overall for a combined \$1,443,610. His latest feat was particularly impressive, nearly going back-to-back-to-back in consecutive nights, winning two of three heads-up showdowns against fellow high-stakes pro Sean Perry. (Read more about these events on pg. 15)

"It's hard to talk to people over the plexiglass and masks obviously take away some of the live aspect of it, which I don't like, but honestly, I take whatever I can get. I love live poker so much and I'm just so happy to be playing again."

As a result of his high roller run, Imsirovic now sits in fourth place in the *Card Player* Player of the Year standings, and given the volume he puts in, he is a real threat to win the title for 2021. ♠

Ali Imsirovic's Top Tournament Scores



Date	Event	Finish	Payout
Sept. 2019	£250,000 Super High Roller Bowl London	2 nd Place	\$1,089,000
Sept. 2018	\$50,000 Poker Masters	1 st Place	\$799,000
Dec. 2019	\$50,000 Five Diamond High Roller	1 st Place	\$600,000
Dec. 2018	\$300,000 Super High Roller Bowl Las Vegas	7 th Place	\$540,000
Sept. 2018	\$25,000 Poker Masters	1 st Place	\$462,000
Feb. 2019	\$25,000 U.S. Poker Open	1 st Place	\$442,500
Nov. 2018	\$50,000 Caribbean Poker Party	3 rd Place	\$400,000
Feb. 2021	\$50,000 Aria High Roller No. 6	1 st Place	\$344,910
Aug. 2019	€50,000 EPT Barcelona High Roller	5 th Place	\$319,203
April 2021	\$25,000 Aria High Roller No. 13	1 st Place	\$310,000
April 2021	\$25,000 Aria High Roller No. 14	1 st Place	\$300,000
Nov. 2019	\$25,000 Poker Masters	2 nd Place	\$269,500
April 2018	\$2,500 Borgata Spring Poker Open	1 st Place	\$246,066
May 2019	\$10,000 WSOP Turbo Bounty	2 nd Place	\$213,644
July 2019	\$50,000 WSOP High Roller	7 th Place	\$212,292

 A large background image of Mount Rushmore under a clear blue sky.

the *Odds* of becoming President of the U.S.A.
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Card Player

BANKROLL MANAGEMENT: HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

By Jonathan Little

I am often asked why most players fail at poker. The answer is simple... bad bankroll management.

Many novices think poker is a get-rich-quick scheme, but in reality, it is quite the opposite. You get rich in poker by taking it slowly and playing within your means. If you don't have a bankroll, you can't play. Even if you are the most skilled player in the world, if you have little to no money to your name, you won't be able to play and make money unless you get very lucky. On the other hand, if you are smart with your money and always keep a decently large bankroll in relation to the games you are playing, you will maximize your chance to win money indefinitely while also improving your poker skills.

When I first started playing poker 18 years ago, I played 25¢-50¢ limit hold'em. While I only had 100 big bets to my name (\$50), I managed to grow my bankroll and slowly move up. I eventually learned the common knowledge that you need 300 big bets to play limit poker in order to have only a small chance of going broke, so I followed that guideline until I reached \$15-\$30.

Most people think it takes a long time to build a bankroll from scratch, but in reality, it does not take too long if you are willing to put in lots of hours at the table. Let's look at the math.

Assuming you can play four tables at a time online, which is the minimum I suggest, you will be able to play around 250 hands per hour. If you win two big bets per 100 hands at limit hold'em, you will win five big bets per hour. If you have 300 big bets in your current game, that means you have 150 big bets at the next level. So, it will *only* take you around 30 hours to double your bankroll and move up. You can easily do that in a week if you are playing full time and remain disciplined.

When it comes to no-limit hold'em, which is by far the most popular poker variant, I suggest keeping at least 30 buy-ins for your current game, and ideally more. This assumes you are buying in for 100 big blinds. If you buy in for less than that, which I only recommend if you realize you are outmatched (which usually means you should not be playing in the first place), you will actually need a larger number of buy-ins because you will get all-in more often with a smaller advantage on average.

In no-limit hold'em, a good player can win around 10 big blinds per 100 hands when playing online. So, assuming you can play 250 hands per hour, you will win 25 big blinds per hour. Every four hours, you will win a buy-in, meaning it will take you around 100 hours to double your bankroll. If you play full-time, you could potentially double your bankroll in less than three weeks.

For multi-table tournaments, you should keep at least

How Do You Double Your Bankroll In Less Than Three Weeks?

In no-limit hold'em, a good player can win around 10 big blinds per 100 hands when playing online. Assuming you can play 250 hands per hour, you will win 25 big blinds per hour. Every four hours, you will win a buy-in, meaning it will take you about 100 hours to double your bankroll, assuming you are practicing proper bankroll management strategy.

