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ALL GAS, NO BRAKES: 'TEXAS' MIKE IS ON A MISSION

MONCEK WOWS VIEWERS WHILE STACKING TROPHIES

PLUS

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SAM LASKOWITZ ON
BEATING HIGH ROLLERS**

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TOP 40 ELIGIBLE PLAYERS ON PGT LEADERBOARD
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NEWS FROM THE GAMBLING WORLD

DOUG POLK ADDS TWO MORE POKER INFLUENCERS TO CARD CLUB OWNERSHIP

By Sean Chaffin



Two new investors have come on board at Texas's Lodge Card Club.

The company's owners already included high-stakes poker pro and YouTuber Doug Polk, as well as top poker vloggers Brad Owen and Andrew Neeme.

Polk dipped in the poker influencer well once again in March, announcing in a YouTube video that Ethan 'Rampage' Yau and high-stakes cash game stream regular Nikhil 'Airball' Arcot have also joined the team.

The group operates a Lodge poker room in Round Rock, just north of Austin, and added a San Antonio club last year after acquiring the Rounders Card Club in May. The company also hosts the *Lodge Live*, which streams cash games and tournaments four days a week.

Polk was pleased to see Yau and Arcot come on board.

"I think these two men have a playing style that will fit in nicely with the Lodge Card Club ownership group," Polk said. "However you want to chop it up, these are two of the largest personalities in poker today and they certainly make things more entertaining. In fact, whenever they swing by the channel and play in our show, viewership does tend to spike pretty significantly."

Polk said both players understand how to create successful poker content, and that appears to be a major factor in adding them to the Lodge ownership group.

Yau has more than 300,000 subscribers on YouTube, and both players are significant draws to live cash game streams.

"They understand that poker is a game where you need to generate interest in the game itself in order for viewers to enjoy their experience and feel compelled to root for their heroes or hope that their villain loses," Polk said.

Polk didn't disclose any financial details of the investments.

"I am incredibly proud of what we've built over the last few years," Polk said. "Obviously we bought into this club a few years ago and we've expanded to two clubs. We're going to continue to look for opportunities to grow and we're going to keep trying to do cool stuff in poker. And I think that's something that the poker industry needs."

However, the investments come as the legality of Texas poker clubs might be at an inflection point. A pair of bills are floating through the legislature. One would legalize the social club model used in the Lone Star State, while the other would make them illegal.

Beyond the new investors, the Lodge recently made news when players at the property cashed in on a \$290,000 bad beat jackpot, the largest in Texas history. ♠

FLORIDA POKER TOURNAMENT ENDS IN 15-WAY CHOP

By Jeff McMillan

“Anyone want to chop it up?”

It’s the question you often hear in the late stages of small daily poker tournaments. When it’s said with more than one table left, it’s usually a tongue in cheek joke that gets a few laughs around the room.

But that was not the case in March at bestbet St. Augustine when the final 15 players of a \$300 buy-in, 340-entry tournament actually decided to stop play and chop up the remaining prize pool.

Despite nearly filling two tables, the remaining players decided to equally divvy up the cash. As a result, each player received \$4,460 for their efforts, ensuring all of them a payday of nearly 15 times the buy in.

David Hughes took credit for the win. The Florida native is infamous in the Sunshine State for entering, then winning a \$250 ladies event at Hard Rock Hollywood in May of 2023.

Chops with this many players are very rare. While you may sometimes see a player rallying others to pay the bubble, big chops won’t usually be discussed until the final table where everyone can communicate directly.

However, it’s not a completely unprecedented move. Last year, the final 15 players in a Wynn Poker ladies event also worked out a chop.



But with a \$600 buy-in and 209 entries, the buy-in was larger and field size smaller. Nor was it an equal chop. In that event, everyone walked away with at least \$4,032, but Lisa Childers got credit for the win, taking home \$9,868 and the trophy.

Just a few months before the deal at Wynn, an online tournament saw a chop that gave the winner more than what he would’ve won if they played it out without a deal.

In a tournament on 888poker, the final two players were scheduled to get \$8,766 and \$6,406. But Ukraine’s “yriy3” and Brazil’s “andrey59” decided to make first-place worth \$2,000 more and second worth \$2,000 less. The Ukrainian came out on top of the heads-up battle and earned the larger payday. ♠

YOUTUBER KEVIN MARTIN COMPLETES ROYAL FLUSH CHALLENGE

By Jeff McMillan

The odds of achieving a royal flush are 1 in 30,940. In other words, it’s incredibly rare. Most players will only see a handful in their life.

Insert Kevin Martin, the Canadian poker pro and content creator who decided to take those odds head on. Martin began an ambitious quest and giveaway on his YouTube channel to find the poker equivalent of the Lochness Monster in early December.

Every day, Martin would pick a suited Broadway hand and run out boards trying to make a royal flush. On day 1, Martin would run one board. On day 2, he would run two boards. Martin would deal three boards on the third day, and so on and so on.

Additionally, Martin generated a prize pool to give away. When he started the challenge, he had 117,000 subscribers on YouTube. For each day the challenge lasted, he would add \$117 into the pot. He also increased the amount donated to the pot for every 1,000 subscribers he added.

It took him more than three months, but on the 99th day, the GGPoker ambassador completed the challenge. He took A♦ K♦ and found a flop that included the J♦ 10♦. The turn was a brick, but the Q♦ came on the river, giving him the royal and ending the challenge.

His plan was to pick 20 subscribers to play poker or another luck-based game for the \$11,959 pot.

It took Martin 4,908 hands to reach the holy grail of poker



hands. Considering the odds of making a royal, Martin was incredibly lucky to finish the challenge on day 99 (even if he did help his odds significantly by starting with suited Broadway cards every time.)

Martin is no stranger to streaming poker stunts. Last year, the former Big Brother Canada contestant turned his life into a “real life *Truman Show*,” streaming his life 24/7 while he tried unsuccessfully to run an empty online poker account to \$10,000.

The online poker pro also has \$500,000 in live tournament earnings, including five wins in Calgary. ♠

WSOP TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS RETURNS TO COMMERCE CASINO

By Steve Schult

For the second consecutive year, the *World Series of Poker Circuit* Tournament of Champions is heading to California.

The *WSOP* announced that the tournament would be held at the Commerce Casino in Los Angeles from May 15-17.

The freeroll event runs in the middle of the *WSOP Circuit* stop at the Commerce. It's sandwiched between an \$1,100 no-limit hold'em tournament and the start of the \$1,700 no-limit hold'em main event.

Unlike the other events scheduled for the series, only bracelet and ring winners from the 2024-2025 *WSOP* season are eligible to play. Furthermore, the winner will receive the year's first *WSOP* bracelet.

"We are happy to return to The Commerce Casino & Hotel for the *WSOP* Tournament of Champions and our 15th consecutive \$1,000,000 freeroll," said *WSOP* CEO Ty Stewart in a statement. "With a \$2 million guaranteed Circuit main event, *WSOP* satellites and nonstop action at the world's biggest poker room, this is like the opening ceremonies for the 2025 *WSOP*."

Last year, Dong Meng bested a 559-player field to win a bracelet and \$200,000.

The Tournament of Champions was originally dubbed the National Championship at its inception in 2011. As the tour added more international stops, the event was eventually



rebranded to the Global Casino Championship.

It was a freeroll for players who qualified on the *WSOP Circuit* by either winning the stop's main event, the casino champion title, or finished in the top 50 of the season's point system.

For most of its history, the tournament was either held as part of the *WSOP* in Las Vegas or at the start of the new Circuit season at Harrah's Cherokee in North Carolina.

"The Commerce is thrilled to be welcoming back the *WSOP Circuit* Finals, as well as the *TOC*, both of which are such prestigious events," said Commerce tournament director Cavin Quintanilla. "It takes a dedicated team to deliver legendary customer service and I am excited and honored to have the opportunity to collaborate with these two iconic brands. We will strive to uphold the integrity of the game, show everyone a great time and elevate each other's legacy." ♠



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ALL GAS, NO BRAKES: 'TEXAS' MIKE IS ON A MISSION

Moncek Wows Viewers While Stacking Trophies

By Julio Rodriguez



It was the talk of the summer of 2022. The guy who won the \$1,500 limit hold'em event along with a cool \$145,000 had never played limit hold'em before. He then took that cash and bought himself into the \$100,000 event, despite never having played a high roller before, and finished fifth for \$420,000.

Who was this unknown, a player who went by 'Texas' Mike?

"I'm a parlay guy, so I figured I'd go for it, go big."

A fitting explanation for a man with "all gas, no brakes" quoted on his Twitter profile.

In the three years since his debut to the high-stakes world, Moncek has turned heads with his fearless approach and racked up an impressive collection of bracelets, rings, and trophies, as well as more than \$5.2 million in cashes, and a growing highlight reel of viral livestreamed poker hands.

But appreciate Moncek while you can, because it turns out the poker world is only borrowing him for a little while.

Poker Success Follows Tragedy And Heartache

Despite the 'Texas' nickname, which comes from his time at the University of Texas, Moncek was actually born

and raised in Chicago, which is where he also earned his MBA from Loyola University. You can always spot him at the table wearing a burnt orange UT hat to rep his alma mater, however, as evidenced by all of his photos in this article.

At just 32 years old, Moncek wasn't even a teen when the poker boom hit, but it still had a major impact on him.

"Poker started with Moneymaker, just like everybody else," Moncek recalled. "I was 11, and I would watch with my dad. That's one of the things we bonded over, watching poker on *ESPN*. He wasn't really a poker player before that, but the next year he went and played in the main event. He ended up losing with kings to Daniel Alaei's aces, and I don't think he ever played it again."

While Mike Sr. might not have enjoyed his unceremonious \$10,000 donation to the sharks in Vegas, the younger Mike couldn't wait to get in the game. He was in graduate school when he got his chance, playing cards on the weekends in rooms in the greater Chicago area.

There were back-to-back final tables at the *Chicago Poker Classic*, and then in February of 2019 he took down the \$400 no-limit event at the *WSOP Circuit* stop in



Milwaukee, earning the first of his four rings.

Then, Moncek's world was completely turned upside down, and not because of a global pandemic.

"My dad was pretty excited about my success," he said. "I was playing an event at the Horseshoe (in Hammond, near Chicago) and he asked me for an update. I was actually chip leader on day 1, so I told him, and he sent back a thumbs up."

"On dinner break, I got a call and learned that he had a heart attack while driving and crashed. I left immediately, just leaving the chips behind, but my dad was gone before I got to the hospital. He was only 53."

"My mom was in the car as well. We almost lost her, but we got very lucky. His foot was pressed against the gas pedal and he was unconscious at the wheel. The car was still accelerating but stopped after hitting a construction trailer on the side of the road at around 40 miles per hour. She barely survived and was in the hospital for a few weeks. We had to keep pushing the funeral service back."

Moncek and his father were very close, with he and his brother being groomed to take over the family business, a successful wholesaler for packaging products. With his passing, however, the company was put up for sale.

"It was really tough," Moncek admitted. "I didn't want to sell it, but it was his wish that the family, my mother and siblings, be set and taken care of if something happened to him. I was excited about the company and learning more so my brother and I could take it over, but we didn't have that option. Of course, you couldn't really sell a company during COVID, so we did keep it going for a few years."

"I want to get back into that business, but we had to sign a five-year non-compete. So, during the non-compete, and on days when I feel okay, I've just been playing poker. The last message I got from my dad was a thumbs up about a

tournament update, which I kind of took as a sign. It was telling me to keep pursuing poker."

One In The Chamber

When you watch him play, you might say Moncek is "all heart," never afraid to make the gutsy play. It's an apt description, given his cardiomyopathy diagnosis.

"My heart is four times too big," he explained. "In the last two years, I found out that I have heart failure. I have a blood clot in my heart, which is why I'm now on blood thinners. This summer they said the bottom of my heart is dead because I have a trapped artery."

"There's one surgery, a full on, open-heart surgery, that they said had a 10% chance of making me feel better. The other option is a heart transplant, which I'm eligible for now, but the surgeon said he would rather do the 10% surgery than a transplant. That shows you just how much they don't like to do transplants. Kind of, 'Get what you can out of this heart, first.'"

A family tragedy, serious health concerns, and a complete upheaval of his professional life have given Moncek a *Carpe Diem* outlook on life.

"When your dad dies at 53 and you have your own health problems, there's definitely a bit of a YOLO (you only live once) mentality."

It's that approach that got Moncek noticed in the first place, putting up almost all of his bracelet-earning winnings at the *WSOP* to enter a \$100,000 buy-in high roller.

"I was going to leave town after a few days, but then I won the first tournament I played. It felt like a freeroll. I'm a parlay guy, so I figured I'd go for it, go big. Plus, it was a small field, so a good shot at another bracelet. I wanted to win Player of the Year, and that's now my goal every summer."

He closed out 2022 with a fourth *WSOP Circuit* ring, and then the next summer he returned to Las Vegas and



took down the \$5,000 no-limit hold'em/pot-limit Omaha event for his second bracelet and \$535,000. Moncek also finished third in the \$10,000 razz event and in 2023 took third in the \$25,000 H.O.R.S.E. event.

After two runner-up showings at the *Poker Masters*, Moncek picked up his biggest score with a min-cash in the \$500,000 *Triton Million Invitational* in the Bahamas for \$1,200,000.

In February, Moncek put together a run of first, second, and third in the *PokerGO Cup*, narrowly missing out on player of the series honors to a historic run by Joey Weissman. Then a month later, he was a few unfortunate runouts away from taking down the inaugural *Super High Roller Bowl Mixed Games* event, settling for a runner-up and \$725,000.

But despite his very quick rise in the high roller world, Moncek remains very humble about his accomplishments.

"Sometimes with success, I feel like I'm just getting lucky because I know all these guys are better than me, especially in the high roller scene and at the PokerGO studio," he admitted. "These guys are all pros, I'm just a recreational player trying to compete. They're studied and know what to do in almost every situation, but I'm problem solving the entire time on the spot. I know how much I'm guessing, and I know they're not."

"But that's also the fun of it, and why it appeals to me. I could go study solvers, but that wouldn't be fun. I like problem solving, and being a little unorthodox is kind of exciting and can throw everything else off at the table. Luckily there is a lot of luck and variance in poker, so I've been able to win sometimes, but I know how much better all these guys are."

While he may not be running solvers and consulting charts in his time off, Moncek is clearly a quick study and is often able to find the right play using his instincts and well-timed aggression.

"I've gotten better by just learning from what other people are doing around me. That's why PokerGO is so great, because you can just see what all the best players are doing. And if you make a mistake you can watch it and avoid it in the future. You can even ask friends, 'Hey, what did I do

wrong in this hand?'"

"That being said, if you keep playing high rollers, maybe it's a little irresponsible to not figure out how to play poker at some point."

