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HISTORIC SUMMER**

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TIED TO MAFIA-RIGGED
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





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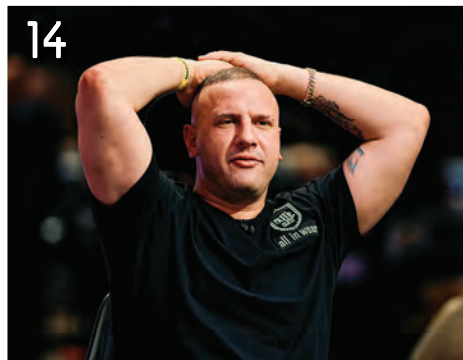
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NEWS FROM THE GAMBLING WORLD

MAFIA-RIGGED POKER GAMES AND SPORTS BETTING SHENANIGANS: NBA COACHES, PLAYERS EMBROILED IN SCANDAL

By Card Player News Team



Two NBA coaches and a current player were arrested as part of a large-scale FBI probe into illegal gambling operations in late October.

Federal law enforcement arrested more than 30 people from two different stings. Those arrests included Portland Trail Blazers head coach and NBA Hall of Famer Chauncey Billups, former player and Cleveland Cavaliers assistant coach Damon Jones, and current Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier.

FBI officials said the arrests were part of two fraud-related investigations, one for sports betting and another for “rigged poker games.”

“The charges and arrests that were taken down across the country range from wire fraud, money laundering, extortion, robbery, and illegal gambling,” said FBI Director Kash Patel. “This FBI will leave no room for any perpetrating of crime across this country.”

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Joseph Nocella described the poker-related arrests as part of a nationwide scheme using “high-tech cheating technology to steal millions of dollars from victims in underground games that were secretly fixed.”

“Your winning streak has ended,” said Nocella at a press conference. “Your luck has run out. Violating the law is a losing proposition, and you can bet on that.”

As it turns out, the government loves bad gambling puns. The investigation surrounding cheated poker games was dubbed “Operation Royal Flush,” while the sports betting investigation was titled “Operation Nothing But Bet.”

Within Operation Royal Flush, the feds said there were two types of players – “face cards” and “fish.” The

face cards were the celebrities used to attract the wealthy gamblers, and even some poker pros, to the rigged games. Those wealthy gamblers were called the fish.

Mafia Involvement

According to the FBI, the people organizing the games were incredibly dangerous, and tied to several organized crime families. The rigged poker game was described as a wide-ranging cheating operation centered in the New York area run by the Bonanno, Gambino, Lucchese, and Genovese crime families.

The crime families were based in New York, but the game moved around. According to Nocella, they also held rigged games in Miami and Las Vegas. Enforcement of debt collection often included “threats and intimidation,” and organizers allegedly laundered funds using multiple shell companies and cryptocurrency transfers.

When the news broke, a 2023 video clip from Matt Berkey’s former podcast, *Only Friends*, made the rounds on social media and was even played on numerous sports talk shows.

“There was this game. It started in LA and it came to Vegas for a few days. It was all built around Chauncey Billups,” said Berkey on the podcast. “I had heard about the game and the person who told me about it was like ‘Look, I know the game runners. I am telling you 100% this game is on the up and up.’ And I was like ‘Well, I know a lot of people involved and I’m telling you 100% that it is *not* on the up and up.’”

Berkey went on to say that the pros eventually agreed that the game was cheated.

“It was obviously for sure confirmed to be cheated,” said Berkey. “People who clearly didn’t even understand



the rules of no-limit hold'em are jamming hundreds of big blinds in with a gutty and just drilling it.”

As the clip circulated on sports talk shows, Berkey even went on the popular *Pat McAfee Show* on *ESPN* to give further breakdowns of what he knew.

Of the three arrests, Billups was the one most connected to the poker games, utilized as one of the face cards used to attract high-stakes players. According to federal officials, the face cards knew the games were rigged and took a cut of the fishes' losses.

Jones was also arrested as an alleged face card, but was also alleged to be involved in the sports betting scheme. Rozier was only accused of involvement in the sports betting ring, which used insider information about player availability to make bets. If gamblers knew that a star player was nursing a hidden injury or would be a late scratch for a game before the sportsbooks did, they would have a big advantage.

Rigged Shuffle Machines, X-Ray Tables, And Marked Cards

In the days following the arrests, authorities released more details about the cheating methods.

The poker game used multiple methods to cheat. One of the most common was a rigged shuffle machine, which was recently featured in a *Wired* exposé.