100 buy-ins for your current level. There is much more variance in multi-table tournaments than most other forms of poker because you only win a significant amount when you cash in the top one percent of the field, which is tough to do. For sit-n-go tournaments, you should also keep at least 50 buy-ins. Remember, the listed numbers are the minimum amount required!

Ideally, if you plan on playing professionally, you should keep around two times the numbers suggested. If you're playing in tough games where your win rate will be lower, you also should keep a larger bankroll. If you are playing in extremely high variance games, like 1,000-player tournaments or a volatile game like pot-limit Omaha, you will need an even larger bankroll.

To learn even more about bankroll management, check out my free Bankroll Bible at PokerCoaching.com/bankroll. As long as you make a point to play a lot in games where you have an edge while keeping a proper bankroll, the money will flow in your direction. If you don't, you are gambling.

Game	Minimum Bankroll
Limit Hold'em	300 Big Bets
No-Limit Hold'em	30 Buy-Ins (100 BBs)
Multi-Table Tournaments	100 Buy-Ins
Sit-N-Go's	50 Buy-Ins



Jonathan Little is a two-time WPT champion with more than \$7 million in live tournament earnings, best-selling author of 15 educational poker books, and 2019 GPI Poker Personality of the Year. If you want to increase your poker skills and learn to crush the games, check out his training site at PokerCoaching.com/cardplayer.

Deuce to Seven Triple Draw Lowball: Turn Fundamentals

By Kevin Haney

Mixed game players are often attracted to limit games because the action moves fast and the long tanks that are commonplace in big bet games are relatively rare.

However, there are some spots that require some thought. The turn is usually the most difficult street to play well in any poker variant, and Deuce to Seven Triple Draw Lowball (27TD) is no exception. For example, if we lead out on the turn with a weak low and get raised, a case can possibly be made for all of the following options: folding, calling/patting, calling/breaking, and three-betting/patting. Whenever someone requires a little more time, even the most impatient of players tend to be understanding of the situation as they have all been there at some point themselves.

Our discussions on turn play will be extensive, detailed, and very mathematical, as that is the nature of the game. Before we get into more intense discussions it will be most helpful to first go over some basic core concepts that we will be revisiting often when shaping our strategies.

Equities With One Draw To Go

A pat jack is usually a small favorite over any one player drawing one, but so is the superior draw. So if we have a premium draw underneath (e.g. J-7-4-3-2) we should break and draw. Breaking allows us to make money on the river, whereas had we chosen to pat we cannot bet for value and are reduced to bluff catching. If our underlying draw is rough, we should tend to pat. For example, we would pat J-8-7-6-2 against a single opponent drawing one.

Equities vary depending on the strength of the draw out against you and the dead cards, but a ten low typically has 60-70% equity against any single player drawing one. For example, 10-7-4-3-2 is around a 67% favorite over a draw to an 8-6-3-2, however, if we choose to break and draw at the seven, our equity advantage would decline to approximately 54%. Since our winning chances are significantly reduced, it would be a small mistake to break the 10-7-4-3-2 even though by drawing we would expect to recoup some of the loss on the last betting round.

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2021 bestbet Jacksonville Spring Series
\$2,500 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Kyle Cartwright
2,370,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 28.0%
After Flop: 91.0%
After Turn: 95.0%



Stephen Strout
1,320,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 72.0%
After Flop: 9.0%
After Turn: 5.0%

PREFLOP

With eight players remaining and blinds of 20,000-40,000 with a big blind ante of 40,000, Kyle Cartwright raised to 80,000 from the button. Stephen Strout three-bet to 155,000 from the big blind, and Cartwright called.



Strout bet 190,000, and Cartwright called.



Strout checked. Cartwright bet 165,000, and Strout called.



Strout checked, and Cartwright bet 290,000. Strout called.

ANALYSIS

The 2021 *bestbet Jacksonville Spring Series* \$2,500 buy-in main event drew a sizable field of 401 entries. By the time the field was narrowed down to the final table of eight, *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner and eight-time *WSOP Circuit* ring winner Kyle Cartwright had established himself as the chip leader. In this hand Cartwright raised with A-8 offsuit from the button, wielding the dual advantage of his large stack and the best position at the table. Stephen Strout picked up pocket tens in the big blind and decided to three-bet. While the decision has merit, Strout likely should have chosen a larger sizing than he ultimately went with. Cartwright had min-raised to 80,000, and Strout's three-bet was to 155,000, or less than twice the size of Cartwright's bet. While there is always room for variation in bet sizing, a three-bet to between three and four times the initial raise is more common among top professionals. Strout's tiny reraise laid great odds for Cartwright, who made the call and flopped trip eights. Cartwright just called in position on the flop, and took over the betting lead on the turn. He sized down after Strout checked the turn, betting just 165,000 into a pot of 750,000. Strout called and the river completed the possible backdoor flush draw and made a straight for any player with a seven in their hand. Cartwright again chose a smaller sizing on the river, likely targeting just the kind of hand that Strout held, which was an unimproved pocket pair. Strout called the bet of just over a quarter of the size of the pot and fell to the bottom of the chip counts with eight players remaining.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM

In a three-way pot, a ten is most often the equity favorite against two drawing hands:

10-7-4-3-2	46%
7-5-3-2	30%
8-5-4-2	24%

However, once again it is a close decision on whether to pat or break when your underlying draw is so strong. In a three-way pot with our opponents still drawing, we should always pat a nine and break a jack.