Going Viral

Moncek isn't afraid to put up big money outside of tournaments, either, bringing seven figures to the Hustler Casino Live *Million Dollar Cash Game*. It was there that he made headlines for a massive bluff, somehow pushing Charlie Hook off of 8♣ 7♣ on a board reading A♠ 5♥ 4♣ 6♠ A♥ holding nothing but 10♥ 2♠.

"Once I saw I had 'the Doyle,' I wasn't going to dog it. I thought, 'This is going to look so stupid if it doesn't work. But if it does work, then there's nothing cooler.' I get a rush out of it."

The week wouldn't end well, with Moncek losing a \$2.2 million coinflip with pocket tens against A♠ Q♣ to fellow high-stakes sicko Alan Keating.

"I was already down a lot for the day, playing two horrible hands against Brandon Steven. Then I had a hand against Keating with a straight against his flush. I wasn't happy with how I was playing, and I wasn't feeling well. And then we got to that hand, which ended up being a flip because he is sick enough to call it off with A-Q suited. His call is sicker than my jam. I'm not supposed to jam, but his call is even crazier," he explained. "I appreciated the ace on the flop rather than the river."

How did he shrug off losing one of the biggest pots in poker history? By flying to Vegas and jumping into a tournament the next day.

"To be flipping was fair. If I get it in good and happen to lose, oh well, good game. But if I messed something up or could have done something differently, that's what bothers me."

When the cameras are on, Moncek feels an obligation to be entertaining to those watching at home, often playing the vast majority of the hands he is dealt. At one session at the Lodge in Texas, he had a VPIP (voluntarily put money into pot) of nearly 90%.

A man with a light beard and mustache is wearing an orange baseball cap with a white 'T' and a Nike swoosh. He is wearing a black t-shirt and is sitting at a poker table. His hands are resting on the table, and he is looking down with a serious expression. In the background, there are blue lights and a water bottle. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“People are taking time out of their busy lives to watch other people play poker. I think we should try and make it fun. That’s what I try to do on streams. It should be exciting. You have to make moves.”

“People are taking time out of their busy lives to watch other people play poker. I think we should try and make it fun,” he said. “That’s what I try to do on streams. I don’t want to be a nit. I mean, I’m not a nit when the cameras are off, either, but if people are literally watching others play poker, it should be exciting. You have to make moves.”

“Granted, it can get very expensive if you’re making moves in a million-dollar game.”

Moncek most recently went viral for a 2-7 single draw lowball hand he played at the final table of the *Super High Roller Bowl*, picking off a bluff from Yuri Dzivielevski with a pair of fours. Dzivielevski had been making a big snow play with two pair, and Moncek’s unlikely call earned him a lot of respect from the poker community.

“I know Yuri is a good player capable of snowing with the right hands, and that he wasn’t afraid to go for it. I was hoping he had a snow and not a seven or eight right off the bat. Once he jammed river it just felt very polarized and it seemed like as good of an opportunity to knock out a far superior opponent as I was going to get.”

But would he have made the call if the cameras weren’t rolling?

“Playing on the live stream didn’t change my play at the final table, but for that particular hand the hero call aspect of it definitely appealed to me. I was risking looking like an idiot, but if I called correctly it could be a legendary call. Definitely high risk-high reward, but luckily it worked out.”

The Beat Goes On

Did Moncek get his fearlessness from his diagnosis, or was it always there?

“I think it was always there. My family was always very

competitive, even with board games. A game of *Monopoly* or *Risk* at our house could get more intense than some of these \$100,000 high rollers.”

Still, just being at the table does pose some real-life risk for Moncek, given the heart-pounding excitement that comes with huge bluffs and seven-figure flips.

“Sometimes I start to feel bad, but I have a big stack. So, what do I do? I can’t exactly leave. So, tournaments can be a little risky. My blood flow will slow down and my hands will get cold. I get chest pains. I’m worried about having a heart attack at the table, especially when I’m playing on a stream. It’s not fun feeling sick in public, let alone on camera.”

“But while stress probably doesn’t help, when I’m playing and feeling okay, I’m not thinking about my heart. It’s nice to be able to take my mind off it for a while.”

The *WSOP* has 100 bracelet events scheduled for the summer, and Moncek estimates he will play in about 85 of them as he chases the POY award.

“That could be a little low,” he added. “In the small ones I’ll be trying to build a stack really quick, sometimes even going all in blind towards the end of re-entry. I’m playing every event, low to high, no-limit to mixed, just trying to maximize my chances at a bracelet.”

There are about two years left on Moncek’s non-compete clause, and depending on his health and other business opportunities, he plans on making the most of his time in the poker world.

“I’m trying to get as much fulfillment out of poker as I can. That’s why I’m playing everything, whether it’s the high rollers or \$1-\$3. I don’t care what the stakes are, as long as it’s something competitive and the people are fun.” ♠

Top Tournament Scores

Date	Buy-In	Event	Finish	Payout
Dec. 2024	\$500,000	WSOP Paradise Triton Million Invitational	9th	\$1,200,000
March 2025	\$100,000	Super High Roller Bowl Mixed Games	2nd	\$725,000
June 2023	\$5,000	WSOP No-Limit Hold'em/Pot-Limit Omaha	1st	\$534,499
June 2022	\$100,000	WSOP No-Limit Hold'em High Roller	5th	\$420,944
July 2024	\$25,000	WSOP H.O.R.S.E. High Roller	3rd	\$336,442
Sept. 2024	\$15,000	Poker Masters No-Limit Hold'em	2nd	\$216,600
Feb. 2025	\$5,000	PokerGO Cup No-Limit Hold'em	1st	\$185,850
Feb. 2025	\$10,000	PokerGO Cup No-Limit Hold'em	2nd	\$182,900
Dec. 2023	\$25,000	WSOP Paradise Pot-Limit Omaha High Roller	6th	\$172,300
Sept. 2024	\$10,000	Poker Masters No-Limit Hold'em	2nd	\$165,000
June 2022	\$1,500	WSOP Limit Hold'em	1st	\$145,856
June 2023	\$10,000	WSOP Razz	3rd	\$133,177
Feb. 2025	\$10,000	PokerGO Cup No-Limit Hold'em	3rd	\$115,000



OH BABY! SAM LASKOWITZ MAKES HIS MARK ON THE HIGH ROLLER SCENE

Former Attorney Talks About His Colossal Boost Into The Poker World

By Sean Chaffin



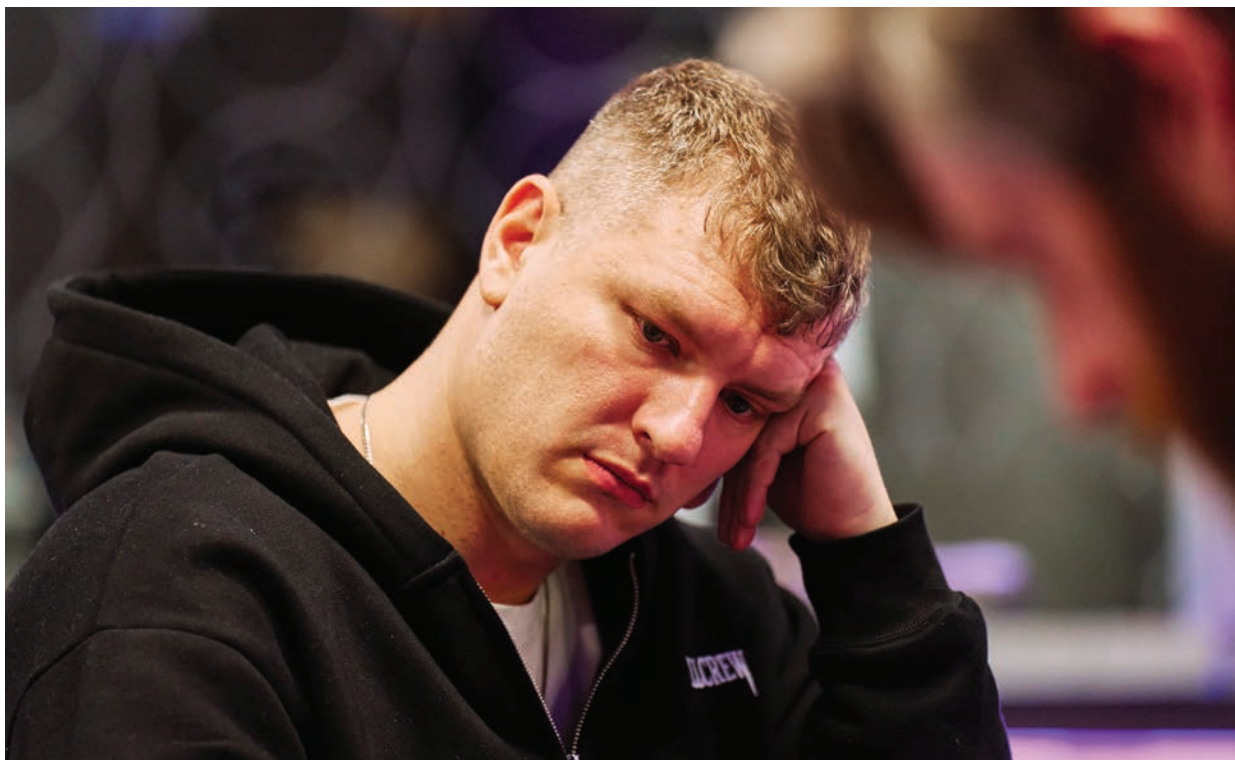
Most poker players would envy the spot Sam Laskowitz found himself in. He sat inside the PokerGO Studio in February as the chip leader in a \$15,000 *PokerGO Cup* event. The former lawyer from Long Island, New York had already notched three top-10 finishes in the series, and with a win could put himself in contention for player of the series honors.

Instead, the 32-year-old found himself abruptly rushing towards the exit. Although he still had chips on the table, a major life event had forced his hand.

“My girlfriend was pregnant and the due date was sometime during the *PokerGO Cup*,” he recalled. “We didn’t know when it was going to be exactly, obviously. I was playing every tournament, just kind of waiting for that call. And then finally, we were on stream and she texted me that her water broke. I was actually chip leader with like 21 people left or something. It just progressed super fast. By 7:30 we were all ready to push the baby out.”

The story had a positive ending all the way around. His

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new son was healthy, as was his son's mother, fellow poker pro Melissa Schubert. And while he didn't get to finish the tournament in the PokerGO Studio, Laskowitz still managed to finish eighth for \$51,600 while simply getting his stack blinded off.

He'd have to wait about a month before he found the winner's circle again, earning a *WSOP Circuit* ring at Horseshoe in March (pg. 50), but heading to the hospital instead was certainly worth missing out on the potential \$350,000 first-place prize.

"It's actually been really nice to have a girlfriend or a partner who understands poker life a little bit," he said of Schubert.

The couple met through mutual friends in Las Vegas.

"We knew there was a possibility he would have to blind out of something if I went into labor during the series," Schubert said. "I was five days late, so we were expecting it any day. I started labor the night of that tournament when he had a lot of chips. As a first-time mom, I expected a long labor and no rush, but I progressed really quickly and it was all pretty hectic. He made it though! Early on, Sam and I knew we had a shared vision of family and we're blessed to have started. Our son Dean is already no stranger to poker. The day after he was born, he spent his afternoon at the hospital watching the final table on his dad's chest."

Laskowitz's life has certainly been on the upswing since leaving his job as a corporate attorney. The new career began in 2022, when he played in his first *World Series of Poker* event. It was a long shot. The \$400 Colossus drew a massive field of 13,565 runners, but Laskowitz managed to navigate his way to heads-up play, settling for second place and a \$256,170 payout.

With his new bankroll secured, Laskowitz ditched filing legal briefs for riffling poker chips and has since racked up \$3.3 million in tournament winnings. He

recently spoke with *Card Player* about his unique entry into the game, playing with the high rollers, living in Las Vegas, and more.

First-Bullet Fortune

Laskowitz took up poker as a hobby at an early age back in New York. He and his father played at the house and the Moneymaker boom only ramped up his interest. He was into sports and played a lot of basketball, making good use of his 6-foot, 5-inch frame.

Always very competitive, Laskowitz has also been a little bit of a gambler.

"I've never been a degenerate gambler," he says. "I'm not into sports betting or things like that, but I'm always ready to put my money where my mouth is if I believe in myself."

After high school, Laskowitz attended the University of Delaware to study law, eventually working in New York City for one of the big four accounting firms. But that 2022 trip to Las Vegas would eventually change his entire life.

"One of my friends convinced me to come out to Vegas for the *WSOP*," he recalled. "I played my first serious poker event and I ended up coming in second. Then I left my job to try and pursue this professionally."

"It was a surreal experience. It was my very first live bullet in a tournament. It was pretty fast because it's over in three or four days, but it was crazy just being on the livestream for the very first time. I always thought I could probably be a professional poker player and I liked the game a lot. It was something I wanted to do, and that was the big push I needed."

As someone fairly new to the major tournament competition, Laskowitz says he was surprisingly calm for much of the action, which helped him in the long run. While the six-figure finish added fuel to his new poker life, taking second was a major disappointment at the time.



"It's so funny, but I swear, I [never got above] my resting heart rate," he said. "I was very, very prepared for the moment somehow. I've had big spots since then where I have felt nerves. I would say I've felt the nerves on many occasions. But that one, it just kind of felt like a destiny type of thing."

"It was really weird because I was actually really sad [after losing]," he admitted. "I really wanted it. I was a card away from winning the bracelet. We got it all in heads up. I lost the flip for the bracelet (his pocket threes fell to A-Q when eventual winner Paul Hizer rivered a Broadway straight) and the remainder of the heads-up. So afterward, I remember kind of just sitting there and watching them celebrate. It was a bittersweet feeling."

New Full-Time Job

So far, playing full time has been a highly profitable decision. Along with the big runner-up, Laskowitz grabbed a win six months later in a \$2,200 mystery bounty event at Borgata for \$146,609. He also finished

eighth in the championship event for another \$144,006.

In 2023, Laskowitz transitioned to playing more events in the PokerGO Studio, chalking up a few final table appearances at the *Poker Masters* and *PGT Sprint* series. He also finished runner-up in a \$1,500 mystery bounty event at the Wynn for \$133,820 and closed his year with a win at the *North American Poker Tour* at Resorts World for a score of \$180,850.

In 2024, Laskowitz turned up the heat on the high roller circuit, winning event no. 3 of the PGT Last Chance series for \$205,000 while adding two more final tables for another \$102,200. He then picked up two more final tables at the *PGT Kickoff* series a couple weeks later for a combined \$80,950 and another two in April when the *U.S. Poker Open* was running for \$315,310. Even more final tables followed up and down the Strip, including a \$250,000 score at the *Wynn Summer Classic*.

So far in 2025, he has already made 10 final tables, including his most recent *WSOP Circuit* win and runner-up finish for a total of \$100,152, which Schubert credited on Twitter to some baby run good.

Laskowitz now sees that first runner-up finish for what it was, a major windfall to springboard to a full-time poker career.

"I feel like it's a pretty common story in poker," he said. "A lot of the guys that have had staying power ended up having one big score or a lot of success early on. So (a major win) really does help and keep you in the game."