The game used a DeckMate2 machine that would read the cards in the deck and know which player at the table would end up with the best hand. That information was sent to an off-site accomplice who relayed the information back to a player in on the scheme through simple cell phone texts. The player receiving the information was called “the quarterback.” The quarterback would signal to the other players who had the winning hand.

Another cheating method included poker chip trays that could read the cards using a small camera.

Sometimes organizers went with a more traditional cheating method – marked cards. Investigators said some involved used special contact lenses or glasses to read pre-marked cards.

Lastly, authorities said the games also used an “x-ray table” that could read cards face-down. But Berkey clarified in an interview that it wasn't actually an x-ray. It was infrared technology that was synced with the card deck.

More Names Revealed

As more time elapsed, more celebrity names were leaked. According to former *ESPN* reporter and podcast

host Pablo Torre, who was first to report the story, Pro Football Hall of Famer and former Chargers tight end Antonio Gates hosted and played in the Miami poker games.

Torre also reported that Los Angeles Clippers head coach Tyronn Lue played in the same games as Billups in Las Vegas. However, Torre's source said they didn't play at the same table.

NBA Hall of Famer Kevin Garnett was also allegedly at one of the Los Angeles games, but did not play. Torre reported that Garnett thought he was going to an “after-party” and ended up at the poker game, and left the game “early.”

Neither Lue nor Garnett commented on the reports, but Gates vehemently denied any involvement. None of the three had been charged with a crime at press time.

While there are no formal charges, there's clear evidence that Lue is at least a poker fan. Furthermore, he has a close relationship with Billups. According to reports, Lue is the godfather to Billups' children. He was also spotted on Brent Hart's rail during the final table of the \$5,000 no-limit hold'em event at the 2024 *World Series of Poker*. After doubling up six-handed en route to a victory, Hart ran to his rail and celebrated with Lue.

Congress Gets Involved

The poker world may be fixated on the rigged games, but it looks like the larger fallout could come from the sports betting scheme.

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation has sent a letter to NBA Commissioner Adam Silver asking for more information on the league's gambling policy and details of any ongoing investigations, and is calling for him to testify.

The league had previously cleared Rozier of similar accusations in 2023, but Congress' upper chamber wants details to make sure findings weren't swept under the rug.

According to the letter, the committee is concerned about possible integrity issues and corruption involving game outcomes. The committee wants all documents on any investigations related to players, coaches, owners, or general managers since 2020.

When widespread scandals hit professional sports, Congress has a history of getting involved. In March 2005, lawmakers hauled several high-profile Major League Baseball players and executives to answer questions about alleged steroid use in the game. ♠

CALIFORNIA CARDROOMS SCORE KEY LEGAL WIN IN BATTLE AGAINST TRIBES

By Sean Chaffin

A judge has rejected California tribes' latest effort to curtail cardrooms from offering Las Vegas-style table games.

Superior Court Judge Lauri Damrell dismissed the case, claiming federal law covers tribal-related gambling. Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 549 in September 2024. The bill gave tribes until the start of last April to bring a suit against the state's licensed card rooms to see if they fall within state law.

The tribes filed suit on Jan. 2, the first day they possibly could.

Damrell's decision is now a major setback to that effort. In her ruling, she said that since tribes are sovereign nations, they lacked standing in the lawsuit. Federal gambling laws trumped California law.

"The court is mindful that previous efforts to resolve this longstanding dispute – whether through regulatory action, legislation, ballot initiatives, or litigation – have been unavailing," Damrell wrote in the ruling.

She added that if it were within her bounds to issue a definite ruling, she would. However, she doesn't believe she has the jurisdiction to do so.

"[The court] recognizes the genuine desire, shared by many stakeholders, including the California Legislature, to reach the merits and achieve a final resolution. The court does not take lightly the importance of the issues at stake and, were it within its authority to provide a definitive resolution, it would endeavor to do so."

Tribes have worked for years to limit the games cardrooms can offer. Under California's legal landscape, the tribes have exclusivity over slot machines and house-backed table games like blackjack.

Cardrooms have circumvented this rule by offering similar, non-house backed games. A cardroom will have a third-party back the game and employ a dealer to run it.

It's possible for local, competing cardrooms to back the games at the other property. As a result, it's no longer a house-backed game. But tribes feel the move still violates their state gaming compacts.



Those affiliated with the California cardroom industry were pleased with Damrell's ruling. However, the tribes are appealing the ruling.

"We are encouraged by today's ruling," said California Gaming Association president Kyle Kirkland. "Our member cardrooms will continue to support good jobs, vital public services, and local economies across California while upholding the highest standards of integrity, accountability, and compliance."