Equities With Two Draws To Go

Why should we discuss equities with two draws to go in an article focused on turn play? The answer is that they are relevant for turn decisions when we are out of position and thus don't have any information regarding the outcome of our opponent's second draw. Therefore, in situations when we want to estimate our equity and decide how to best play various pat holdings, we must determine the probability of our hand holding up over the course of two draws.

For example, suppose we are out of position and both players are drawing one on the second draw. If we make a 10 low, we are not a 60-70% favorite to win (as indicated above with one draw to go) because our opponent could have already made a better low on the second draw.

Since our opponent may have already improved, a 10 low is an underdog in this situation while a pat nine is generally a small favorite. Therefore, when we find ourselves in this spot, we should tend to lead out with nines

but check most of our 10 lows, especially those tens with good draws underneath.

Betting all of our 10 lows will create many problems for us. We will tend to face raises from a wider variety of made hands and draws and our opponent also has the ability to "freeze" us.

Freezing

Freezing is an in-position turn play where there is a decent chance that we hold the best pat hand, however, we just call for the dual purpose of saving money when our hand is instead second best and also to give the impression to our opponent that we are still most likely drawing. When we just call, our opponent will pat his weaker holdings and when we have the best low, our decision to not raise ensured us the pot.

For example, suppose we hold position in a heads-up pot and both players draw one on the second draw. On the turn our opponent leads into us, highly representing a pat low, and we have made an 8-7-5-4-2 low. Even if we estimate that there is a 55-60% chance that we hold the best hand we should just call.

Calling prevents slightly "value owning" ourselves as even if the 55-60% estimate of having the best hand is indeed correct, our raise may be a small money loser because it gives our opponent the ability to three-bet when his hand is best. However, another important reason to just call is that a raise may cause our opponent to break worse lows and therefore instead of being dead in the water, he is now drawing live to the entire pot.

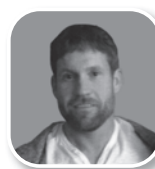
Suppose our opponent has 9-7-4-3-2, we just call the turn bet, and he pats thus ensuring that the pot will be ours. He may even call a river bet as well with that hand, which is a nice cherry on top.

Now let's assume we raise the turn and villain decides to break and draw. The good news is that we are getting an extra bet on the turn with around 77% equity, netting us approximately .54 big bets (77%-23%) of value.

The bad news is that our raise has now put the underlying pot (reflecting the turn call but not the raise) at risk. If the size of the pot that we have put at risk is 6.75 big bets and our opponent has 23% equity, inducing a break has cost us approximately 1.55 big bets (23% x 6.75).

If we gain .54 big bets on the raise but lose approximately 1.55 big bets from putting the pot at risk, our net loss is around one big bet. Making a decision in a limit game that causes us to lose one big bet in expectation is quite substantial, and to make matters worse, we are now all but compelled to call a river bet due to the bloated pot we created.

There will be further discussion on freezing, and all of the other topics outlined above as we walk through many different turn situations in future issues. ♠



Kevin Haney is a former actuary of MetLife but left the corporate job to focus on his passions for poker and fitness. He is co-owner of Elite Fitness Club in Oceanport, NJ and is a certified personal trainer. With regards to poker he got his start way back in 2003 and particularly enjoys taking new players interested in mixed games under his wing and quickly making them proficient in all variants. If interested in learning more, playing mixed games online, or just saying hello he can be reached at haneyk612@gmail.com.



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CONTRACTS AND POKER: WHERE ARE YOU?

By Scott J. Burnham

You are playing internet poker when suddenly a message pops up on your screen that states, “We are unable to verify your location.” A few seconds later, you are booted from the site, and finish just short of the bubble while you are disconnected. Do you have any recourse against the site?

The WSOP.com rules very clearly state that you can play only while physically located in Nevada (and comparable software has a similar rule for playing in New Jersey). The WSOP.com Terms of Service section 3.6 states: “Persons located outside of the State of Nevada, at the time of their activity, may not use the Services for real money play.” Sites like WSOP.com attempt to verify your location using your IP (Internet Protocol) address. Some players, however, try to counter their attempts by using a VPN (Virtual Private Network), which is software that allows you to send websites a different IP address which is associated with another location – in this case, one inside Nevada.