After formerly working in corporate taxes, mergers, and acquisitions, poker has been a welcome change. High-octane legal work can mean long hours and major responsibility. High salaries can come with demanding workloads and a highly-competitive environment. He now spends those same long hours betting and bluffing. How do his two jobs compare?

"They're both pretty stressful in their own ways," he said. "There are a lot more similarities than it would probably appear. I would say this one's a little bit better on the

**“I’VE NEVER BEEN A
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BELIEVE IN MYSELF.”**





time flexibility.”

Time flexibility is very important given his new family. He and Schubert plan to get married in the future.

“It’s nice,” Schubert admitted. “I’ve definitely taken a step back from poker since I got pregnant but I think being in the same industry and knowing the same people adds to our relationship. I’m able to empathize better knowing the game and lifestyle.”

“Sam is hardworking, focused, and has an unrelenting belief in himself,” she added. “He’s always looking to learn and that’s why he’s been able to improve so quickly. In life, poker, and love - he knows what he wants and he’s good at getting it!”

Looking Ahead

Poker has not only brought about a change in career, but also to his lifestyle overall. Laskowitz enjoys the weather more in Nevada and finds his new life more peaceful. His routine includes playing as many of the higher-stakes tournaments in Las Vegas as he can get into, but when not at the table, studying occupies much of his time – including working with solvers and reviewing hands and footage. His good friends in the game include Nick Seward, Landon Tice, David Coleman, and Nick

Schulman.

He doesn’t have any hard goals at the moment, just to improve and get better in high-stakes events. Winning a *WSOP* bracelet is on his bucket list after getting so close and he wants to possibly play in some *Triton Poker* series in the coming years. But he particularly enjoys battling it out in the PokerGO studio.

“I can’t imagine there’s anywhere else that’s better to play,” he said. “They treat you really nice. The structures are amazing. It’s my favorite place to play and it’s not close. I’ve done well there. It’s going well. The competition is tough, but it’s not as intimidating as it sounds.”

With poker as his new 9-to-5, not being a flash in the pan is one of Laskowitz’s major goals. He aims for real consistency and doesn’t want to be remembered in poker as a guy who just went on a massive heater or grabbed a big finish in his first-ever tournament. That means plenty of work left to do on and off the felt.

“When I’m not playing poker, I’m studying poker. If I’m not studying poker, I’m watching poker,” he says. “I’m pretty obsessed and I want to get good at this. This is my hobby, my passion, my career – it’s everything right now.” ♠

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DARREN ELIAS ON BUILDING MOMENTUM IN TOURNAMENTS

World Poker Tour End Boss Featured On Table 1 Podcast

By Art Parmann and Justin Young



When it comes to the *World Poker Tour*, Darren Elias is king – with four titles, 13 final table appearances, and 47 cashes overall. The only *WPT* category he doesn't lead in is total earnings, although he has won plenty, with \$4.6 million of his career \$13.9 million in cashes coming on the tour. (pg. 43)

His path to the top of the leaderboard began in 2014 with a win at the *WPT Borgata Poker Open* for \$843,744. Then he captured his second title a month later at the *WPT Caribbean* in St. Maarten for \$127,680.

In 2017, Elias won the *WPT Fallsview Poker Classic* in Canada for \$335,436 and his third title. He added the record-breaking fourth in 2018 by winning the *WPT Bobby Baldwin Classic* at Aria in Las Vegas for another \$387,580.

He also came close to a fifth title in 2022, finishing runner-up in the *WPT Hard Rock Poker Showdown* for \$660,000. Beyond the victories, this

BetMGM Poker ambassador also has five third-place finishes on the tour along with a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, and a seventh.

The New Jersey resident was a recent guest on the *Table 1 Podcast* in a broad conversation that included not only his success on the *WPT*, but also a discussion about his phobia of birds, growing up as the son of a college football coach, and a crazy prop bet that involved a bit of drinking.

Check out some of the highlights below. You can also watch or listen to the entire episode on YouTube, Spotify, Apple, or any podcast app.

Darren Elias: I have a fear of birds. I made a bet with Chewy (Andrew Lichtenberger) in a tournament when there were 50 left and he was chip leader. He said, 'If I win this tournament, you have to come meet my pet birds at the house.'

I went to his house. Fucking frightening – he's got doves flying around.

Justin Young: I'm not scared of birds, but that is kind of creepy.

Art Parmann: Why are you scared of birds?

Darren Elias: They're legit dinosaurs. Have you ever seen a picture of what they know a raptor looked like? It had feathers.

Art Parmann: Just like a chicken.

Darren Elias: A giant, scary chicken.



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Art Parmann: What's funny is that my daughter actually told me recently that we might have it completely wrong the way that the dinosaurs looked. My kids are dinosaur nerds. (Scientists) used the same technology on some hipopotamus bones. Just like to see (if the technology worked). They're like, 'Let's take our animals and see if we got it right, how they looked.' They mapped it out and it looked like a fucking freakish dog with really tight skin. So, dinosaurs might have looked completely different.

Elias also talked about what it's like to grow up with a father as an SEC football coach.

Darren Elias: My dad was a college football coach, so I lived almost like a military family life. When you're a football coach, if you're doing well and you win, you go get a better job. We were at Vanderbilt and then we went to LSU because he was doing well. And then they lost, he got fired, and we went to a worse school. You're always on the move, so I moved every three or four years my whole childhood.

He was linebackers coach and then recruiting coordinator, but usually assistant head coach. He would visit with kids (as a recruiter). Obviously, it's different now, with the money. But

back then, it was just trying to get kids to come to school.

Justin Young: Who was the biggest superstar that he got to recruit?

Darren Elias: Probably Kevin Faulk (former LSU running back who won three Super Bowls with the New England Patriots).

I remember when I was probably eight or nine, the most exciting part of the year would be the bowl games. If we got to go to a bowl game, after Christmas we would go stay somewhere for a week and they would turn the hotel arcade on free mode. They'd bring in soda dispensers, and all the kids of the coaches would just be in there. We'd play pinball for six hours and gas Dr. Peppers, it was awesome.

I wasn't there so much for football, but I remember playing Tecmo Super Bowl with Kevin Faulk. He'd be knocking on the door to play against the kids.

The conversation later moved on to discussing his success on the WPT, including winning back-to-back titles.

Art Parmann: Let's go back a little bit. What was your breakout WPT win?

Darren Elias: It was 2014 at the Borgata, the \$3,500 event which got

about 1,300 runners. I think first was \$840,000 or something. I had made a couple of final tables where I got like third and fifth, but I [finally broke through]. It was my home casino, and I had all my family there. It was huge to win that one.

Obviously, the money's great. Anytime you're in a big field main event and you can win 250 buy-ins or whatever that is, and have most of yourself, that's huge. But also just getting the monkey off your back for that first big live win feels good mentally. That was huge.

Art Parmann: Was that a big change in your lifestyle or were you already pretty comfortable at that point?

Darren Elias: I was pretty comfortable. I don't think it changed too much in my life. I don't know if it's confirmation or something, but you never want to be the guy that makes a bunch of final tables and can't close, the guy who always gets third or something. It was getting to the point where I had made multiple WPT final tables and hadn't won, so just closing it felt really good.

Justin Young: Do you know what your Wikipedia nickname is?

Darren Elias: I hope it's not 'Big Brisket.'

Justin Young: I kind of want it to be that, but that wasn't it.

Darren Elias: It probably was 'End Boss.'

Justin Young: To me, I just go back to video games when you go through and at the end of every level you fight the boss. The end boss was always the one that hit the hardest. So, you were End Boss, which I think is a great nickname, even though I've never heard anyone call you that ever in my life. You have so many seconds and thirds and fourths. It's ridiculous. How did you get the nickname End Boss when you could never finish?

Darren Elias: (Elias laughs) Bowser is not that tough. Jump on his head right a couple times and he misses you with the fire.

Justin Young: I'll remember the next time I get to the final table with you.

Darren Elias: 'He's headed right for third, don't worry about him.' Greg Mersen used to call me that. I guess he kind of coined it back when we played at the Borgata. I give him credit for that nickname, but nobody calls me that except Wikipedia. (Also *Card Player* in 2025, 2022, and 2019. Embrace the name!)

Justin Young: After the first *WPT* win, did the second *WPT* become the most important thing?

Darren Elias: I actually won the next one I played. I play more when I'm winning and less when I'm losing, kind of on purpose. I believe a little bit in the 'hot hand fallacy' or whatever you want to call it. I believe in long-term momentum in poker.

Generally, when I'm winning, I'm going to play more volume just because I'm having more fun when I'm winning. Usually there are things that work that you don't understand. I would say when you're winning and playing well, you're making plays that you're not really cognizant that you're playing better, but you are. I think that that's something that happens on both sides of it, when you're on upswings or downswings.

Justin Young: It's not a fallacy. It's for sure real, and it's not even close. Even though you can't put a finger on exactly what you're doing, making any move confidently is so much better than making any move without confidence.

Art Parmann: We've talked about that a ton on this podcast, where if you're on an upswing and you lose aces versus

kings or you lose some flip, you're like, 'Oh, well, that's going to happen or whatever.' But if you're on a downswing and you lose aces versus kings, you're just like, 'Every time for me.'

Darren Elias: It hurts a little more.

Justin Young: Exactly and then you're able to focus and play better. Any bluff, any value bet, any three-bet, [it all works]. Everything just becomes crystal clear.

Art Parmann: You find stuff that you don't find on a downswing. Maybe people with strong mindsets don't have that issue. (laughing)

Darren Elias: Yeah, people go on runs. I've been in poker a long time and just seeing these one- and two-year runs is unbelievable. The last couple years Bin Weng has been winning in these main events. Is he the best player in the world? No, but I would probably pick him during that run if we were doing a draft. He'd be in the top five picks just because of that momentum, that confidence, and how he's playing. It's wild. There's always a guy who's having a run – you just hope it's you.

While Elias may not be the biggest gambler, he did share a whiskey-drinking prop bet for a Bitcoin.

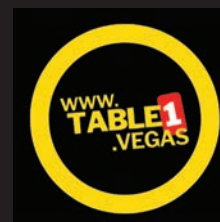
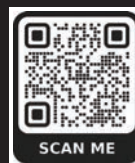


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If you've ever thought, "Man, poker used to be fun," then welcome to Table 1.



Justin Young: I don't want to put you too much on the spot, but do you have any awesome gambling stories?

Darren Elias: Probably compared to most of the guys you have on here, no. I'm not a huge gambler money-wise. My best gambling story is probably the whiskey bet I did with Ankush Mandavia.

We were shooting the shit in Florida after a tournament, and Kush was saying that one of his friends got offered a bet to do 10 shots of whiskey in 15 minutes and how that was impossible. I said that doesn't sound too impossible.

I had never tried to do that, but I

thought I could. He's like, 'No, you couldn't do that,' but then said, 'Alright, how much do you want to bet?'

'I don't know, a Bitcoin?' I answered. And this was back when Bitcoin was at about \$10,000. He got super aggressive, 'You want two Bitcoins?' I'm like, 'No, I'm good with one Bitcoin.'

We had all these conditions on the bet. I couldn't throw up for two hours, and I couldn't get arrested. He wanted to throw that one in there. As if I'm going to go ballistic in the casino, start punching people in the face, and then get arrested.

We got a fifth of Johnnie (Walker)

Black and went to the hotel room.

Justin Young: Johnnie Black, how was that negotiated?

Darren Elias: They had it in the gift shop.

Art Parmann: He wanted to hurt you. He wanted you to throw up.

Darren Elias: I poured it in a pint glass with some ice. There was a big group of 10-15 people watching me and they had side action too.

I think I did it in 11 or 12 minutes. Then we went down and had a couple more drinks at the bar. Kush was watching me for two hours. I was fine. I wish I would have bet more. ♠

"I play more when I'm winning and less when I'm losing, kind of on purpose. I believe in long-term momentum in poker."



Watch The Full Episode



MERIT POKER CARMEN SERIES CROWNS MULTIPLE BIG WINNERS IN CYPRUS

By Erik Fast

The *Merit Poker Carmen Series* was the latest tournament festival at the Mediterranean poker hotspot. It spanned from March 13-25 and featured several huge events, with the three biggest tournaments generating six-figure payouts for its respective champions.

The centerpiece of the whole series was the \$3,300 no-limit hold'em main event, which attracted 881 total entries across four starting flights, easily surpassing the \$1.5 million guarantee to end with a final prize pool of more than \$2.4 million.

Serbia's **Nenad Dukic** ultimately walked away with the largest piece of that total, earning \$401,000 as the champion. This was a new career-high score for Dukic, whose previous top payday came when he placed fifth in a €3,000 mystery bounty event at the 2022 *European Poker Tour Prague*. He now has more than \$700,000 in lifetime cashes to his name.

In addition to the money and the hardware, Dukic also scored 1,368 POY points for the win. This was his first POY-qualified score of 2025, but it alone was enough to move him inside the top 70 on the leaderboard.

The top four finishers in the main event were all awarded six-figure payouts, including Soraya Estrada who took fourth for \$132,100. The Spanish player lost the majority of her stack when her queens and sevens clashed with the queens and tens of Dukic.

Mikhail Zavoloka cashed for \$185,250 as the third-place finisher, while accomplished Turkish player Akin Tuna scored \$265,000 as the runner-up. Tuna is approaching \$1.8 million in overall cashes, with this being his third-largest windfall yet.

The second-largest guarantee of the series belonged to the \$2,200 buy-in no-limit hold'em 'Warm Up.' Its \$1 million guarantee was outpaced by nearly \$190,000 thanks to a turnout of 646 entries.

Dmitrii Kopyl ultimately came away with the trophy and the top prize of \$210,000. The six-figure win was by far the Russian's best score, surpassing the \$20,990 for his third-place finish in a \$500 event at the *Eurasia Poker Tour Snowfest* stop.

Bulgaria's Atanas Malinov earned \$142,100 as the runner-up in that tournament, then went on to finish seventh in the \$5,300 buy-in \$500,000 guaranteed high roller event. The tournament drew 270 entries to more than double the guarantee.

The largest chunk of the \$1,242,000 final prize pool was ultimately awarded to **Dawid Smolka**. The Polish player walked away with \$260,000 as the champion, the second-largest score of his career. In 2021 Smolka placed eighth in the *World Series of Poker Online* main event for \$339,124. He now has nearly \$1.7 million in career cashes.