While most California tribal casinos have poker rooms of varying sizes, the largest poker rooms in the state are not technically casinos. Instead, they fall under the cardroom classification. Large properties like the Bicycle Casino, Commerce Casino, The Gardens, and Bay 101 all fall under the cardroom umbrella.

If the tribes win the appeal, and can take action against individual properties, it could dampen the state's live poker scene.

Thunder Valley Casino and Graton Casino are two tribal gaming facilities that host major poker tournaments.

But the tribes aren't worried about those series. They are seeking to limit the properties' offerings.

"This outcome is especially troubling given that it was a state law enacted just last year that explicitly gave tribes standing in state court," said California Nations Indian Gaming Association chairperson James Siva. "It's difficult to reconcile this ruling with the clear intent of the Legislature, and once again, a court has sidestepped the actual merits of the case – effectively denying tribes a fair opportunity to seek justice." ♠

With so many Las Vegas casinos offering tournaments, it can be hard to find the right one. Luckily, Card Player has made it easy to plan each day with our comprehensive database. Visit cardplayer.com/lasvegas poker for complete daily tournament listings.





ILLINOIS GOVERNOR WON \$1.4 MILLION GAMBLING IN CASINOS LAST YEAR

By Sean Chaffin

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker had a good time at the tables last year, winning seven figures.

His campaign released his personal income tax returns, and the document showed Pritzker had \$1.4 million worth of gambling income in 2024.

The Democratic governor saw his adjusted gross income rise from \$2.8 million in 2023 to \$10.7 million in 2024, and the gambling profits made up a significant chunk of that.

According to a report from the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the governor wouldn't disclose his game of choice. However, he did say that the winnings came from a casino in Las Vegas. Pritzker explained that he was on vacation with his wife and some friends in Las Vegas and that he was "incredibly lucky."

While he didn't say what game it was, Pritzker did reveal that he "like[s] to play cards," and referenced his love of poker.

"You know that I founded a charitable poker match here in Chicago called the *Chicago Poker Challenge* that has raised millions of dollars for the Holocaust Museum,"



said Pritzker.

But how much did he lose? The governor confirmed that the \$1.4 million was net profit, and that it was all from one trip to Las Vegas.

"Again, I was just incredibly lucky," he said. "Anybody who's played cards in a casino knows that you often play for too long and lose whatever it is that you won. I was fortunate enough to have to leave before that happened."

The seven-figure score is eye-popping on the surface, but Pritzker wasn't gambling beyond his means. The governor reportedly has a net worth of almost \$4 billion. His family has significant holdings in the Hyatt hotel chain and also invested in casino operations in the past. ♠



DESPITE SWEEPSTAKES BAN, CLUBWPT GOLD WILL CONTINUE CALIFORNIA OPERATIONS

By Sean Chaffin

One of the largest American-facing online poker rooms isn't leaving the Golden State.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) signed a sweepstakes casino ban in October. The new ban won't take effect until the start of 2026, but ClubWPT Gold has no plans to leave the state.

The company's announcement comes after changing its business model in September, eliminating gold coins. Previously, customers would purchase gold coins and get sweeps coins for free. Players could redeem the sweeps coins for cash.

Now, ClubWPT Gold forces players to purchase poker training credits, which come with coins. Those coins are redeemable for cash and prizes. At least in ClubWPT Gold's eyes, this should shield the company from the ban.

"We are aware of the new California legislation scheduled to take effect on Jan. 1, 2026," the company wrote in a statement on the website. "In preparation, our team has been proactively making updates to the platform and developing new features to align with the upcoming legislative change. We are committed to operate in compliance with California law."

The new California law prohibits dual-currency sweepstakes casino-style gambling. Additionally, the ban applies to payment processors, geolocation providers, contest suppliers, and affiliates.



ClubWPT Gold officials believe the shift in business strategy allows the company to comply with the new law. The site offers a hand analysis tool it acquired after purchasing training site Upswing Poker from high-stakes poker pro and cardroom owner Doug Polk. The credits allow players to use the hand analysis tool, which can give them feedback for hands they played on the site.

"With each purchase of Hand Analyses, you'll also get 'chips' that you can use to play the games on ClubWPT Gold," the site reads. "You can use chips to play poker for real cash prizes at ClubWPT Gold. The Hand Analysis tool allows you to get feedback on all the hands you play."

Online poker isn't a regulated entity in California. As a result, sweepstakes casino-style poker rooms comprised most of the options for California poker players.