On an episode of *The Orbit*, Daniel Negreanu voiced his contempt for the poker sites’ geographical restrictions and stated that he did not care if a player used a VPN to

participate in the game while outside of the appropriate place. The comment was made in the context of a discussion of poker regulation, and he preceded it by pointing out that the principal purpose of regulation is to assure that the game is fair for all players.

In that context, he is undoubtedly correct. Banning VPNs does not make the game fairer, and Negreanu is right that he needs no protection from players who are not located where they lead the site to believe they are located. Therefore, he concluded, poker sites should not waste time and energy ascertaining players’ locations and taking steps to disqualify those who break the rules.

I must say I have a particular grudge against WSOP.com for enforcing this rule. On a number of occasions, I was ejected from tournaments because WSOP.com could not ascertain my location even though I was located on the Las Vegas Strip! But section 3.7 makes clear that I am out of luck when this happens. It is one of the few sections that is in bold print, apparently to show that they really mean it:

3.7 UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL WE NOR ANY OF OUR AFFILIATES OR THIRD PARTY SERVICE PROVIDERS AND THEIR

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2021 bestbet Jacksonville Spring Series
\$2,500 No-Limit Hold’em Main Event



Jake Ferro
1,815,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 82.0%
After Flop: 93.0%
After Turn: 100.0%



Dustin Holladay
1,175,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 18.0%
After Flop: 7.0%
After Turn: 0%

PREFLOP

With eight players remaining and blinds of 20,000–40,000 with a big blind ante of 40,000, Brian Arbaugh raised to 80,000 from under the gun. Jake Ferro three-bet to 205,000 from the lojack, and Dustin Holladay called from the small blind. Arbaugh folded.



Holladay checked, and Ferro checked behind.



Holladay checked, and Ferro bet 160,000. Holladay check-raised to 325,000, and Ferro called.



Holladay bet 200,000, and Ferro raised to 400,000. Holladay called.

ANALYSIS

A couple of monster preflop holdings clash in this hand, with two big pocket pairs making flushes on the turn in a three-bet pot. The hand began with shorter-stacked Brian Arbaugh opening A-5 suited from under the gun for a min-raise of 80,000. Jake Ferro picked up pocket kings and made a smallish three bet, re-raising to 205,000. Dustin Holladay held pocket queens in the small blind and opted to just flat call, having seen a raise and a re-raise before the action got around to him. Arbaugh cut his losses and the two big pairs saw a A♣ 7♣ 3♣ flop. Both players had a large club in their hand for strong flush draws. Holladay checked and Ferro checked behind. The J♣ on the turn completed both players’ draws. Holladay checked his second-nut flush and Ferro made a smallish bet of 160,000 into a pot of 570,000 with the nuts. Holladay check-raised, essentially clicking it back by making it 325,000. “Could be finding out here, just raise-folding with the second nuts,” said Eric Steinbaugh, one of the commentators of the live stream of the final table action. Ferro called and the river brought the 10♣ to put a five-card flush on the board. Holladay now bet out 200,000 into the pot of over 1.2 million. Ferro min-raised with his K♣, knowing he could only lose to exactly 9♣ 8♣. Ferro is not very likely to be bluffing with a min-raise on the end, and is also not likely to raise for value with the bare 9♣ or 8♣ in this spot, which would make the next best flushes to Holladay’s with the jack and ten already on the board. While a queen-high flush is a strong holding in terms of absolute hand strength, it isn’t very likely to be beating what Ferro is representing in this instance. Holladay did end up making the call, though, and was left with just over six big blinds. He went on to finish eighth for \$22,876.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY [CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM](http://CardPlayer.com/poker-tools/odds-calculator/texas-holdem)

RESPECTIVE AFFILIATES BE RESPONSIBLE OR LIABLE IN ANY RESPECT FOR ANY LOSSES YOU MAY INCUR AS A RESULT OF YOUR LOCATION NOT BEING ABLE TO BE PROPERLY VERIFIED FOR ANY REASON. BY USING THE GAMBLING SERVICES, YOU UNDERSTAND AND AGREE THAT SUCH RESPONSIBILITY OR LIABILITY IS BORNE EXCLUSIVELY BY YOU.

Why is this such a big deal for Caesars, the owner of WSOP.com? Player protection is not the only reason for poker regulation, and sites have other reasons for enforcing this rule. The obvious reason is to comply with state laws that prohibit internet gambling. While we can certainly disagree with such a prohibition, we have to respect the right of each state to choose how much gambling it will allow.