\$3,300 NLH

Player	Payout (POY)
1 Nenad Dukic	\$401,000 (1,368)
2 Akin Tuna	\$265,000 (1,140)
3 Mikhail Zavoloka	\$185,250 (912)
4 Soraya Estrada	\$132,100 (684)
5 Han Han	\$99,050 (570)
6 Chady Ojeil	\$80,500 (456)
7 Maher Achour	\$65,700 (342)
8 Daniil Kiselev	\$52,200 (228)

\$2,200 NLH

Player	Payout (POY)
1 Dmitrii Kopyl	\$210,000 (840)
2 Atanas Malinov	\$142,100 (700)
3 Daniel Abrahamsson	\$98,575 (560)
4 Alessio Isaia	\$71,030 (420)
5 Erdal Gulseven	\$52,530 (350)
6 Atanas Pavlov	\$42,020 (280)
7 Humberto Galindo	\$35,015 (210)
8 Giorgiy Skhulukhiya	\$28,015 (140)

\$5,300 NLH

Player	Payout (POY)
1 Dawid Smolka	\$260,000 (864)
2 Johnny Lodden	\$182,700 (720)
3 Kirill Shcherbakov	\$131,900 (576)
4 Oleg Svintsov	\$91,400 (432)
5 Merijn van Rooij	\$67,040 (360)
6 Peteris Enders	\$53,700 (288)
7 Atanas Malinov	\$44,700 (216)
8 Cedric Schwaederle	\$35,735 (144)

'HOMETOWN HERO' SHAWN DANIELS WINS WPT ROLLING THUNDER

By Erik Fast



Castro And Daniels Battle Heads Up

Shawn Daniels took down his first *World Poker Tour* title by winning an event at his home casino. The Placerville, California native defeated 404 entries in the *WPT Rolling Thunder* main event at Thunder Valley Casino. The Lincoln casino, like Placerville, is part of the greater Sacramento.

Daniels earned the second-largest score of his career for his win. He turned his \$3,500 buy-in into \$218,600. The only larger score on his resume is a victory in the \$777 event at the 2023 *World Series of Poker* for \$777,777. His recent victory bumps his career earnings north of \$3.2 million.

As with all main event champions on the tour, Daniels' name will be added to the Mike Sexton *WPT* Champions Cup. "To get my name on the cup is very special," Daniels told *WPT* reporters. "It's just something that means a lot and that I'll remember forever."

This was Daniels' second final-table finish of the year. It came with 1,080 *Card Player* Player of the Year points. With 1,164 total points, he now sits inside the top 80 in the 2025 POY standings presented by Global Poker.

The top 51 finishers earned a piece of the \$1,292,800 prize pool in this event, with notables like two-time *WPT* champion J.C. Tran (20th), poker commentator Jeff Platt (17th), 2023 *WPT World Championship* winner Daniel Sepiol (11th), all-time *WSOP Circuit* rings leader Ari Engel (8th), and 2012 *WPT Grand Prix de Paris* winner Matthew Salsberg (7th) all running deep.

The final day began with *WSOP Circuit Choctaw* champion Harvey Castro leading the final six players. Three-time *WPT* champion Eric Afriat was also still in contention, starting the day in the middle of the pack, while Daniels sat in fifth chip position.

Benjamin Primus was knocked out just a few hands into the day, with his K-8 unable to come from behind against the A-K of Castro. Primus earned \$53,000 as the sixth-place finisher.

David Ha soon joined Primus on the rail when his J-10 clashed with the A-7 of Paul Richardson. Ha picked up an open-ended straight draw on the turn to go with his two live cards, but a blank on the end sent him packing with \$69,000.

Daniels scored his first elimination of the day when his

A♠ 3♠ bested the pocket nines of Richardson. Daniels raised from the button for 350,000 and called the 950,000 shove of Richardson from the small blind. Daniels made aces up by the river to win the pot. Richardson earned \$91,000 as the fourth-place finisher.

Afriat's run concluded when Daniels cracked his pocket tens with K♣ 3♦ in a battle of the blinds. Daniels shoved from the small blind for just shy of nine big blinds effective and Afriat quickly called. The board came down K♥ J♦ J♣ K♦ 6♣ to eliminate Afriat in third place for \$122,000.

It was just the latest close call for Afriat on the tour, who has been searching for his record-tying fourth title. (pg. 43) The Canadian now has nearly \$6 million in career earnings, most of which comes from his success in *WPT* tournaments.

Castro held more than a 2:1 lead over Daniels when heads-up play began. It was a back-and-forth affair, with both players holding the lead and having chances to close it out. At some point along the way, they hashed out a deal to redistribute the remaining prize money a bit.

Daniels was well out in front when the final hand of the event arrived. Castro shoved from the button with Q♥ 2♥ for just a handful of big blinds. Daniels called with 8♥ 6♣ and the board came down K♠ 7♣ 6♥ 6♦ J♣ to give Daniels trip sixes for the win.

Castro earned \$193,600 as the runner-up, the third-largest score of his career. He now has more than \$1.1 million in career cashes to his name.

Player	Payout (POY)
1 Shawn Daniels	\$218,600 (1,080)
2 Harvey Castro	\$193,600 (900)
3 Eric Afriat	\$122,000 (720)
4 Paul Richardson	\$91,000 (540)
5 David Ha	\$69,000 (450)
6 Benjamin Primus	\$53,000 (360)
7 Matthew Salsberg	\$40,500 (270)
8 Ari Engel	\$31,500 (180)
9 Eric Wong	\$24,700 (90)

TOURNAMENTS

ANGELA JORDISON EARNs SECOND CAREER MSPT TITLE

By Ryan Lucchesi

Angela Jordison earned her second *Major Series of Poker Tour* title after besting the field at the Grand Falls Casino in Larchwood, Iowa. She ponied up \$1,100 to play the no-limit hold'em tournament and bested 513 entries to earn \$95,381.

The trophy from Iowa will join her *MSPT* trophy from her main event win at Ameristar Casino Hotel East Chicago last year, when the tour was still called the *Mid-States Poker Tour*.

The Iowa main event guaranteed a prize pool of \$200,000, but the turnout more than doubled that figure. The final prize pool was worth \$496,110 with the top 55 players finishing in the money.

Jordison was low in chips when the final table began but got on track by taking out Jason Sell in sixth place. She kept things moving in the right direction by busting Kevin Berthelsen in fifth place, as well. T.J. Murphy continued to add to his lead, however, knocking Steve Fundermann in fourth and Aaron Knudson in third.

Jordison had chipped up to take a slight chip advantage over Murphy, and the final two agreed to an ICM chop not too long before the final hand was dealt.

The chips got in on a board of $Q\heartsuit J\spadesuit 9\heartsuit 2\clubsuit 2\heartsuit$. Jordison moved all-in and Murphy called off his remaining chips with $J\heartsuit 6\clubsuit$ for jacks and deuces, but it was second best to Jordison's $10\heartsuit 8\clubsuit$ for a flopped straight. Murphy took home \$76,736 as the runner-up, the biggest cash of his career by far.



Player	Payout (POY)
1 Angela Jordison	\$95,381 (840)
2 T.J. Murphy	\$76,736 (700)
3 Aaron Knudson	\$47,197 (560)
4 Steven Fundermann	\$35,687 (420)
5 Kevin Berthelsen	\$26,757 (350)
6 Jason Sell	\$20,308 (280)
7 Jason Peterson	\$15,843 (210)
8 D.J. Buckley	\$12,370 (140)
9 Paul Cross	\$9,393 (70)

© WSOP

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 World Poker Tour Rolling Thunder
\$3,500 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



David Ha
3,900,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 16%
After Flop: 9%
After Turn: 18%

Shawn Daniels
2,400,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 84%
After Flop: 91%
After Turn: 82%

PREFLOP

With five players remaining and blinds of 50,000-100,000 with a big blind ante of 100,000, David Ha limped in from the small blind. Shawn Daniels raised to 250,000 from the big blind, and Ha called.

FLOP



Ha checked, and Daniels bet 125,000. Ha check-raised to 400,000. Daniels called.

TURN



Ha checked, and Daniels bet 250,000. Ha called.

RIVER



Ha bet 400,000, and Daniels called.

COMMENTARY:

Ha chose to limp from the small blind, though most ICM configurations see the small blind, as the second-biggest stack, do a lot more raising than limping against a short-stacked big blind. 10-7 offsuit is a hand that mixes raising and limping here, though Ha should raise at a much higher frequency. If Ha had raised, this hand would've been over preflop and he would have lost a few big blinds instead of 1.3 million. After limping, he faced a raise from Daniels' queens and chose to call. Solver analysis suggests that the expected value of calling, folding, or raising is indifferent, given that the big blind's raising range should be extremely polar. A fold would have been preferable as Ha's stack was close to Eric Afriat's (31 big blinds) and Paul Richardson's (30 big blinds) and he would prefer to keep a buffer between himself and them. Given the tournament situation, this is a spot he just didn't have to take. On the king-high flop, Daniels opted to continuation-bet 125,000 into 600,000. Checking back would have made more sense, however, as he had more than enough value to comfortably call off two streets. Ha then decided to raise his double backdoor draws to 400,000. Given his vulnerable stack, he had great odds to just call, or possibly even fold. On the nine turn, Ha might have considered double barreling, as he would with jacks, sixes, and sometimes spades. Instead, he chose to check. Daniels fired a very small bet, presumably for equity denial and as a block in an attempt to get to the river cheaply. Ha couldn't fold his open-ender and got to the river with just 10-high. Knowing he couldn't win without betting, he put out a 20% donk bet, which in hindsight was way too small and didn't put enough pressure on Daniels. This turning point of a hand proved costly for Ha. While Daniels moved from fifth to second in chips, Ha moved in the exact opposite direction and eventually finished fifth for \$69,000.

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

TAYLOR HART WINS WSOP CIRCUIT TURNING STONE

By Ryan Lucchesi

Taylor Hart emerged victorious in the latest *WSOP Circuit Turning Stone* \$1,700 main event, securing his third gold ring and the top prize of \$280,770. Hart's career earnings are now above \$950,000 thanks to his recent win.

The tournament in Verona, New York attracted a field of 1,183 runners, creating a total prize pool of \$1,792,770 to nearly double the hefty guarantee of \$1 million.

The last day began with nine players remaining and Hart in the lead. He was still out in front by the time the field had been narrowed to four, despite failing to land a knockout blow.

Hart scored his first elimination of the day when he busted Thomas Couture. Michael Aman then took out Charles Goelz in third place, setting up the final showdown for the title with Hart ahead 5:4.

Aman spent almost 20 minutes in the tank during the first major clash of the match. He was facing a river shove after a $8\spadesuit 5\spadesuit 2\heartsuit 9\heartsuit Q\heartsuit$ runout. He eventually folded, sending the hefty pot to Hart.

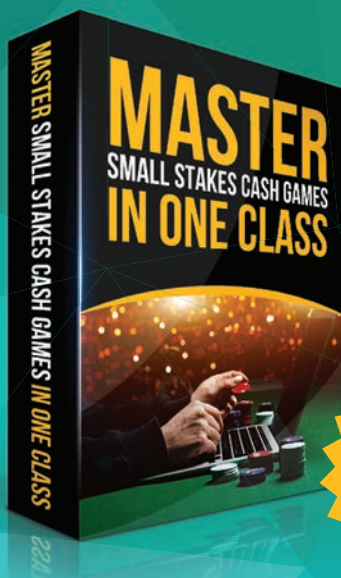
The final hand saw both players see a flop of $K\clubsuit Q\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$. Another bet and call followed after the $J\heartsuit$ hit on the turn, and then the river delivered the $4\clubsuit$. Aman then moved all in holding pocket jacks, but he was behind the $A\spadesuit 10\clubsuit$ of Hart who turned Broadway. Aman earned \$187,172 as the runner-up.



Player	Payout (POY)
1 Taylor Hart	\$280,770 (960)
2 Michael Aman	\$187,172 (800)
3 Charles Goelz	\$132,068 (640)
4 Thomas Couture	\$94,583 (480)
5 Anthony Runza	\$68,767 (400)
6 Allen Krouth	\$50,769 (320)
7 Yuriy Kuorynsky	\$38,069 (240)
8 Joseph Molitor	\$29,000 (160)
9 Aaron Gao	\$22,450 (80)

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CIRCUIT RESULTS



Event	Player	Payout (POY)
Winnin' O' the Green Parkwest Bicycle Casino Bell Gardens, CA \$400 NLH March 10-16 \$400,000 GTD Entries: 1,809 Prizepool: \$596,970	1 Massoud Eskandari	\$84,330 (432)
	2 Jose Oscar	\$69,655 (360)
	3 Mir Gaskari	\$61,980 (288)
	4 Justin Lee	\$46,790 (216)
	5 Rudy Cervantes	\$25,130 (180)
	6 Rick Mechammil	\$19,405 (144)
	7 Andrew Kang	\$15,755 (108)
	8 Evgeniy Tsyrenov	\$12,220 (72)
	9 Chester Burnett	\$9,160 (36)

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
WPT Prime Cyprus Chamada Prestige Casino Chamada, Cyprus \$1,100 NLH March 13-17 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,391 Prizepool: \$1,349,270	1 Omar Lakhdari	\$190,430 (960)
	2 Atilla Saracoglu	\$125,000 (800)
	3 Joseph Haddad	\$93,000 (640)
	4 Fabian Rolli	\$70,000 (480)
	5 Edgars Hauks	\$53,000 (400)
	6 Andras Balogh	\$40,000 (320)
	7 Sencer Ozturk	\$31,000 (240)
	8 Baris Topuz	\$24,000 (160)
	9 Ilan Verdnikov	\$18,800 (80)



Event	Player	Payout (POY)
Winnin' O' the Green Parkwest Bicycle Casino Bell Gardens, CA \$500 NLH March 16-23 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 1,420 Prizepool: \$596,400	1 Corey Brass	\$77,165 (480)
	2 Marc Florentino	\$75,095 (400)
	3 Adam Kline	\$45,400 (320)
	4 Christina Gollins	\$42,412 (240)
	5 Michael Brown	\$24,820 (200)
	6 Huy Lam	\$18,250 (160)
	7 Alex Farahi	\$13,575 (120)
	8 Jon Gisler	\$10,600 (80)
	9 Treyland Leauanae	\$8,765 (40)

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
Wynn Millions Wynn Las Vegas, NV \$1,600 NLH KO March 13-16 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 880 Prizepool: \$1,257,900	1 Matthew Schulte	\$146,698 (912)
	2 Valentyn Shabelnyk	\$95,993 (760)
	3 Todd Stewart	\$72,831 (608)
	4 Ardit Kurshumi	\$57,287 (456)
	5 Jamie Flynn	\$44,889 (380)
	6 Fred Li	\$33,798 (304)
	7 Seth Fischer	\$25,413 (228)
	8 Craig Mason	\$18,903 (152)
	9 Gladys Landegger	\$13,528 (76)

All payouts in USD.