Other sweepstakes operators like Global Poker, Clubs Poker, and Stake.us will have to change their business models or be forced to leave the state in the coming months. ♠

THE GRINDER REFLECTS ON A HISTORIC SUMMER

Table 1 Podcast: Michael Mizrachi Talks Poker Players Championship, Main Event, And Hall Of Fame Run

By Art Parmann and Justin Young



Michael Mizrachi's epic run in the *World Series of Poker* this summer was the main topic of conversation on the latest episode of the *Table 1 Podcast*, but the interview also revealed plenty of other interesting notes from the life of the 'The Grinder.'

The two-time *World Poker Tour* champion took down the \$50,000 *Poker Players Championship* this summer for \$1.3 million, winning the event for a mind-boggling fourth time. If that wasn't a big enough feat, Mizrachi then went on a heater in the \$10,000 main event that resulted in a \$10 million payout and his eighth career *WSOP* bracelet. (Keep in mind, this wasn't even his first time at the *WSOP* main event final table!)

The summer double was so unprecedented, so astounding, that it earned the 44-year-old an immediate induction into the Poker Hall of Fame.

The conversation with the *Table*

1 crew kicked off with a look at his family home game. All three of his brothers play, (Robert has five bracelets of his own) but the stakes and payouts are quite a bit different these days than how they started. The South Florida native also discussed ditching college for cards, how he got his famous nickname, and even his participation in a European celebrity supercar rally.

Highlights appear below, and you can also watch or listen to the entire episode on YouTube, Spotify, Apple, or any podcast app.

Michael Mizrachi: Growing up we would play five-card draw. Not much betting - pretty much flipping for baseball cards and comic books. I had a garbage can full of baseball cards and comic books out of everyone's collection. I was always lucky.

I don't know what happened to the baseball cards. I'm sure they're worth

something now. We had a lot of Jose Cansecos in there, and then I actually ended up playing poker with Jose Canseco recently at this house.

Justin Young: Did you have aspirations of going to college?

Michael Mizrachi: I did go to college for a little bit. I was in a community college, but I was like, 'How am I





The Grinder Hasn't Aged Much In The Last Two Decades



going to do this?' The only way to stay awake was drinking lots of Red Bulls in the early mornings.

I felt like I wasn't learning much in school. If I went away to a university and was having fun, enjoying my life, [I may have stayed.] But instead I was going to play poker. 'Screw this,' I said. 'That's where the money's at. I'm not going to lose these three years of my life, not playing poker. This is not for me.'

So, I withdrew from all my classes and went on to my poker career.

Justin Young: Where were you playing during all this?

Michael Mizrachi: When I first started, I played underage on cruise ships. (Ships would take day trips off the coast of Florida to international waters to spread casino and poker games.) I started there, then I played in the underground games as well. I was playing a lot of \$10-\$20 limit hold'em, and \$1 to \$5 spread seven-card stud. I started high.

Justin Young: I feel like some people think your nickname, 'The Grinder,' is like calling a fat guy 'slim' or a bald guy 'curly.' But you were actually the definition of a grinder back in the day.

Michael Mizrachi: I was one of the first guys to play online poker. Planet Poker, Paradise Poker, PokerStars, Full Tilt, Absolute Poker, all these crazy ones – I played them all. And that's how I got my name, because my first name on there was 'Michael34.' Nobody knew that. Then I changed my screen name to 'The Grinder,' and that stuck for 30 years.

Art Parmann: It's going to be forever now.

Michael Mizrachi: I put a lot of hours in online, for sure, probably more than anybody. I was on all the time. And I actually enjoy playing online and looking forward to playing online again, hopefully soon.

Justin Young: How was your bankroll going at this time? It's tough to manage a bankroll, whether it's too big or too small, when you're 19, 20, 21 years old.

Michael Mizrachi: I was always up and down. I was probably playing over my limits. I couldn't care less, we all take those chances. Got rich, went broke. Got rich, went broke. Got rich, went broke. That's a poker player's life.

I try to enjoy every minute – to have fun. I like to party here and there, a lot more before than now. I still enjoy it, but I think with how much I've learned, I won't make that mistake again.

The conversation then shifted to Mizrachi's participation in the Gumball 3000, an international celebrity motor rally that took drivers from Istanbul, Turkey to Ibiza, Spain.

Justin Young: You've been busy since this summer. What are you up to these days?

Michael Mizrachi: In September I'm going to do the Gumball 3000 with Ben Lamb. His friend's going to start in Istanbul. But I was like, 'I can't do all that. I'll just meet you in Bucharest. Pick me up from there.' I'm going to take that ride from Bucharest to Belgrade, stop there,

then we go to Florence, Italy. I'll get off there. So, I'll do 1,000 miles in a Lambo with him.

Justin Young: Can you explain what the Gumball 3000 is?