It is both a strength and weakness of our federal system that each state may choose its own path with respect to gambling. We have come a long way from the (good old?) days when the only state in which gambling was legal was Nevada, and tribes were yet to take advantage of this aspect of their sovereignty. When a state prohibits gambling, the consequence of a violation usually falls on the organizer of the game, not the player. The theory seems to be that the players are rubes who need to be protected from the predators who would offer them a chance to gamble. This is not always the case, however. In Washington State, for example, it is a felony to play internet poker!

The consequences imposed by your state for engaging in prohibited internet poker are not much of a deterrent compared to the consequences imposed by the contract with the site on which you play. Section 15.2 of the WSOP.com Terms and Conditions states that “if You breach any of the terms and conditions of this Agreement

... Your winnings may be forfeited at the discretion of the Company and the Company may retain any positive balance then existing in Your account on account of any damages or other amounts owed by You to the Company pending investigation and/or the conclusion of any legal proceedings.”

Under similar provisions in its agreement with players, PokerStars reportedly recouped over \$1 million from the winner of the 2018 *WCOOP* main event for rules violations that may have involved the use of a VPN.

When a state allows gambling, it makes clear that a license to operate a gaming establishment is a privilege, not a right. This means that the operator's license can be fairly easily revoked, without all the due process attached to deprivation of a right. Operators must therefore be vigilant that they comply with the terms of the license. Failure to sufficiently monitor out-of-state participants using the site could be interpreted as an open invitation to play, which would violate the terms of the license. Thus, Caesars probably monitors the location of players not so much to protect other players, but to cover its own ass.

In the process, the monitoring may inconvenience players like Negreanu, who would welcome all players to the site, no matter where they reside, and it inconveniences players like me, whose computer leads Caesars to believe they are somewhere else even when they are in the middle of Las Vegas. But that is a situation we will have to live with until legal internet poker gains more adherents among the states. ♠



Scott J. Burnham is Professor Emeritus at Gonzaga University School of Law in Spokane, Washington. He can be reached at profburnham@yahoo.com.

WSOP SCHEDULE HYPE!

By Gavin Griffin

Full disclosure, I haven't been in a poker room in about 10 months. I haven't played poker at all in the last six months. Hell, I haven't played a poker tournament since the *World Series of Poker* back in 2019!

To be honest, the only things I've left my house for during this pandemic have been essential shopping and exercise. And yet, I somehow got excited about the recent announcement that there will be a live *WSOP* in September of this year. In fact, I'm even excited that it's still going to take place at The Rio! I don't understand these feelings, but maybe I can make some sense of them in this column.

I'm really not sure how big my appetite was for a *WSOP* last year, even if there was no COVID-19 and it went off as regularly scheduled. Tournaments mostly fill me with dread. I would probably have ended up scouring the schedule for a good stretch of pot-limit Omaha tournaments and headed out for them. PLO tournaments can be kind of boring, but at least I feel like there is still some value in them for me. No-limit hold'em is a whole different story. I feel my skill edge over the field is pretty slim

these days. I only play NLH when there is no PLO seat available for me, and I'm at the casino anyway.

They didn't even list all of the events in this press release! It's just the starting and ending dates and a couple of marquee events with specific dates attached. So far, there has been no mention of PLO or mixed games or anything else I'm interested in. But still, I'm excited to play.

I'll probably be even more socially awkward than usual since I've pretty much only been around my wife and kids for the last year, but most people probably won't notice since my social awkwardness mostly presents itself in avoiding people and not talking. It will be hard to remember how to navigate crowds of people without getting worried about someone getting too close to me, or how to avoid touching my face after touching the cards. I'm sure I'll be taking even more advantage of the available hand sanitizer and bringing my own water and snacks just to be sure.

Eventually, I'm certain I'll be used to being in crowds again, but that might take a while and I can't really foresee any significant way to find out before the *WSOP* starts.

The biggest gathering I might be at before then would be my local poker room, which has maybe a few hundred people in attendance at one time or, if I'm feeling adventurous and vaccinated, perhaps a Los Angeles Angels game with my family.

In terms of crowd density, I don't really go anywhere that compares to the *WSOP*. I haven't been to a concert in probably 10 years or more. I haven't been to a club or bar that packs in people in three years. In fact, I remember the last time I went to a super crowded bar so vividly as a bad experience that I have intentionally avoided places like that even before COVID. But still, I'm excited to play.

So, why am I even interested in a *WSOP* in 2021? I guess because it feels like some return to normalcy. I live in California where all people 16+ will be eligible for vaccination as of April 15. Many other states are on a similar timeline. Even if it takes three to four months for everyone to get the shot, most of the population will be vaccinated before the time frame of the events. This means that it's possible that the *WSOP* is going to feel somewhat normal to me if I end up going.