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Jesse Lonis



© Wynn Poker

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
Wynn Millions	1 Jesse Lonis	\$173,160 (300)
	2 Shannon Shorr	\$110,500 (250)
	3 Nick Schulman	\$79,300 (200)
Wynn Las Vegas, NV	4 Clemen Deng	\$57,200 (150)
	5 Gustavo Ortega	\$42,900 (125)
	6 Dylan Smith	\$32,500 (100)
\$10,500 NLH March 14 Entries: 52 Prizepool: \$520,000	7 Brek Schutten	\$24,440 (75)

Ian Steinman



© RGFPS

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
Mission Rungood	1 Ian Steinman	\$36,220 (300)
	2 Yang Zhao	\$25,000 (250)
	3 Art Tanimoto	\$25,000 (200)
Atlantis Casino Reno, NV	4 Shawn Van Asdale	\$11,690 (150)
	5 Ryan Awwad	\$9,010 (125)
	6 Ed Miller	\$7,455 (100)
\$600 NLH March 28-30 \$150,000 GTD Entries: 370 Prizepool: \$188,700	7 Greg Paradero	\$6,255 (75)
	8 Adam Saven	\$5,125 (50)
	9 Johnny Ye	\$4,010 (25)

John Dollinger



© WSOP

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
WSOP Circuit	1 John Dollinger	\$147,148 (720)
	2 Russell Brooks	\$98,109 (600)
	3 Iman Alsaden	\$67,346 (480)
Hard Rock Catoosa, OK	4 James Jewell	\$47,149 (360)
	5 Yordanos Mehbratu	\$33,679 (300)
	6 Kiran Suresh	\$24,555 (240)
\$1,700 NLH March 14-17 Entries: 487 Prizepool: \$737,805	7 Andy Robinson	\$18,282 (180)
	8 Marvin Donaldson	\$13,906 (120)
	9 Matthew Riffel	\$10,811 (60)

Jordi Ruiz



© PokerCity

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
WSOP Circuit	1 Jordi Ruiz	\$184,964 (1080)
	2 Max Broens	\$125,589 (900)
	3 Menno Velde	\$89,684 (720)
Holland Casino Amsterdam, Netherlands	4 Matt Lushin	\$69,012 (540)
	5 Thomas Cazalet	\$53,313 (450)
	6 Nazariy Piznak	\$41,656 (360)
€1,100 NLH March 16-21 €500,000 GTD Entries: 1,505 Prizepool: \$1,562,696	7 Longmao Fan	\$32,485 (270)
	8 Diederick Straat	\$25,491 (180)
	9 Erik Van Hulst	\$20,206 (90)

TOURNAMENTS



© WPT

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
WPT Prime	1 Craig Blight	\$46,776 (360)
	2 Kyu Park	\$28,846 (300)
The Star Boadbeach, Australia	3 Chih-Wei Fan	\$17,308 (240)
	4 Robert Spano	\$11,305 (180)
A\$2,500 NLH March 17-18 Entries: 110 Prizepool: \$155,924	5 Kevin Lee	\$8,732 (150)
	6 Jeison Berdugo	\$7,173 (120)
	7 Takashi Hirukawa	\$6,081 (90)
	8 Michel Bouskila	\$5,301 (60)
	9 Kenji Hata	\$4,678 (30)



© WSOP

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WSOP Circuit	1 Tyler Culpepper	\$76,068 (432)
	2 Adam Johnson	\$47,019 (360)
Turning Stone Verona, NY	3 Kevin DiPasquale	\$35,700 (288)
	4 David Knight	\$26,054 (216)
\$400 NLH March 18-20 \$200,000 GTD Entries: 1,678 Prizepool: \$551,862	5 Philip Ceppaglia	\$19,753 (180)
	6 Jason Pasinski	\$15,162 (144)
	7 Anthony Serino	\$11,785 (108)
	8 John Mayo	\$9,277 (72)
	9 Junhao Shen	\$7,398 (36)



© WPT

Event	Player	Payout (POY)
WPT Prime	1 Joshua Mcswiney	\$177,680 (912)
	2 Patrick Yazbeck	\$156,775 (760)
The Star Boadbeach, Australia	3 Jiaxu Chen	\$98,910 (608)
	4 Joseph Antar	\$73,874 (456)
A\$2,000 NLH March 21-26 Entries: 719 Prizepool: \$1,203,081	5 Michael Egan	\$55,744 (380)
	6 Daniel Klinger	\$42,500 (304)
	7 Gary Lin	\$32,746 (228)
	8 Matthew Woodhall	\$25,497 (152)
	9 Wiremu Renata	\$20,068 (76)



© WSOP

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WSOP Circuit	1 Brian Altman	\$73,717 (288)
	2 Charles Alex-Barton	\$48,168 (240)
Turning Stone Verona, NY	3 Christian Roberts	\$32,474 (192)
	4 Seunghyun Nam	\$22,611 (144)
\$2,200 NLH March 23-24 \$100,000 GTD Entries: 147 Prizepool: \$294,000	5 Samuel Joureyay	\$16,277 (120)
	6 Jacob Hamed	\$12,128 (96)
	7 Kaiwen Wei	\$9,366 (72)
	8 David Kuder	\$7,505 (48)
	9 Patrick White	\$6,250 (24)



© 888 Poker

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
888poker Live	1 Dean Lyall	\$74,988 (360)
	2 Daniel Johnson	\$55,393 (300)
Grosvenor Glasgow, Scotland	3 Martin Byrne	\$41,022 (240)
	4 Michael Broadhurst	\$30,444 (180)
£888 NLH March 19-23 £250,000 GTD Entries: 407 Prizepool: \$419,739	5 Harry Cattanach	\$22,627 (150)
	6 Jack Moore	\$16,835 (120)
	7 Zbigniew Wieczorek	\$12,603 (90)
	8 William Haughey	\$9,585 (60)



© SHR Poker Blog

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WPT SHR Poker Showdown	1 Michael Newman	\$103,274 (528)
	2 Sean Phillippi	\$101,019 (440)
Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood, FL	3 Sergio Giha	\$100,865 (352)
	4 Tom Gottlieb	\$86,425 (264)
\$400 NLH March 19-24 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 4,265 Prizepool: \$1,407,450	5 Matthew Yorra	\$78,637 (220)
	6 Miguel Martinez	\$63,610 (176)
	7 Bryce McVay	\$29,000 (132)
	8 Sean Astwood	\$22,500 (88)
	9 Alexandru Ivan	\$17,700 (44)



© SHR Poker Blog

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WPT SHR Poker Showdown	1 Dessiree Bennett	\$49,199 (600)
	2 Steve Blackmon	\$48,675 (500)
	3 Chad Roedersheimer	\$41,735 (400)
Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood, FL	4 Juan Mubarak	\$40,891 (300)
	5 Anibal Pabon	\$20,100 (250)
\$1,100 NLH March 23-25 \$250,000 GTD Entries: 384 Prizepool: \$372,480	6 Wayne Leonard	\$15,400 (200)
	7 Sean Byars	\$11,800 (150)
	8 Tanupat Punjarojanakul	\$9,200 (100)
	9 Samuel Kim	\$7,200 (50)



© SHR Poker Blog

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WPT SHR Poker Showdown	1 Femi Fashakin	\$156,565 (660)
	2 Abraham Padilla	\$150,220 (550)
	3 Atanas Pavlov	\$147,315 (440)
Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood, FL	4 Zachary Fischer	\$135,013 (330)
	5 David Frenkel	\$103,310 (275)
\$600 NLH March 26-31 \$2,000,000 GTD Entries: 4,017 Prizepool: \$2,088,840	6 Joel Gossett	\$94,257 (220)
	7 Sebastian Toro Henao	\$42,500 (165)
	8 Marcelo Aagesen	\$33,000 (110)
	9 Albert Son	\$26,000 (55)

TOURNAMENTS



© PokerStars

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
Manila Megastack Okada Manila, Philippines PHP 45,000 NLH March 20-23 PHP 20,000,000 GTD Entries: 652 Prizepool: \$447,217	1 Kiwanont Sukhum	\$57,970 (420)
	2 William Ysmael	\$55,505 (350)
	3 Cheolmin Byeon	\$53,975 (280)
	4 James Cruz	\$26,860 (210)
	5 Suya Lee	\$21,420 (175)
	6 Wanhee Kang	\$16,320 (140)
	7 Moosung Lee	\$11,730 (105)
	8 Uday Duggal	\$8,160 (70)
	9 Tamon Nakamura	\$6,440 (35)



© WSOP

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WSOP Circuit Horseshoe Las Vegas, NV \$400 NLH March 20-23 \$250,000 GTD Entries: 1,408 Prizepool: \$464,640	1 Evangeline Ayed	\$62,005 (384)
	2 Robert Payette	\$41,180 (320)
	3 Brett Coltman	\$30,010 (256)
	4 Roy Ouyeung	\$21,920 (192)
	5 Shawn Libersky	\$16,200 (160)
	6 Michael Thach	\$12,250 (128)
	7 Seseung Oh	\$9,330 (96)
	8 Robenito Roxas	\$7,200 (64)
	9 Mauro Avila	\$5,640 (32)



© WSOP

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
WSOP Circuit Horseshoe Las Vegas, NV \$2,200 NLH March 25-26 \$100,000 GTD Entries: 126 Prizepool: \$252,000	1 Sam Laskowitz	\$63,866 (264)
	2 David Cabrera Polop	\$42,433 (220)
	3 Daniel Moran	\$29,066 (176)
	4 Jesse Yaginuma	\$20,546 (132)
	5 Craig Mason	\$15,003 (110)
	6 Shawn Daniels	\$11,329 (88)
	7 Andrew Brinkley	\$8,858 (66)
	8 Martin Schamaun	\$7,179 (44)
	9 Asher Conniff	\$6,040 (22)



© GulfCoastPokerNET

Event	Player	Payout (POV)
Milly in Philly Pearl River Philadelphia, MS \$400 NLH March 20-23 \$350,000 GTD Entries: 1,258 Prizepool: \$388,650	1 Dexter Burns	\$50,082 (384)
	2 Christopher Carey	\$42,311 (320)
	3 Alan Close	\$41,129 (256)
	4 Jeremy Kolb	\$40,302 (192)
	5 Gerald Kuchenmeister	\$18,871 (160)
	6 Leslie Roussell	\$14,539 (128)
	7 Justin Barnes	\$11,348 (96)
	8 Robert Henderson	\$8,945 (64)
	9 Ralph Robinson	\$7,095 (32)

TOURNAMENTS



Event	Player	Payout
Milly in Philly	1 Jeremy Gaubert	\$87,829 (456)
	2 Alec Tull	\$54,254 (380)
Pearl River Philadelphia, MS	3 Luther Tran	\$39,730 (304)
	4 Jonathan Sanborn	\$29,477 (228)
\$700 NLH March 28-30 \$400,000 GTD Entries: 712 Prizepool: \$427,200	5 Carl Masters	\$22,214 (190)
	6 Gerald Kuchenmeister	\$16,661 (152)
	7 Griffin Moore	\$12,816 (114)
	8 Dylan Crawford	\$10,253 (76)
	9 Andrew Van Ganns	\$7,476 (38)



Event	Player	Payout (POV)
Station Poker Classic	1 Brett Lambden	\$81,857 (456)
	2 Louis Collette	\$51,537 (380)
Casino Regina Regina, Canada	3 Michael Schmidt	\$34,143 (304)
	4 Joe Gallo	\$23,707 (228)
C\$1,700 NLH March 22 Entries: 294 Prizepool: \$312,436	5 Deven Lane	\$17,184 (190)
	6 Michael Pierre-Porter	\$12,952 (152)
	7 Justin Skamanis	\$10,114 (114)
	8 Dominick Esquimalt	\$8,153 (76)
	9 Tomas Loro	\$6,760 (38)



Event	Player	Payout (POV)
Rising Star	1 Anthony Ajlouny	\$233,800 (900)
	2 Chang Lee	\$156,000 (750)
Bay 101 San Jose, CA	3 Andrey Marsavin	\$116,000 (600)
	4 Zachary Grech	\$87,000 (450)
\$3,500 NLH March 22-25 Entries: 358 Prizepool: \$1,140,300	5 Grant Maruya	\$66,000 (375)
	6 Stephen Graner	\$50,000 (300)
	7 Nguyen Le	\$38,500 (225)
	8 Brett Murray	\$30,000 (150)
	9 Cody Wiegmann	\$23,400 (75)



Event	Player	Payout
MSPT	1 Matthew Porter	\$106,078 (840)
	2 Ramon Ziadeh	\$100,000 (700)
Riverside Casino Riverside, IA	3 Carl Carodenuto	\$57,097 (560)
	4 Mark LaFata	\$42,490 (420)
\$1,110 NLH March 27-30 \$300,000 GTD Entries: 629 Prizepool: \$608,630	5 Jeff Petronack	\$32,143 (350)
	6 Dave Grandin	\$24,231 (280)
	7 Varun Uppal	\$18,754 (210)
	8 Dustin Hoffmann	\$14,493 (140)
	9 Jake Wilding	\$11,450 (70)

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2025 Card Player Player of the Year

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Rank	Player	Points	Titles	Final Tables	Earnings
1	Jeremy Ausmus	3,754	1	6	\$2,668,400
2	Nick Schulman	3,016	1	10	\$1,041,985
3	Brandon Wilson	3,000	2	7	\$1,953,800
4	Wenjie Huang	2,550	1	2	\$5,978,000
5	Joey Weissman	2,477	1	7	\$1,053,700
6	Igor Yaroshevskyy	2,360	0	2	\$1,469,000
7	Cody Stanford	2,307	5	6	\$471,158
8	Bryn Kenney	2,193	1	2	\$2,736,430
9	Eric Blair	2,188	2	6	\$983,825
10	Sam Greenwood	2,126	0	3	\$2,380,500
11	Joao Simao	2,110	1	4	\$657,125
12	Ryan Leng	2,108	1	4	\$203,165
13	Anatoly Filatov	2,100	1	1	\$1,882,000
14	Shannon Shorr	2,070	2	5	\$899,500
15	Tom Vogelsang	2,063	1	4	\$1,507,870
16	Zachary Fischer	2,020	1	7	\$326,981
17	Calvin Lee	1,990	0	2	\$1,349,000
18	Zhen Chen	1,930	1	4	\$635,889
19	Daniel Cates	1,900	0	1	\$3,528,000
20	Mikita Badziakouski	1,840	0	2	\$1,978,000
21	Michael Moncek	1,824	1	4	\$1,208,750
22	Zhao Hongjun	1,800	1	1	\$818,000
23	Joao Vieira	1,770	1	2	\$5,488,000
24	Benjamin Tollerene	1,760	0	5	\$1,468,250
25	Ryan Hogan	1,754	0	4	\$416,570
26	Quan Zhou	1,750	0	1	\$1,193,000
27	Cecile Ticherfatine	1,740	0	3	\$420,961
28	Maurice Hawkins	1,728	2	7	\$259,707
28	Spencer Champlin	1,728	1	2	\$582,500
30	Clemen Deng	1,722	0	4	\$1,192,582

WORLD POKER TOUR TITLES



Rank	Player	Titles	Earnings	Cashes	Final Tables
1	Darren Elias	4	\$4,653,250	47	13
2	Carlos Mortensen	3	\$6,738,670	21	6
3	Chino Rheem	3	\$4,097,943	11	4
4	Gus Hansen	3	\$4,076,802	9	7
5	Eric Afriat	3	\$3,639,492	23	9
6	Anthony Zinno	3	\$3,155,419	39	7
7	Brian Altman	3	\$3,124,165	34	7

The *World Poker Tour's* title record has stood for nearly seven years. **Darren Elias** broke the multi-way tie at three main tour wins back on May 23, 2018, taking down the *WPT Bobby Baldwin Classic* at Aria for an unprecedented fourth victory. Since that historic triumph, several of the players with a trio of *WPT* titles to their name have come close to matching Elias' total, but none have yet managed the feat.