Michael Mizrachi: It's a road rally of like 125 of the nicest cars driving from Istanbul to end up somewhere in Spain. Then they're taking a ferry to Ibiza. I don't know exactly how it's going to work, but it sounds crazy.

Justin Young: Do you have to get invited to something like this or do you just have to have money and a fancy car?

Michael Mizrachi: Money, fame, anything can get you in.

Mizrachi then got into some of the details surrounding his run through the PPC, the main event, and being instantly inducted into the Poker Hall of Fame this summer.

Justin Young: You make so many deep runs in these large fields. Is it ever overwhelming?

Michael Mizrachi: To tell you the truth, this WSOP, with the PPC and the main event, I didn't sleep much. I was playing a lot of slot machines, doing some drinking. Two hours of sleep, that's it. I was just trying to keep the momentum. I just couldn't sleep. It's hard to sleep when I just want to just play. I wasn't getting enough rest.

Justin Young: What's your slot machine of choice?

Michael Mizrachi: I play a lot of Buffalo Link. I play a lot of Buffalo Ascension, different ones, Rich Little Piggies, Dragon Link, Phoenix Link.

“I’m not afraid. People want to ladder up, but I’m going for first. If you ain’t first, you’re last. Who’s going to remember second place? You guys play GTO, or whatever you want to do. I’m going to play to win and have all the chips.”



Watch The Full Episode





I gamble here and there. I give good action.

Justin Young: Where were we staying during this summer run? Were you somewhere in town or at a casino?

Michael Mizrachi: I mix it up. I'm everywhere. I was at Caesars, and Bellagio, but now my home is the Venetian. I'm an ambassador for the Venetian now, and I'll be there for quite a while. If you want to come see me, I'll be in the poker room quite a bit. I'll be there at least once a month for at least a week or two. I basically live at the Venetian, that's my other home.

Justin Young: Did anything stick out from that first main event final table back in 2010?

Michael Mizrachi: I don't remember much, that was so long ago. That was millions of hands ago. I kind of play the same way, but I also take risks. I'm not afraid. People want to ladder up, but I'm going for first. If you ain't first, you're last. Who's going to remember second place? Do you remember who won second place?

Justin Young: I do not. I feel like I should.

Michael Mizrachi: That's the point. That's how it is. That's why I'm playing to win, and that's the way I'm going to always play. I'm not afraid of failing

to ladder up. You guys play GTO, or whatever you want to do. I'm putting myself in the best position. I'm going to play to win and have all the chips.

Justin Young: I love the fact that you don't use GTO. I think we're kind of cut from some same cloth outside of the fact you've been better than me.

Art Parmann: Let's get to the fourth *PPC* and this year's main event run.

Justin Young: How did you even decide to play this year's *PPC*? Was it always on your schedule?

Michael Mizrachi: It's not always. I cashed in it last year as well, but I don't know what tournaments I'm actually going to play. I just go with the flow. I was playing a lot of smaller ones, maybe hoping to hit a big score and then just parlay it.

I knew I was playing great. I kept cashing, kept cashing, kept cashing, and getting deep. Then I was like, 'You know what? Let me just play this. I run good in this one. This is my event.' And boom, I win.

Justin Young: I watched the final table. You dominated that thing.

Michael Mizrachi: It's just experience, just experience being in the spotlight and situations. I know a lot of people are trained just to ladder up, sit back and relax and just wait for people to bust each other, but not me.

Justin Young: I feel like Bryn Kenney, (who finished second in the *PPC*) was kind of cut from the same cloth as well. I feel like he took spots he probably shouldn't have ICM-wise here and there. It didn't help him beat you.

Michael Mizrachi: At that point, I was in a really good position. I was already a huge chip leader, but you still have to respect the stack, no matter whoever's stack you're playing against. If they're short, they're not out until they're out. You still can't be like, 'Oh, I can take these risks.'

I just knew in that situation that Bryn's dangerous, and he's one of the best poker players in the world. I'm still going to respect him and respect the stack. I just know I have been in this situation. I've seen 20-to-1 chip leads go like that and lose.

Justin Young: Do you like the format of the *PPC* as it is now? (The tournament began as a H.O.R.S.E. event with a no-limit hold'em final table, but has since evolved to an eight- and now a nine-game rotation.)

Michael Mizrachi: What do you think, that I'm going to complain? (laughing) I'm happy with how it is right now, so I don't want anything changed. What's funny is, I don't think anyone even drafted me [in the



events?

Michael Mizrachi: I don't like doing that, only if I have to. It's tough. It's hard playing two events. I hate that and feel just like I'm blowing money like that.

Art Parmann: After winning the main event, they inducted you instantly into the Hall of Fame. Run us through that moment.