I used to go to the *WSOP* every year without fail and I used to think it would be crazy to suggest that I would even think about missing the main event. I looked forward to seeing the friends I have in the poker world and doing poker summer camp. This year it's in the fall, which is probably even better. Not having to walk outside on a break into a heat that feels like an oven will be a blessing. It might even be possible to go for a nice bike ride in the morning before playing poker tournaments without worrying that I might pass out from the heat!



Matt's tweet almost perfectly encapsulates my feelings on the subject. I haven't thought about playing poker much over the last year, and certainly haven't thought about playing tournaments. Yet here I am, just a few days after the *WSOP* teases a hint of a schedule, at a casino I've grown to despise, in crowds I can't imagine being a part of, and in a future that feels uncertain, and I'm ready to jump in. ♠



Gavin Griffin was the first poker player to capture a World Series of Poker, European Poker Tour and World Poker Tour title and has amassed nearly \$5 million in lifetime tournament winnings. Griffin is sponsored by HeroPoker.com. You can follow him on Twitter @NHGG

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2021 bestbet Jacksonville Spring Series
\$2,500 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Kyle Cartwright
2,950,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 72.0%
After Flop: 89.0%
After Turn: 5.0%



Stephen Strout
500,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 12.0%
After Flop: 3.0%
After Turn: 9.0%



Johnny Landreth
710,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 15.0%
After Flop: 8.0%
After Turn: 86.0%



PREFLOP

With seven players remaining and blinds of 25,000-50,000 with a big blind ante of 50,000, Kyle Cartwright raised to 100,000 from the button. Johnny Landreth called from the small blind, and Stephen Strout called from the big blind.



Landreth checked, Strout checked, and Cartwright checked behind.



Landreth bet 100,000, and Strout folded. Cartwright called.



Landreth bet 150,000, and Cartwright called.

ANALYSIS

The table folded around to chip leader Kyle Cartwright and he min-raised with pocket queens from the button. The players in the blinds were the two shortest stacks at the table. Johnny Landreth, the second shortest, made the call with pocket sevens. Stephen Strout was getting laid 6:1 on continuing, which was enough to call with his 9-8 offsuit. The ace-high flop didn't directly connect with any of the three players and the two blinds checked to Cartwright. He passed up the opportunity to continuation bet, and the turn brought the 7♣ to give Landreth a set and a huge lead in the hand. He wasted no time in firing right out, perhaps hoping that one of his two opponents had been pot-controlling with an ace. Landreth bet 100,000 into a pot of 350,000. Strout got out of the way and Cartwright called. The 10♣ on the river completed two possible gutshot-straight draws, but that was not enough of a worry to keep Landreth from making another value bet. He again went for a notably small sizing, firing 150,000 into 550,000 on the end. Perhaps he specifically put Cartwright on a weaker one-pair hand, and chose the smaller bet size in the hopes that it might entice Cartwright to call when he might not have done so for a bet of half the pot or larger. In the end, Cartwright did make the call, only to muck his pocket queens when shown a set. Landreth chipped up to over 1.2 million to move into fourth chip position, while Cartwright relinquished the chip lead to Jake Ferro.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-Holdem

A Memorable Loss To Grandpa

By Greg Raymer

No poker strategy lessons today. I just wanted to share a fun story that I was reminded of recently. Hope you enjoy it.

I was raised as a young boy in Michigan, and that is where most of my relatives on my father's side still live. Several years ago, I was visiting, and my dad flew in from Kansas City, where he was then living. Since I would be there as well, it seemed like a good time to visit family.

At the time, my grandpa was getting pretty old, and was somewhat frail. He was living with my Uncle Russ and Aunt Connie, who used to host a small \$5 buyin poker tournament about once per month with family and a neighbor or two. Since Dad and I were visiting, they decided to run one of those tournaments while we were there.

It started with nine players around the dining table, and eventually got down to just Grandpa and me, and I had a small lead as we began heads-up play. Having played with him for a couple of hours, I was confident I could "grind him down," since he played a very tight game.

It occurred to me that it would mean a lot to him to win this, especially beating me heads-up at the end. And winning this small family event was clearly unimportant to me, as the money involved of any consequence. However, as soon as the thought occurred to me, I immediately dismissed it. Even in this situation, I just didn't have it in me to lose on purpose. Maybe that speaks poorly of me, but I just couldn't dump intentionally. Even to Grandpa.

We play a few hands, and then I raised preflop and hit two pair on a flop of A-Q-7. I bet the flop, Grandpa raised, I re-raised

enough to put him all-in, and he called. Because he was so tight, I knew he had something, but I still figured that I had to be the favorite to win.

However, he had A-Q for a better two pair, and was actually the huge favorite. His hand held up, crippling my stack, and he busted me soon after, winning the tournament. You could clearly see how much it meant to him, and how happy and proud he was feeling.