The latest close call saw three-time champion **Eric Afriat** finish third in the *WPT Rolling Thunder* main event (pg. 33). Afriat also has runner-up showings at both the *WPT Hard Rock Poker Showdown* and the *WPT Choctaw Championship*, as well as a third at the *WPT Playground Championship*, a fifth at the *WPT Montreal* main event, and a sixth at the *WPT Bellagio Cup*. More than half of the Canadian's \$6 million in career earnings have come in *WPT* events.

Elias first broke through with a win in the 2014 *WPT Borgata Poker Open* for \$843,744. Just a couple of months later, the New Jersey resident took down the *WPT Caribbean* main event for another \$127,680. In 2017, Elias

secured his third title by taking down the *WPT Fallsview Poker Classic* for \$335,436.

In addition to being the tour's title leader, the 38-year-old poker pro also holds the tour's records for the most main tour cashes (47) and the most main tour final-table finishes (13). Of the four major stat categories for the *WPT*, the only one Elias doesn't sit atop of is main tour earnings. His \$4,653,250 is good for fifth place in that metric.

There are currently six players tied with three wins. **Carlos Mortensen** has the highest earnings among them, as he is the tour's all-time money leader. The Spanish poker legend has more than \$6.7 million in cashes on the tour, including nearly \$4 million that came from his win in the 2007 *WPT Championship*.

Chino Rheem and **Gus Hansen** round out the top five with Afriat as the next-highest earners among the three-time champions. 38 total players have won multiple *WPT* main tour titles, including the likes of Daniel Negreanu, Michael Mizrachi, Antonio Esfandiari, Jonathan Little, Chad Eveslage, and Barry Greenstein. ♠



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FINAL TABLE TAKEDOWN: POKER DEALER MALLORY KLAUS EARNS TEXAS-SIZED PAYDAY

By Craig Tapscott



Mallory Klaus grew up playing cards. Her grandparents would bring over rolls of coins and everyone would battle it out family style around the kitchen table.

At the age of 15, Klaus lost her mother after a 10-year fight with cancer, and her life changed immediately from a family that always had something to pray about, doctors' appointments, and a structured home life – to a quiet lull of emptiness.

Klaus' father started taking her to his Friday poker nights in Norman, Oklahoma. Her dad would buy her into the friendly \$20 tournaments, and they would split the winnings. When Klaus turned 21, she played with her dad in her first live poker tournament at a nearby casino. Although she didn't win anything, she got to talk poker with her father on the drive home, and that was as good as any trophy.

After college, she started a career in orthodontics and dentistry, got married, had a son, divorced, and re-evaluated her life trajectory as a single-income parent. She eventually founded a poker league centered around teaching people of all skill levels the basics of tournament poker. Poker RX originated in 2019, and was gaining traction before COVID hit and shut everything down.

She began to deal poker in local home games and fell into the underground poker scene. After the pandemic, she followed a friend down to Dallas, where he was deal-

ing. She auditioned for a dealing position at Texas Card House at 2 pm and by 9 pm, she was sitting down for her first shift. It wasn't too long before she was dealing the TCHLive cash game streams.

The RunGood Poker ambassador has recently taken on a new role within Texas Card House, while also looking to expand her mark on the poker circuit.

Card Player caught up with Klaus to talk about her recent win on the *Trailblazer Poker Tour*, where she banked \$211,745.

Event: Trailblazer Poker Tour - Dallas
Buy-In: \$800
Entrants: 1,943
Prize Pool: \$1,360,100
First-Place Prize: \$211,745

Craig Tapscott: How did you prepare for this final table?

Mallory Klaus: I had multiple reviews of some short-stack strategies the day of the final table and had a lot of conversations with friends and mentors. They [reinforced] that laddering up was the most important thing as a shorty and to pay attention to the ICM.

Alvin Lau (@alvinteachespoker) gave me a run-through of final table strategy, especially navigating the short stack. Alvin is a dear friend from his Dallas days playing



HAND NO. 1

Stacks: Mallory Klaus – 5,500,000 (11 BB)
 Craig Varnell – 9,000,000 (18 BB)
Blinds: 250,000-500,000 with a 500,000 big blind ante
Players: 9

MK: I found myself in the big blind as the shortest stack nine-handed. I knew that players, specifically Craig, would be putting pressure on me in the big blind.

I had been playing conservatively, and he knew I was overfolding. Craig even told me how his rail buddies told him the hands I had been folding.

I had determined my calling range to stack off to him before I even looked at my hand. I knew what he would do and was prepared for it.

Varnell raised all in from the small blind with 4♦ 4♥. Klaus called all in with J♥ 10♥ from the big blind.

MK: We snapped off his raise and had a lovely flip happening.

Flop: 9♦ 7♥ 5♥

CT: Pretty great flop for your hand.

MK: Definitely. I had the flush draw, two overs still and a gut shot. Gorgeous set up to blink.

Turn: 2♣

River: 8♠

Klaus won the pot of 10,600,000.

MK: I busted out laughing at my double up because it was an ongoing joke that no one would bust. The worst thing they could do was give me more chips, as they would soon enough find out.

CT: Let's jump into heads-up play.

MK: The heads-up match took over two hours, playing for a difference of more than \$66,000. I was up against Zak Baron, and he and I are buddies. He's a fun player, more fun when tilted (laughs), but he's actually a consistent crusher in tournaments.

HAND NO. 2

Stacks: Mallory Klaus – 51,200,000 (25 BB)
 Zak Baron – 53,400,000 (26 BB)
Blinds: 1,000,000-2,000,000 with a 2,000,000 big blind ante
Players: 2

Baron raised to 5,500,000 from the button. Klaus called from the big blind holding J♠ 10♠.

MK: Luckily, I've played cash with Zak before, so I'm sure that knowledge had some value. I was buzzing with all the energy behind me, and I couldn't imagine a better heads-up opponent for this experience. But he was mixing up his betting sizes too much; it didn't make sense to me other than to avoid those spots with him.

Flop: 9♥ 8♠ 7♦

Both players checked.

Turn: A♦

Klaus checked.

Baron bet 5,000,000, and Klaus raised to 20,000,000. Baron

at Texas Card House. He took me on as a student a few years ago, and my game has improved. But my focus has been primarily on cash game strategy.

CT: Set this final table up for us.

MK: I came into the final table as the short stack. There were a lot of medium stacks that were going to play tighter because they wanted to let the shorties (me) bust.

I didn't want to be the first one out. There was a lot of folding and discipline from the start. I was dealt some hands I would blast my chips off with in cash games, but I was able to tap the brakes. I didn't want to lose any chips with marginal holdings.

CT: What else made this final table special for you?

MK: The entire scene – I work there, all my friends and coworkers are there, and my rail was deep and unmatched. One of the most amazing things about this final table was that it was recorded on livestream. That also allowed so many special people from afar in my life to be a part of it. I was also able to go back and review and dissect mistakes and use that as a tool to improve my game.

I encountered some questionable spots and plays during the final table. I came in short-stacked at 24 big blinds and was most certainly the least qualified tournament player at the table. There were some excellent players at this final table, like Craig Varnell, Jared Ward, Will Pengally, and Zak Baron. We played for nearly four hours before the first person busted, and I finally laddered.

One tricky spot in particular was against Craig Varnell, directly to my right. He is definitely a tournament crusher.



tanked and folded A♥ 8♥.

Klaus won the pot of 19,000,000.

MK: How he could find a fold heads-up with two pair is beyond me, but he made an exceptional laydown.

CT: Looking back at that hand, do you wish you slow-played it more instead of putting in the check-raise? What range of hands did you put him on after he bet the turn?

MK: It was for sure a misclick at that moment. I didn't realize 20,000,000 was that many actual chips, considering the stack-to-pot ratio.

I don't think my sizing was terrible, but do we donk/lead river, or do we still check the river and possibly get no value, or do we check-raise the turn to get value from a weaker opponent calling off with a worse hand? Tough to say.

[Later, he jammed his last six big

blinds] with Q-7 offsuit and I called with J-9. A jack fell on the turn, and the rail exploded. It was an unbelievable moment.

CT: What advice do you have for women dipping their toes into tournaments? Where should they look for a deeper understanding of tournament play?

MK: My best advice is first to learn how to lose. Learn how to embrace the downswings and learn how to recover mentally. You cannot be a good player until you know how to lose with a smile and grace. Learning how to lose made me a better and more balanced player. I am much better at navigating those emotions away from and at the tables. I find it astonishing how well I can handle adversity on and off the felt.

For cash players wanting to get into

tournaments – surround yourself with crushers, and it'll eventually rub off. Do what winning players are doing – there is so much helpful content to glean.

CT: How has the growth of women in the game in the card houses in Texas been over the last few years?

MK: My ladies! I've always believed that a lady at the table brings so much value to the game. The ladies in Texas are spicy and fearless! I am super proud to be amongst an amazing tribe of women in the poker industry – too many besties to list.

I hope that seeing more and more women navigate and conquer these spots will encourage more and more women to find the courage to take a shot.

CT: What do you think, if anything, is holding back more women from getting into poker as a recreational hobby or a more serious pursuit?

MK: I don't feel women are being held back in poker. It could just be the inclusive environment I'm in, but in Texas alone, I see some of the best aggro ladies in the game. Even on livestreams, I see ladies left and right, which brings me so much joy. So, it's hard to imagine anything holding ladies back other than finding that courage.

I have a huge passion for the game. I am very immersed in it. Outside of family stuff, poker is my life.

Find Mallory Klaus on Twitter/X @PokerMallory. ♠

THE PROBLEM WITH PLAYING TOO PASSIVELY

By Jonathan Little

In a \$2-\$5 no-limit hold'em cash game, everyone folded around to a presumably decent player on the button who raised to \$20 out of his \$500 effective stack. The small blind folded and our Hero decided to call from the big blind with 8♣ 6♣.

While almost everyone calls in this situation, when facing a large four-big blind raise, Hero should be less inclined to call and more inclined to either fold or three-bet, especially with suited gappers.

I realize that a four-big blind raise may be "standard" in your game, but that does not mean you can call as wide as if the button instead raised to 2.5 big blinds. As the raise size gets larger, you must adjust by defending tighter and potentially three-betting more often. Calling is still reasonable with 8-6 suited, but three-betting will likely lead to better results.

Calling large raises from out of position is one of the main reasons many \$2-\$5 players never move up to higher buy-in games. I would have three-bet to \$70 some portion



of the time (depending on my opponent's preflop strategy) and called the rest. If Hero's hand was a bit weaker, like 8-5 suited, he should just fold to a four-big blind raise and move on to the next one.

The flop came K♠ 9♠ 7♠, giving Hero a flush and straight draw. Hero checked, the button bet \$25 into the \$42 pot, and Hero called.

While Hero is certainly getting the right price to draw to his multitude of outs, check-raising to \$80 is the best option, especially if the opponent tends to continuation bet the flop too often (as many players do).

Check-raising will win the pot immediately some portion of the time and when it doesn't, Hero will be able to continue betting the turn essentially every time.

Hero should also make this check-raise with many of his best made hands, including sets, two pairs, and perhaps some top pairs. This strategy will make him difficult to play against because sometimes he will be value betting and other times he will be semi-bluffing.

Another reason to check-raise is that if Hero instead calls and improves on the turn, the opponent will likely check behind with most of his non-premium hands, and if Hero decides to lead the turn when he improves, he takes away his opponent's opportunity to bluff.

For the most part, check-raising your high equity draws that have no showdown value is the best play.

The turn was the K♠. Hero checked, the button bet \$40 into the \$92 pot, and Hero called.

The king is certainly a bad card for Hero since the button should have essentially all kings in his range and would usually bet them on the flop and turn. The opponent may also continue value betting with some nines.

While folding is still out of the question due to Hero's excellent pot odds, calling is a viable option. However, as on the flop, if Hero improves on the river, he will have a difficult time getting paid. For this reason, plus the fact that Hero would like to also check-raise some of his own kings, he should again check-raise, this time to about \$130.

It is always rough when you are against trips, but when you aren't, you will put your opponent in a difficult spot where even if he decides to make a big turn call, he may fold to a river bet, or you may improve.

Of course, if Hero knew the opponent would only bet the

turn with trips and better made hands, he should instead call because he is behind and his opponent will not fold to a raise.

The river was the K♥.

This is a tough spot, but Hero should at least consider leading, given he has no showdown value and would strongly consider betting if he had quads (although there may be no quads in his range because he would have raised his kings on the flop or turn).

A small river bet of \$55 into the \$172 pot is quite nice because the opponent will almost certainly fold all of his hands worse than a full house, many of which may still be in his range if he bets the flop and turn with all his possible draws (Notice all the draws that missed).

A reason not to lead this particular hand is because knowing the 8♣ and 6♣ cannot be in the opponent's hand makes it a bit less likely that he has a busted flush draw (one of the hands Hero wants to make fold). That said, since Hero should realistically have no quads, he cannot justify leading without some sort of a read on the opponent that justifies making the exploitative play.

Both players checked and Hero lost to Q♠ J♠.

If you want to apply more pressure to your opponents, one of the ways you can accomplish this is by bluffing. I created a simple flowchart to help you bluff like a pro. This flowchart has 11 questions you should always ask yourself when deciding if you should bluff. I also recorded a short video that shows you how to use this flowchart by going through two hand examples! ♠



Jonathan Little is a two-time WPT winner and the 2024 PokerGO Cup champion with nearly \$9 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.



Get my free Bluffing Flowchart and Video and bluff like a pro

SPICE UP YOUR HOME GAME: POINT-BASED DRAMAHA VARIANTS

By Kevin Haney

Dramaha is a five-card split pot game combining Draw and Omaha, and has become a very popular genre of poker in home games and mixed rotations all over the country. It's the poker equivalent of a second-chance, scratch-off lottery ticket. If your Draw holding fails to materialize the dealer might deliver what you need in Omaha, and vice-versa.

What wins in Draw varies depending on what particular game you are playing, and in past installments we introduced variants where the winner of the Draw hand was simply the best pure high holding, the lowest ranked

hand, or perhaps the superior badugi.

In this issue we'll look at other variants where the winner is determined by the number of points within your hand. In all of the games described below, face cards are worth zero, aces count as one, and all other ranks (deuces through tens) are worth their listed amount.

In **Dramaha 49** the goal is to obtain the highest number of points; the best possible hand is 10-10-10-9 which sums up to forty-nine, hence the name. In no other game are you explicitly hoping to get dealt middling cards, making it a unique form of poker. It's mildly interesting

to note that while 49 is the best possible holding, it is not the nuts since lesser amounts effectively block the ability of anyone else to beat you.