Michael Mizrachi: That was so cool, but I had some inside info. I know Jared Bleznick. I think he hit up Phil Helmuth. Then he and Daniel Negreanu talked it over. Everybody talked and agreed. 'If Mike wins this he's got to get inducted in the Hall of Fame. How can he not? And especially since all his family, his friends, his fans, and everybody's there. Why not do it there?'

I don't know what would have happened if I finished second. It's probably never going to happen again. But it was great for poker, and I made it happen this time.

It was an amazing time. It was really cool. The guys came up, although I know Negreanu fell asleep. I'm sure he was a little upset about it, but I'll give him a pass. ♠

\$25K Fantasy pool.] That makes it even sicker.

Justin Young: No one drafted you?

Michael Mizrachi: This was the first time ever I didn't get drafted, because they didn't think I was playing any tournaments. People knew I was playing cash. I hadn't played a tournament in a year, so they assumed I wasn't going to play.

Art Parmann: Sleeper pick?

Michael Mizrachi: Next year I'm probably a good pick because I think I'm playing almost every event. I used to play 15, but next year I think I'm going to try to get to 35-40 events – pull a Shaun Deeb. We'll see if I can play that many events. I'll try my best.

Justin Young: Are you going to be running back and forth between

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Table 1 is for people who *love* poker but can't stand rigid, boring, dusty games. We've put together the kind of community where the vibe is just as important as the cards.

Think about it—what if poker was less about squeezing every penny out of the pot and more about the laughs, the stories, and those unforgettable moments? That's what we're here for.

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



CHINO CLEANS UP IN 2025

RHEEM FINDS HIS HAPPY PLACE

By Tim Fiorvanti



The PokerGO Studio opened its doors in May of 2018 at the Aria Resort & Casino, right in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip. Almost immediately, the frequency of high roller tournaments more than doubled, going from one or two events at the bigger circuit stops each month, to having a near-weekly series dedicated entirely to high-stakes buy-ins.

There have been a number of top pros who have made the studio their home base in the years since, opting for the convenience of a dedicated high roller schedule without the inconvenience of constant travel. Amongst those players, there's an even smaller group who have managed to thrive, despite the shark-infested waters.

And even among those who regularly find the winner's circle, David 'Chino' Rheem stands out. The 45-year-old is seemingly always in the middle of the action, always a threat to win, even though his path to the nosebleeds was a little different than his peers.

Gregarious and well-liked, especially among *PGT* regulars, Rheem hasn't always tapped into his deep well of talent, even with a career that carries well into eight digits worth of results. There was a stint in jail when he was younger, and the early days of his gambling career were more about hus-

ling than grinding. In poker, he'd hit a big score, and then give it all back. His skills were undeniable, so there was no shortage of investors looking to cash in. But sometimes, he'd borrow too much, and find himself deep in the hole looking for another score to get out.

The Los Angeles native recently captured the championship at the *PokerGO Tour PLO Series II*, courtesy of a victory in the \$25,000 finale. (pg. 24) It was his second *PGT* series win this year and third title overall, making him the first in the history of the tour to accomplish the feat. He previously had won the *PGT Mixed Games* series in both 2023 and earlier this year.

Rheem's 2025 campaign has arguably been his best yet. It's certainly his most consistent, with 14 final tables and four titles for a total of \$2.8 million in cashes. He's racked up \$6.8 million since the start 2021, and these days, he's determined to hang on to it.

Millions Won, And Lost, In A Hurry

Rheem's first major moment in the poker world came during the 2006 *World Series of Poker*. He finished second to Allen Cunningham in a \$1,000 no-limit hold'em event, good for \$327,981. At that point, Rheem had only a handful

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of recorded live results. But between his online poker experience, his instincts, and the benefits of spending a significant amount of time in and around poker with the Mizrachi brothers, Rheem's early live results were impressive.

The spotlight grew significantly brighter in the second half of 2008. That summer, Rheem made the final table of the *WSOP* main event and became one of the original members of the "November Nine."

He went on to finish seventh for \$1,772,650. Just a month later, he took center stage in his return to the TV airwaves. Rheem won the first of three career *World Poker Tour* titles at the *WPT Five Diamond World Poker Classic*, banking \$1,538,650.

The first public sign of distress for Rheem came in 2011, when he recorded his third seven-figure result in the debut event of the short-lived *Epic Poker League*. Less than a week after that \$1 million win, the *EPL* surprised the poker community by putting Rheem "on probation" for violations of their code of conduct. A press release alleged a failure to pay back debts to other poker players.