I couldn't have asked for a better finish. The best part was I knew Grandpa could truly say he bested me that night. I imagine he did just that, to anybody who would listen. In my mind, I can hear him telling somebody, "You know, my grandson is the world champion of poker, but when he played with us here at home, I beat him!" I hope he got to say that many, many times before he passed a few years later.

If you have a great family poker story of your own, I would love to hear it. Please post it online, tagging me @FossilMan and @CardPlayerMedia on Twitter when you do. Thanks!

Have fun, and Play Smart! ♠



Greg Raymer is the 2004 WSOP world champion, winner of numerous major titles, and has more than \$7 million in earnings. He recently authored "FossilMan's Winning Tournament Strategies," available from D&B Publishing, Amazon, and other retailers. He is sponsored by Blue Shark Optics,

YouStake, and ShareMyPair. To contact Greg please tweet at him using @FossilMan or go to www.FossilManPoker.com.

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2021 bestbet Jacksonville Spring Series
\$2,500 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Johnny Landreth
1,210,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 44.0%
After Flop: 82.0%
After Turn: 93.0%



Brian Arbaugh
910,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 56.0%
After Flop: 18.0%
After Turn: 7.0%



PREFLOP

With six players remaining and blinds of 25,000-50,000 with a big blind ante of 50,000, Johnny Landreth raised to 125,000 from the hijack. Brian Arbaugh three-bet to 300,000 from the button, and Landreth called.



Landreth checked, and Arbaugh bet 175,000. Landreth called.



Landreth checked, and Arbaugh moved all-in for 435,000. Landreth called.



ANALYSIS

This hand sees 2015 *Mid-States Poker Tour* bestbet Jacksonville \$1,100 main event champion Brian Arbaugh back up his preflop three-bet with a double-barrel bluff that resulted in him moving all-in on the turn. Action got underway with Johnny Landreth opening to 2.5 big blinds with J-8 suited from the hijack. Arbaugh looked down at A-4 suited and elected to three-bet, making it six big blinds to go out of his stack of just over 18 big blinds. Landreth made the call for 175,000 more and the pot grew to 725,000 heading into the flop, which was already more than the 610,000 that Arbaugh had left in his stack. This fact left Arbaugh in a tough situation when he failed to connect in a meaningful way with the flop. Landreth flopped middle pair and checked from out of position. Arbaugh went for a continuation bet, but didn't have much room to maneuver due to how large the pot had grown in relation to his stack. He ended up sizing down, betting just 175,000 into the pot of 725,000. Landreth was being laid more than 5:1 on the call, which he quickly made. The turn paired the board and Landreth checked again. The pot now sat at 1,050,000, or more than twice the size of Arbaugh's remaining 435,000. Arbaugh had represented strength with his preflop three-bet and flop continuation bet, but continuing to bluff had a key drawback in that his opponent would be getting fantastic odds. Despite this downside, Arbaugh pulled the trigger and moved all-in. Landreth made a quick call, and Arbaugh was left rooting for an ace on the river. It failed to materialize, and he was sent to the rail in sixth place, earning \$37,941 for his latest deep run. Landreth went on to finish fourth for \$66,069, while Hal Rotholz ultimately emerged victorious with the title and the \$180,986 top prize.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM

FOR COMPLETE TOURNAMENT RESULTS AND LISTINGS, VISIT CARDPLAYER.COM

MAY	May 14-16	South Dakota State Poker Championship	Silverado Franklin ■ Deadwood, SD
JUNE	June 2-13	Palm Beach Summer Classic	Palm Beach Kennel Club ■ West Palm Beach, FL
	June 17-28	Card Player Poker Tour	bestbet Jacksonville ■ Jacksonville, FL
JULY	July 15-27	World Poker Tour Choctaw	Choctaw Casino Resort ■ Durant, OK

AO-Add On **B**-Bonus **CP**-Crazy Pineapple **H.O.R.S.E.**-Hold'em, Omaha Eight-or-Better, Razz, Seven-Card Stud, Seven-Card Stud Eight-or-Better **R.O.S.E.**-Razz, Omaha Eight-or-Better, Seven-Card Stud, Seven-Card Stud Eight-or-Better **KO**-Knock Out or Bounty **LH**-Limit Hold'em **MP**-Mexican Poker **NLH**-No-Limit Hold'em **O H/L**-Omaha Eight-or-Better **PLO**-Pot-Limit Omaha **RB**-Rebuy **SH/L**-Seven-Card Stud Eight-or-Better **SLH**-Spread-Limit Hold'em

ARIZONA

TALKING STICK RESORT - SCOTTSDALE**MONDAY-THURSDAY**

10:15 a.m. NLH, \$125

FRIDAY-SUNDAY

10:15 a.m. NLH, \$200

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$240 (\$6K Guarantee)

TUESDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$165 KO \$25 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$320 KO \$50

WEDNESDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH/PLO, \$240 (\$5K Guarantee)

THURSDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

SUNDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$360 (\$25K Guarantee)

CALIFORNIA

COMMERCE CASINO - COMMERCE**MONDAY-THURSDAY**

5:00 p.m. NLH, \$125 AO \$100

FRIDAY-SUNDAY

1:00 p.m. NLH, \$125 AO \$100

NEVADA

OCEAN'S ELEVEN - OCEANSIDE**DAILY**

10:00 a.m. NLH, \$75 AO \$5

SAHARA - LAS VEGAS**DAILY**

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$55 RB \$20 AO \$20 (\$500 Guarantee)

FRIDAY

1:00 p.m. H.O.R.S.E., \$105 (\$1K Guarantee)

SATURDAY

1:00 p.m. NLH, \$100 RB \$50 AO \$50 (\$3K Guarantee)

FLORIDA

BESTBET - JACKSONVILLE**MONDAY**

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$60

WEDNESDAY

12:00 p.m. NLH, \$60

FRIDAY

12:00 p.m. NLH, \$160

SUNDAY

12:00 p.m. NLH, \$160

VENETIAN HOTEL & CASINO - LAS VEGAS**MONDAY**

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 KO \$25 (\$2K Guarantee)

TUESDAY

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$200 KO \$50 (\$6K Guarantee)

WEDNESDAY

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$2K Guarantee)

THURSDAY

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$4K Guarantee)

FRIDAY

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$200 AO \$100 (\$20K Guarantee)

SATURDAY

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$340 (\$20K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$4K Guarantee)

SUNDAY

11:10 a.m. NLH, \$250 (\$12K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$4K Guarantee)

PALM BEACH KENNEL CLUB - W. PALM BEACH**MONDAY**

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$125 KO \$25

6:00 p.m. NLH, \$70

TUESDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$70

WEDNESDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$100

6:00 p.m. NLH, \$125 KO \$25

THURSDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$70

FRIDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$125

6:00 p.m. NLH, \$40

SATURDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$250 KO \$50

6:00 p.m. NLH, \$100

NORTH CAROLINA

MARYLAND

HARRAH'S - CHEROKEE**MONDAY-THURSDAY**

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$135

MGM NATIONAL HARBOR - OXON HILL**MONDAY**



ALL-TIME WORLD SERIES OF POKER EARNINGS LEADERBOARD

Rank	Player	WSOP Earnings
1st	Antonio Esfandiari	\$21,917,460
2nd	Daniel Negreanu	\$18,705,140
3rd	Dan Colman	\$17,413,780
4th	Phil Hellmuth	\$15,034,240
5th	Jonathan Duhamel	\$14,644,200
6th	Justin Bonomo	\$14,124,130
7th	Joe Cada	\$13,610,090
8th	Fedor Holz	\$13,002,460
9th	Elton Tsang	\$12,388,310
10th	Jamie Gold	\$12,198,920

The *World Series of Poker* is officially set to return to the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino for a live series of bracelet events this fall, with *WSOP Europe* and *WSOP Online* festivals also expected to take place in 2021. While the schedules for these series are not yet finalized, what is clear is that there will be a lot of official *WSOP* events taking place throughout the rest of the year. Millions upon millions in prize money are likely to be paid out, which could very well make an impact on the all-time *WSOP* earnings leaderboard.

The player currently at the top of this prestigious list is **Antonio Esfandiari**, who has cashed for more than \$21.9 million in *WSOP* events since making his first score in a bracelet event back in 2003. The three-time bracelet winner's largest payday at the series came when he won the first-ever \$1 million buy-in *Big One For One Drop* event back in 2012, outlasting a field of 48 total entries to win \$18,346,673.

Daniel Negreanu sits in second place with more than \$18.7 million accrued in *WSOP* events. The six-time bracelet winner finished runner-up in the 2014 \$1 million buy-in event for just shy of \$8.3 million to account for nearly half of his earnings. In addition to that huge payday, Negreanu has also recorded two other seven-figure scores at the series, including finishing runner-up in the 2019 \$100,000 buy-in high roller and winning the 2013 *WSOP APAC* main event.

Rounding out the top three on this leaderboard is the player who beat Negreanu heads-up for the 2014 *Big One For One Drop* title, **Dan Colman**. He earned \$15,306,668 of his \$17.4 million in overall *WSOP* earnings with that one victory after outlasting an elite field of 42 entries. He is joined on the list by other high rollers Justin Bonomo, Fedor Holz, and Elton Tsang. The rest of the top 10 is led by all-time bracelet leader Phil Hellmuth, as well as a number of other players who have also won the main event, including Jonathan Duhamel, Joe Cada, and Jamie Gold.



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