For example, if you make a 47 (e.g. 10-10-10-9-8) there are not enough tens and nines left in the deck for an opponent to make anything greater than 45 (10-9-9-9-8). 46 would constitute the technical nuts as you can only be tied (10-10-10-8-8 versus 10-9-9-9-9).

In a 52-card deck there are 220 total points, so the average card is worth around 4.2 points, making 21 points the approximate dealt total. If you get dealt Q-10-9-8-6 you currently have 33 points, which is way above average. Assuming you discard the queen (which you should do the majority of the time), you'll have an opportunity to accumulate more on the draw.

While this is a holding you are going to be quite happy to play, it's important to note that starting behind in points to another player is obviously possible, and puts you in relatively bad shape. For example, if someone else was dealt K-10-9-9-7 they would have 35 points for a two-point lead heading into the draw, assuming you both end up ditching your high card.

For the sake of simplicity, we will ignore how various boards impact the race, but with 42 cards left in the deck there are 14 cards (10 remaining face cards and four aces) to catch that would be automatic losers no matter what your opponent receives. And when catching one of the four deuces, you can only hope to tie. Overall, 43% of the deck (18/42) is really bad news unless it helps you in Omaha, but at that juncture you would often be playing for just half of the pot.

When the dust settles, you only have around a 34% chance of winning the Draw side. While that is not a catastrophe, it's less than ideal since the basic tenet of any form of Dramaha is that it's very important to be in good shape for that half of the pot. With Q-10-9-8-6 playing from behind is going to be an unavoidable situation except for very rare circumstances where perhaps you face a cold three-bet from tight players, or an early position open from Broomcorn's uncle.

However, we should be careful not to overrate hands such as Q-9-8-8-6 (31 points) that can more easily have an uphill struggle in Draw. All we did was exchange the 10 for an eight, but in a game where everyone is going for the same premium cards it can make all the difference. Now if someone appears to like their hand it's dangerous as all of the tens are live, and being several points behind would make you a massive underdog.

Dramaha Zero is the exact opposite in that the lowest point total wins. In this game you want kings, queens, and jacks, and there are a total of 12 of the best cards one can be dealt as opposed to the four tens in Dramaha 49.

Aces are also quite valuable in that they are only worth one point and can aid significantly to your Omaha prospects. Some good Big O type hands such as A♦ K♠ 2♣ 3♦ 9♣ can scoop pots in Dramaha Zero because when they catch another face card (in exchange for the nine), they will only have six points and usually have good prospects in Omaha as well.

This aspect probably makes starting behind in points a bit less of an issue than it is in Dramaha 49 since it's easier to leapfrog into a winner on both sides.

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 World Poker Tour Rolling Thunder
\$3,500 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Shawn Daniels
3,500,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 82%
After Flop: 80%
After Turn: 95%



Harvey Castro
12,600,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 18%
After Flop: 20%
After Turn: 5%



PREFLOP

With four players remaining and blinds of 75,000-150,000 with a big blind ante of 150,000, Shawn Daniels raised to 300,000 from the cutoff. Harvey Castro called from the big blind.

FLOP



Castro checked, and Daniels bet 200,000. Castro called.

TURN



Both players checked.

RIVER



Castro bet 2,000,000, and Daniels folded.

COMMENTARY:

This hand played out standardly preflop. As Castro is the big stack, he can afford to defend all his suited hands. On this particular flop, Daniels' continuation-bet sizing is fine, though perhaps a check is preferable with this particular holding. He would rather be c-betting a hand like pocket jacks with a club as it would unblock more of Castro's double backdoor bluffs. EV-wise, however, his decision to c-bet or check is indifferent. The 4♥ on the turn was interesting because Castro will have more fours in his calling range and should lead some of the time. Castro would also lead with a lot of his turned flush draws and the gutshot straight draws he called the flop with. Given his specific holding, however, he had a clear check, which Daniels reciprocated. Castro hit the jackpot making sevens full on the river and went with an overbet of 2 million into 1.25 million, which is an ideal sizing on the double-paired board. He should be using this size with almost all of his full houses as well as his complete air that makes it to the river. Daniels' hands were tied and he made the easy snap-fold. He'd have to consider hero calling with some Q-X, K-K, A-A, and even 5-5 and 6-6. Both players played this hand quite well and, given Castro's river sizing, it's clear he's on his solver game.

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

Don't make the common rookie mistake of assuming tens are worth zero! Surprisingly this comes up relative frequently; perhaps confusion is caused by the fact that they are Broadway cards.

Then there is Dramaha 21 where the Draw side is won by the player getting closest to 21 without going over. Similar to blackjack, you can "hit" by drawing cards in order to try and improve your position, however, if you accumulate more than 21 points your Draw hand busts and the holding is then only eligible to contest the Omaha side. It's worth noting that aces can only be played as one point and not 11 as you could do on the casino floor.

When multiple players tie in the '21' hand there is a tie-breaker in place to determine the winner, and that would be whoever uses the most cards to make their hand. For example, A-9-6-3-2 (a five-card 21) would beat A-K-10-5-3-2, which is considered a four-card holding due to the use of the king. Remember, the king is worth zero points and considered to be 'invisible.'

The best possible dealt holding is probably A♦ A♣ 8♦ 8♠ 3♥ as it's a five-card 21 and also has a large amount of Omaha equity. In contrast, J♣ 6♠ 6♥ 6♦ 2♦ is a four-card 20 and a likely trap hand perhaps only worthy of a late-position steal. Usually, you'll have a pile a nothing in Omaha and against many players would probably end up losing the '21' side more than one might suspect.

As for playability, I'll rate Dramaha 49 (5 out of 10), Dramaha Zero (8 out of 10), and Dramaha 21 (6 out of 10).

Dramaha 49 typically isn't that well received, and while it's not that hard to explain to new players, counting the points in your hand is not something that many

people like to do. It also has the problem of not having enough of the good middling cards to go around, which effectively curbs the action. If the action is raised and three-bet by tighter players, it's almost a waste of time for everyone else to check their hands.

In contrast, Dramaha Zero has 16 premium cards (aces through jacks) that more often creates the desired multi-way action and big pots. And these same cards are also useful in Omaha High.

Dramaha 21 is somewhat of a gimmicky game and in my somewhat limited experience was not a fan favorite. No one had a great sense of what a playable hand looked like, thus the game moved a little slow and was on the tight side even amongst a bunch of action players. And after a few rounds we ended up taking it out of the rotation.

We may have been unlucky in that the dealer just happened to deliver a few cold rounds, so the game may be worth a try in your home game sometime simply because it's quite different than any other game out there. Plus it's Dramaha so it can't be all that bad. ♠



Kevin Haney is a former actuary but left the corporate job to focus on his passions for poker and fitness. The certified personal trainer owned a gym in New Jersey, but has since moved to Las Vegas. He started playing the game back in 2003, and particularly enjoys taking new players interested in mixed games under his wing and quickly making them proficient in all variants. Learn more or just say hello with an email to haneyk612@gmail.com.

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 World Poker Tour Rolling Thunder
\$3,500 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Shawn Daniels
8,100,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 24%
After Flop: 13%
After Turn: 5%



Harvey Castro
12,000,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 65%
After Flop: 86%
After Turn: 95%

PREFLOP

With two players remaining and blinds of 100,000-200,000 with a big blind ante of 200,000, Shawn Daniels raised to 400,000 from the button. Harvey Castro called from the big blind.

FLOP



Castro checked, and Daniels bet 600,000. Castro called.

TURN



Both players checked.

RIVER



Castro checked, and Daniels bet 2,200,000. Castro called.

COMMENTARY:

After battling all day at the final table, it was only fitting that Shawn Daniels and Harvey Castro ended up squaring off heads-up for the illustrious *WPT* title. This hand started innocently enough, with Daniels having a clear raise and Castro having a clear call. Since they were playing 40 bigs effective, the button/small blind should be raising to two bigs with 60% of their hands, and 6-4 offsuit is definitely included in that range. At this stack depth, Castro should only be folding the bottom 12.7% of his range, making 9-6 offsuit a straightforward call. Daniels flopped third pair while Castro made second pair. Daniels opted to bet 60% pot and Castro made the call. The 5♣ gave Castro a virtual lock on the hand and both players made a sensible check. Daniels, however, hit an incredible two-outer on the river. Castro checked and Daniels put in a pot-sized bet. Castro, after using one of his final three time extensions, decided to make the call and was shown the bad news. Castro could have instead put in a blocker-bet that could get value from some initial bluffs containing a five, some ace-highs, while minimizing damage against better hands. Instead, he was met with the hammer and was faced with a really tough decision. Understandably, it was hard to put Daniels on a four given his line.

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

Getting The Max: The Poker Community Knows How To Rally For A Cause

Maxine Preston Honored In Birmingham With Memorial Poker Tournament

By Blaise Bourgeois

Sleazy. Grim. Desperate. Poker rooms can sometimes have a foul energy about them that gets painstakingly exhausting, even to the seasoned pro.

But on this particular Friday night, the poker room at the Grosvenor Birmingham Hill Street Casino was a place of magic.

The stakes were small, just £40. But this game wasn't about winning and making money. Rather, it was a night of celebration and remembrance.

"The G" played host to a memorial tournament honoring Maxine Preston, a nightly tournament regular who recently passed after a battle with motor neuron disease (MND), better known stateside as Lou Gehrig's disease or ALS.

"Max," as she was known at the table, made the local casino her second home. Michelle Bricknell-Sheils, who organized the memorial tournament, can still recall the night they first crossed paths about 12 years ago.

"Max and I met at Hill Street," Michelle recalled. "She was playing in a casino for the first time after making a pub poker final."

"We got to chatting, I was there for the nightly. I told her she should come back, now that she realized it wasn't as scary as she thought. She sent me a drink over, I sent one back, and we promised to meet outside the next week. From that moment on, we were firm drinking and poker mates."

The two became inseparable, traveling across Europe to play poker together while knocking back several drinks in the process.

"We took poker as a bit of a laugh and it was always a bonus if we cashed. We would always say, 'Right! Less drinking next time and let's try to concentrate.' That never happened though."

The memorial featured plenty of reminders of Max's infectious energy. Some of her favorite sweets decorated each seat, and friends popped bubbly at nearly every table. The casino even gave away free drinks to players who won with Max's favorite hand, which was K-Q.

"I was pretty numb. It had been so emotional since she passed on Feb. 19," Michelle admitted. "I just wanted it to go well and for the whole night to be about her."

Given the buy-in and the fact that we were raising money



for MND awareness, I decided to personify the true Max spirit. I wasn't about to take this tournament seriously.

10-6 suited from under-the-gun? It's in there!

Hell, some of Max's friends at the table had literally never played poker before, so I wanted to contribute my good vibes to the party. (However, that didn't stop one of the regulars from performing an incredibly-obvious angle on one of them... in a memorial tournament!)

The turnout was larger than anyone could have imagined, with the tournament attracting a surprising 137 entries. After buy-ins, add-ons, donations, and

more, the tournament raised £1,418, or just under \$2,000.

I was also lucky enough to be seated next to my girlfriend, CoinPoker's Peggy Crawford, and we were taking the night off from our self-induced, month-long alcohol ban. (We're getting our bodies ready for the *Irish Open* after all.)

Naturally, I rivered the nuts against her with K-Q and was one of the first players to get a free drink. I had recently flush-over-flushed her in a main event in Slovenia for piles, so needless to say, I'm not on her good side at the moment.

We were just about on the 18-player, £80 money bubble when Michelle moved to my table with about 15-20 big blinds. She was going to cruise into the money but, suddenly, the poker gods decided to start having some fun. The short stack went all in and UTG+1 shoved over the top. Michelle looked down at A♠ K♠.

"Normally, I would have folded. I hadn't invested any chips, and I was doing okay. But if I wanted to win, I had to take chances. I felt like a drama queen - I had A-K suited, but I really didn't want to go out. I called and shouted, 'One time, Max!' I was up against A-J and J-10, so I was ahead anyway. The flop came down all spades. It felt like Max was there."

Michelle would end up busting me in 16th place a short time later. As I left the table, I couldn't help but feel that something almost divine was happening in the casino that night. But seeing as it was already 2 a.m., I wasn't going to be there to see it.

I couldn't just cash out, however. I took my £80 min-cash to a slot machine downstairs, expecting to quickly

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COMMENTARY

give it back. After just four £5 spins, I banged off a bonus game and hit a ridiculous jackpot for over £1,200.

I then took the remainder to the roulette table and put a fiver on 8, 13, and 22. Boom! I banged off a 13 and walked out of there with about £1,400 in my pocket.

As I left, I thought to myself, “Michelle’s gonna win that tournament, huh?”

Sure enough, when I woke up the next morning, Peggy showed me a photo of Michelle with the trophy in one hand and a photo of Max in the other. It’s one of the most poetic things I’ve ever seen in my poker career.

As it turns out, Max had Michelle’s back the entire way. Near the final table bubble, in a blind-on-blind spot Michelle cracked pocket aces with A-6 offsuit (a 6.5% chance!), making a four-card diamond flush on the river.

She would then crush the final table and, after knocking out the third-place finisher, found herself nearly even in chips with Herui Liu.

Liu, in a gracious show of class, offered a chop to give Michelle both the win and the trophy.

“He said, ‘I told myself if her and I get heads-up, no matter what the chips are, I will offer her the win and chop the cash.’ He said his mom had also died, and that completely



broke me,” Michelle recalled.

Though the £970 was far from her biggest cash, it was the sweetest victory she’ll ever experience.

“As soon as I realized that I’d won, the tears came. Because I genuinely didn’t think for one second that I was going to. I laughed and thought, ‘Max would have absolutely loved this.’ She was one of my biggest supporters in poker and in life.”

Michelle and her family are hoping that this will become a yearly celebration of Max’s unforgettable spirit, which had nothing sleazy, grim, or desperate about it.

“I hope people remember how short life actually is and enjoy it while they can, as we all forget and get bogged down with day-to-day things,” Michelle said. “The tournament represented what a great community the poker world really is and how we all come together when needed.”

I, for one, cannot wait to return to Birmingham in 2026 for the second-annual Maxine Preston Memorial Tournament. ♠



Blaise Bourgeois is a WSOP Circuit ring winner, poker journalist, and contributing columnist for Card Player. Find him on Twitter/X @BlaiseBourgeois.

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 World Poker Tour Rolling Thunder
\$3,500 No-Limit Hold’em Main Event



Shawn Daniels
12,900,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 83%
After Flop: 97%
After Turn: 100%



Harvey Castro
7,200,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 16%
After Flop: 3%
After Turn: 0%

PREFLOP

With two players remaining and blinds of 100,000-200,000 with a big blind ante of 200,000, Shawn Daniels raised to 400,000 from the button. Harvey Castro called from the big blind.



Castro checked, and Daniels bet 300,000. Castro check-raised to 775,000, and Daniels called.