After a significant overlay in the second event, the *EPL* would ultimately fold after just three of five scheduled tour-

naments were played. It was a messy exit that created animosity in the poker community for, ironically, failing to pay out on an end-of-season prize pool. But the damage to Rheem's reputation had already been done.

Rheem kept piling up big scores, but each win was followed by jokes. Even broadcast commentators couldn't resist jabbing about the supposed line of people by the casino cage waiting to collect.

He won another *WPT* title at Bellagio, the 2013 *WPT Five Star World Poker Classic*, for \$1,153,730. His third *WPT* win came in 2016, at *Hard Rock Poker Showdown* for \$705,885. Another \$1,567,100 followed in 2019 at the *PokerStars Caribbean Adventure* main event, his fifth career seven-figure score.

For his part, especially in recent years, Rheem hasn't shied away from taking ownership of his shortcomings. In a 2024 appearance on the *Table 1 Podcast*, Rheem described the aftermath of that *PCA* win.

"Let's say I've been playing professional poker 16 or 17 years, I could honestly admit 13 of those years, I didn't have a fucking clue," Rheem told hosts Art Parmann and Justin Young. "I was so far gone and lost in the world of addiction,



“I’m a different person than I used to be. I appreciate it more. Before, when I used to win, I took it for granted. I fucked off the money every time I won back in the day. I had no regard for it.”

when it comes to gambling and other stuff.”

“I would win seven figures in a tournament, and he broke... PCA for \$1.5 million. My good friend Noah Boeken put me in that tournament, so I had half. I saw \$750,000. That money was gone within two months. I’ve accumulated a lot of debts, I admit it. I’ve owed the poker world a lot of money, and I would do my best to make payments.”

A Place In Poker

Even at his lowest moments, Rheem had vocal support from some of the top names in poker. His skills were undeniable, and his personality made him easy to root for. Perhaps most significantly, Daniel Negreanu came to his defense when the *EPL* called him out publicly, and reiterated a positive perspective of Rheem multiple times over the ensuing years.

But while Rheem kept winning for others, something had to change if he was going to move beyond his pitfalls and start winning for himself.

By the time the 2022 *PokerGO Tour* season rolled around, Rheem found himself at a different point in his life, and his career. He entered the *U.S. Poker Open*, and rattled off a win and a runner-up finish. He knew right away that he had found something.

“The studio is like my home court, my backyard,” said Rheem. “I’m very close with the people who play here, they’re my good friends. I’m close with Cary [Katz], the staff,

the dealers. I play cash games at Aria. I see them every day. For me, there’s no better place to play.”

Since that series, Rheem’s racked up \$5,478,761 in *PGT* earnings. That puts him in the top 20 among all players in the tour’s history. Overall, he has won on the *PGT* eight different times, while making 37 final tables and cashing in 61 events.

“It’s rewarding. Satisfying,” said Rheem. “It’s humbling for me. I’m proud of myself when I do well at the studio, because I’m playing with the best in the world. It’s a good feeling to know that I can compete with the best, and still succeed.”

The bond between players who clash inside the *PokerGO Studio* might seem strange to those outside of that sphere. But even as they battle for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars, the camaraderie that’s fostered in that environment has clearly done Rheem a lot of good, both at the table, and beyond it.

“I still make mistakes when I play with these guys,” said Rheem. “But they’re my friends, so I can talk to them about hands afterwards. I still learn, and try to improve, and not make the same mistakes. I get experience, and friendly, knowledgeable answers. And criticism.”

Rheem also suggests that, in being true to himself and his actions in the past, he’s been able to find his place.

“I think there’s just been a lot of growth in my life that helps me continue to compete at a high level.”



Results Speak For Themselves

While he's evolved as a player over the years, a raw edge seems to remain around Rheem's approach to tournament poker. Despite so much of poker strategy seemingly distilled to GTO charts and solvers in recent years, Rheem's success hasn't come from intensive study work. It's his sharp table instincts that allow him to navigate and persevere by tapping into something different, a more human element of the game.

It's not entirely unlike his old friend Michael Mizrachi, who permanently carved his name into the history books this summer with his 2025 *WSOP* main event and *Poker Players Championship* wins, in its level of effectiveness. (pg. 14)

"I definitely would never consider myself in the solver group," said Rheem. "It's just that's not how I learned how to play poker. I'm an intuitive player."

Rheem grinned, and then, referencing his string of recent successes, added, "These days, I just try to fucking have it."

With two months to go, Rheem's 2025 is already the second-best year of his career in terms of total results, behind only his 2008 breakout performance.

The wins also hit differently at this point in his life, because it's not just about him anymore.