Castro bet 900,000, and Daniels called.



Castro checked, and Daniels bet 600,000. Castro folded.

COMMENTARY:

Shawn Daniels, who battled back to get the chip lead, must have been buzzing to get dealt pocket kings preflop, especially considering the final two were still playing 36 big blinds effective. After a standard open and call, the paired board was sure to annoy Daniels some. His small 1.5 big blind continuation bet made sense, though he could have checked and turned his kings into a two-street hand. Castro found a small raise with his backdoor flush draw, as he would with his trips, his 3-X, and his other smaller backdoor flush draws. Daniels made the call. Harvey went for a second barrel on the 6♠ turn, trying to get Daniels off weak floats, including ace-high. A small bet wasn’t going to make Daniels go away, however. In hindsight, Castro might have chosen to give up after not picking up any additional equity. Unfortunately for him, the eight he was trying to represent arrived on the river, which also gave Daniels a very strong full house. Only a select few hands should attempt to bluff this river, such as 4-2 suited, 5-2 suited, 5-4 suited and some 9-7 suited and 10-7 suited. Castro wisely gave up. Daniels, meanwhile, went for a cheeky bet of about 15% that was met with a quick fold. This could be explained with two lines of thought. First, players tend to check quads at a much higher frequency than they should and Daniels wanted to exercise caution. On the other hand, if Castro had quads, he could have jammed trying to get called by something like exactly what Daniels was holding. If Daniels doesn’t think Castro has quads anymore, he should go all-in with the hope his opponent might find a hero call. The blinds went up immediately after the end of the hand, leaving Harvey with just 20 big blinds. After a wild back-and-forth finish, Daniels would emerge as the champion.

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

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MARCH	March 31-May 18	DeepStack Extravaganza II	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
APRIL	April 16-May 5	WPT Choctaw	Choctaw Casino Resort ■ Durant, OK
	April 24-May 4	Mission Rungood - Florida	bestbet ■ Jacksonville, FL
MAY	May 1-12	WSOP Circuit - North Carolina	Harrah's ■ Cherokee, NC
	May 1-12	Mission Rungood - Bay Area	Graton Resort & Casino ■ Rohnert Park, CA
	May 8-19	WSOP Circuit - Southern Indiana	Caesars ■ Elizaeth, IN
	May 9-24	WSOP Circuit & Tournament of Champions	Commerce Casino ■ Commerce, CA
	May 15-26	Deep Stack Poker Series	Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino ■ Hollywood, FL
	May 16-18	East Coast Poker Championships	Turning Stone Casino & Resort ■ Verona, NY
	May 19-July 31	DeepStack Championship Poker Series	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	May 21-July 14	Summer Classic	Wynn ■ Las Vegas, NV
	May 23-July 13	Summer Open	Orleans Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	May 27-July 2	Grand Poker Series	Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	May 27-July 16	World Series of Poker	Horseshoe Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
JUNE	June 5-15	PokerAtlas Tour - St. Augustine	bestbet ■ St. Augustine, FL
	June 15-July 7	Aria High Roller Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV

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7:00 p.m. NLH, \$120 AO \$5 KO \$25

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7:00 p.m. NLH, \$95 AO \$5

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SUNDAY

12:00 p.m. NLH, \$200

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THURSDAY

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$100

SATURDAY

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$100

SUNDAY

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

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

TUESDAY

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

WEDNESDAY

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$100

THURSDAY

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

FRIDAY

7:00 p.m. NLH, \$160

SATURDAY

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SUNDAY

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POKER GLOSSARY



Action Card - A card that causes an increase in betting.

Air - A bad hand with little to no value.

Angle (Shooting) - An unethical play used to gain information or an advantage.

Backdoor - A draw needing two streets to complete.

Balance - Playing different hands in the same way so opponents can't read you.

Bankroll - The amount of money you have to play poker with.

Barrel - A continuation bet followed by a bet on the turn and/or river.

Blocker - Holding one of your opponent's outs.

Bluff Catcher - A weak hand that can only beat a bluff.

Bounty - A prize earned for a knockout in a tournament.

Brick - A blank card that is unlikely to have helped.

Broadway - A straight to the ace.

Bubble - The time period right before a tournament reaches the money.

Burn - A card that is removed by the dealer to prevent cheating.

Calling Station - A loose, passive player who rarely folds.

Chip Race - Coloring up the smallest chips in circulation during a tournament.

Chop - A split of the pot.

Coin Flip - A situation where the odds for each player are roughly 50/50.

Collusion - Working with another player to cheat.

Continuation Bet - When the preflop aggressor makes another bet on the flop.

Crying Call - A call from a player who does not believe his hand is best.

Dead Money - A player with no chance of winning. Also, extra money in the pot.

Donk Bet - An early position bet by a player who was not the aggressor in the previous betting round.

Drawing Dead - When your hand can no longer win.

Drawing Live - When your hand is behind but can still draw out.

Effective Stack - The smallest stack among two players in a heads-up pot.

Eight-Or-Better - A qualifier common in high-low split games.

Equity - The mathematical expected value of your hand.

Expected Value - The weighted average of what you should profit in the long run.

Family Pot - When every player at the table sees the flop or fourth street.

Felted - To lose all your chips, such that there are none left on the felt.

Float - To call with a weak hand with the intention of bluffing later.

Freeroll - A tournament with no buy-in, or a tournament stake with no makeup.

GTO - Game Theory Optimal play aiming for an unexploitable strategy.

Gutshot - An inside straight draw.

Hero Call - Calling with a relatively weak hand when you suspect a bluff.

Hollywood - Exaggerating and overacting to sell strength or weakness.

Horse - A player financially backed by someone else.

ICM - The Independent Chip Model assigns monetary value to tournament chips.

Implied Odds - The additional chips you expect to win if your draw improves.

Juice - Rake, or the fee collected by the house or casino.

Kill - A button that temporarily increases the stakes of the game.

LAG - A loose, aggressive player.

Limp - To enter a pot by calling the minimum bet rather than raise.

Muck - To fold.

Nit - A rock, who rarely takes risks or gives action, and only plays premium cards.

Nuts - The best possible hand on a given board.

Open - To bet first.

Orbit - A full rotation of the blinds at the table.

Overbet - To make a bet that is more than the current size of the pot.

Overcall - To call a bet after others have already called.

Paint - A face card jack, queen, or king.

Pat - A hand that no longer needs any more draws.

Polarized - When a player's range is split between either very strong hands or air.

Quarter - To win 1/4 or 3/4 of a pot by tying a hand in a high-low split game.

Rabbit Hunt - To look at future cards after folding and the hand is complete.

Railbird - Someone who hangs out on the sidelines of a poker room.

Rainbow - Three or four cards of different suits.

Range - The possible starting hands a player might have given their action.

Ratholing - Going south or sneaking your chips off the table during the game.

Scoop - To win both halves of the pot in a high-low split game.

Semi-Bluff - To bluff with a drawing hand that could improve to the best hand.

Slowroll - To delay or avoid showing when you have the best hand.

Snow - Holding on to bad cards in draw poker in order to bluff.

Straddle - A voluntary bet placed before the deal to increase pot size and incentivize action.

TAG - A tight, aggressive player.

Tell - A detectable change in a player's behavior that gives away the strength of their hand.

Tilt - Frustration or anger that leads to poor play.

Variance - The statistical measure of how results differ from expectation.

VPIP - The percentage of hands voluntarily played preflop.

Wet Board - A dynamic board with many several possible draws.

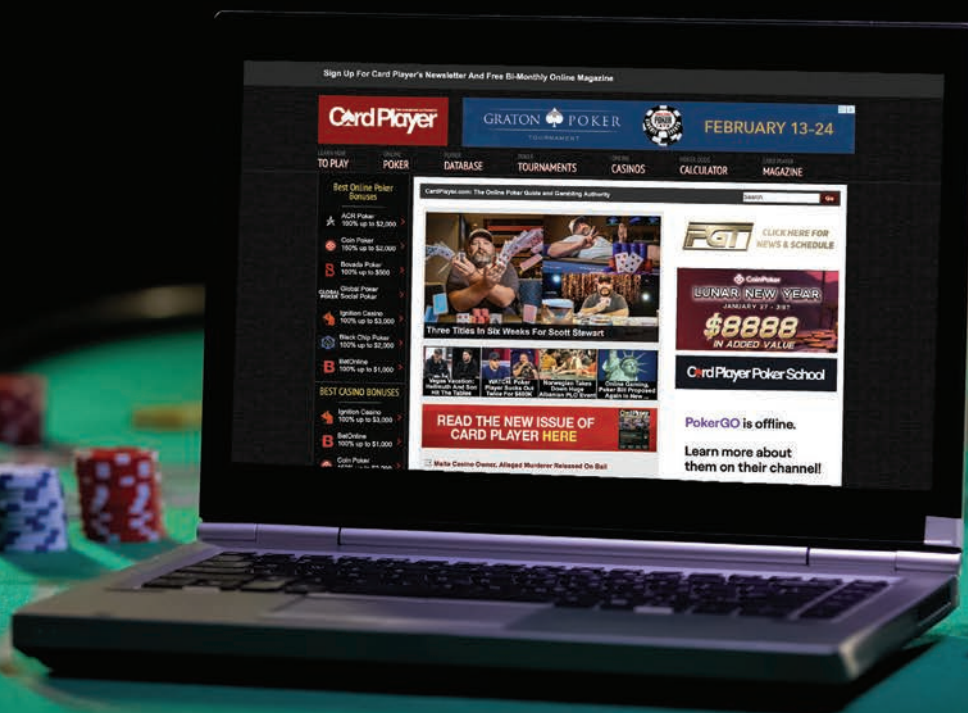
Wheel - A five-high straight.



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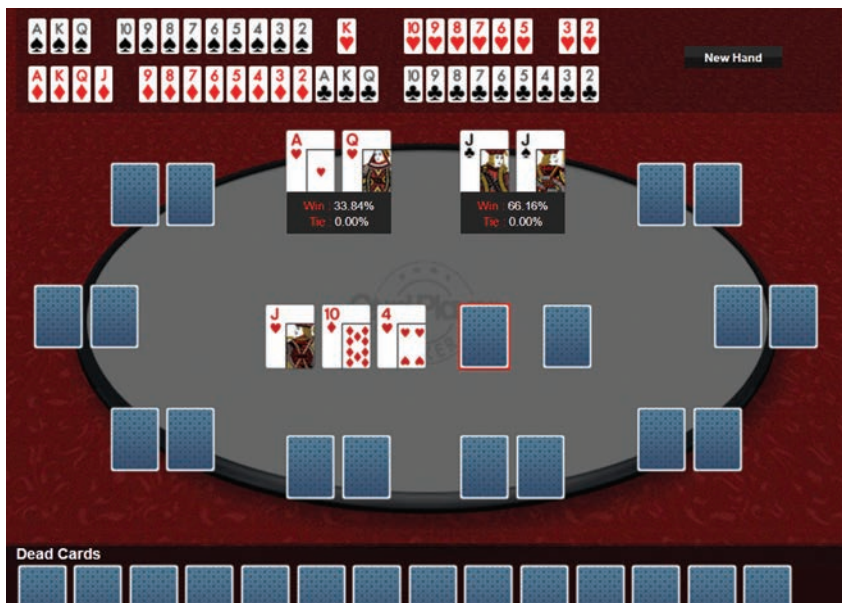
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CALCULATING OUTS

Outs	Situation	After The Flop	After The Turn
21	Straight And Flush Draw, With Two Overcards	70%	45%
20		68%	43%
19		65%	41%
18	Straight And Flush Draw, With One Overcard	62%	39%
17		60%	37%
16		57%	35%
15	Straight And Flush Draw	54%	33%
14		51%	30%
13	Flush Draw With Gutshot	48%	28%
12	Flush Draw With One Overcard	45%	26%
11	Straight Draw With One Overcard	42%	24%
10		38%	22%
9	Flush Draw	35%	20%
8	Straight Draw	32%	17%
7		28%	15%
6	Two Live Overcards	24%	13%
5		20%	11%
4	Gutshot Straight Draw	17%	9%
3	Need To Pair Kicker	13%	7%
2	Pocket Pair Needs To Make A Set	8%	4%
1	Set Needs To Make Quads	4%	2%

HAND MATCHUPS

Situation	Example	Odds	Percent
Higher Pair vs. Lower Pair	J♠ J♣ vs. 7♥ 7♦	4.09-1	80.3% vs. 19.7%
Pair vs. Two Over Cards	7♠ 7♣ vs. A♥ J♦	1.23-1	55.1% vs. 44.9%
Pair vs. Two Under Cards	Q♠ Q♣ vs. 9♥ 7♦	4.77-1	82.7% vs. 17.3%
Pair vs. One Overcard	J♠ J♣ vs. A♥ 7♦	2.50-1	71.4% vs. 28.6%
Two Higher Cards vs. Two Lower Cards	Q♠ J♣ vs. 6♥ 5♦	1.70-1	62.9% vs. 37.1%

*Approximate Percentages



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PLAYING OUT OF POSITION WITH A-K

By Jonathan Little

Join more than 120,000 players worldwide who have taken their game to the next level. To develop your poker skills and learn how to crush games, check out PokerCoaching.com/CardPlayer.



In a \$500 tournament, you have 193,000 at blinds of 1,500-3,000. Everyone folds to you in the lojack and you raise to 7,000 with A♦ K♥. The hijack, who is a strong, loose-aggressive player, calls and everyone else folds. The flop comes 5♥ 3♥ 2♠.

Question 1: Should you check, bet 6,000, bet 12,000, or bet 18,000?

Answer: You should check. Betting small and checking are fine options, but starting with a check is best. You should expect your loose-aggressive opponent to call a flop bet a lot, and occasionally raise. Instead, check and see what develops.

You check and your opponent bets 10,000.

Question 2: Should you fold, call, raise to 26,000, or raise to 38,000?

Answer: Calling is best. You have a gutshot, two overcards, and a backdoor flush draw, so folding is out of the question. While some of your pairs and flush draws should raise, your A-K (a clear marginal made hand that beats lots of bluffs) much prefers to call.

You call and the turn is the 3♦. You check and your opponent bets 25,000.

Question 3: Should you fold, call, raise to 65,000, or go all-in?

Answer: The GTO strategy mixes between calling and folding. Since you are against someone who may be inclined to bluff too often, you should call more often with your bluff catchers, like your A-K. Just be sure to protect your calling range by also including lots of pairs.

You call and the river is the 3♣. You check and your opponent bets 60,000.

Question 4: Should you fold, call, or go all-in?

Answer: The GTO strategy again mixes between calling and folding, although it usually folds. If your opponent thinks your checking range is protected with numerous overpairs (now full houses), they should be less inclined to bluff on this river.

If you are known to be a bit of a calling station, you should be more inclined to fold. That said, if your opponent will bluff with all hands that he does not think can win at the showdown, you should make the crying call.

You fold and your opponent reveals A♠ 3♠ for quads. ♠



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