"I'm a different person than I used to be," Rheem admitted. "I appreciate it more. Before, when I used to win, I took it for granted. I fucked off the money every time I won back

in the day. I had no regard for it. I had no purpose in life. I didn't have responsibilities. I didn't have a son."

"As time goes on, and you get older, hopefully you learn and you grow as a person. I'm trying to do that every day. I think today, the person that I am, I've grown a lot. If I look back at where I was, even a few years ago, things were fucked up. I'm just very grateful."

A Matter Of Respect

There's not much in tournament poker that Rheem hasn't done over the last two decades. In addition to his high roller exploits inside the *PGT* studio, he's made three more runs at an elusive *WSOP* bracelet. In 2022, 2024, and 2025, Rheem earned his second, third, and fourth career runner-up finishes in *WSOP* events. With the way Rheem is playing, it seems like just a matter of time before that gap in his résumé is filled in.

While the money, and the trophies, will always be the primary motivating factors, Rheem's also managed to accumulate something that's harder to measure, which is the respect, and friendship, of his poker peers.

"That's just a blessing," said Rheem. "I'm grateful that I get to experience all of this, to share, and talk, and be friends with the sharpest minds in poker. It humbles me to be around winners, and to surround myself with good people." ♠



PokerGO Tour Success

Oct. 2025	\$25,000 PLO Series II	1st	\$510,000
April 2022	\$25,000 Heads-Up Showdown	1st	\$400,000
March 2025	\$10,000 PLO Series	1st	\$295,000
Sept. 2025	\$10,000 Poker Masters	1st	\$280,000
March 2022	\$15,000 U.S. Poker Open	1st	\$271,350
Sept. 2023	\$10,000 Poker Masters	1st	\$218,400
March 2022	\$15,000 U.S. Poker Open	2nd	\$210,000
April 2025	\$15,000 PLO Series	2nd	\$202,350
March 2025	\$10,000 Mixed Games	1st	\$195,500
Oct. 2023	\$10,000 Mixed Games	1st	\$171,000
Jan. 2024	\$10,000 Last Chance	2nd	\$170,300

PLO Power: Chino Rheem Earns Record Third PokerGO Tour Series Championship

By Erik Fast



Chino Rheem made *PokerGO Tour* history at the *PLO Series II*. In late October, the 45-year-old Los Angeles native won the points race, secured the series championship, and became the first contender to ever earn three overall *PGT* series titles.

Prior to his most recent championship, Rheem won a couple of mixed games titles, earning his first in 2023 while repeating earlier this year.

Rheem is also a three-time *World Poker Tour* champion, a *European Poker Tour* main event winner, and he even final tabled the *World Series of Poker* main event. After this most recent run inside the PokerGO Studio at ARIA Resort & Casino Las Vegas, the longtime tournament fixture has nearly \$18.1 million in recorded scores. (pg. 20)

This latest series victory saw Rheem cash in seven of the 10 pot-limit Omaha events that made up the schedule, with four final-table finishes. His total earnings of \$798,900 were the most of any player.

Rheem saved the best for last. His lone title came in the \$25,000 buy-in finale. He beat out a field of 68 entries to earn \$510,000, locking up the series championship in the process. As a result, he was also awarded the *PGT* Gold Cup and a \$10,000 *PGT* Passport.

The win grew Rheem's point total to 597, giving him a 110-point margin of victory over Bryce Yockey, who won

two titles during the series. While Yockey managed more first-place finishes, Rheem had twice as many final-table showings and more than twice as many cashes.

Rheem kicked off the series with a runner-up showing in the first event, navigating his way through a field of 146 entries to earn \$106,000. He then recorded a min-cash in event no. 3 and a ninth-place showing in event no. 5. While he did not cash in event no. 6, it would mark the last time that he hit the rail empty-handed during the festival, rattling off finishes of sixth, fifth, eighth, and first.

Frederic Normand was the only other player to cash in more than half of the tournaments offered, with six in-the-money finishes.

Rheem's success at this festival also helped propel him to second in the season-long *PGT* points race and 26th in the *Card Player* Player of the Year race presented by CoinPoker.

Superstars Shine Early

More than \$9.1 million was awarded during the series. As with most *PGT* stops, the stakes kept rising as the days flew by. The first trio of events all cost \$5,000 to enter, resulting in the three largest fields of the series.

Event no. 1 was a standard PLO tournament with 146 entries. After two days of action, 2025's hottest tournament player was posing for his latest winner's photo.

Jesse Lonis added \$175,000 to his already massive earn-

© PokerGO/Antonio Abrego



ings total this year, extending his advantage in several key POY statistical categories in the process. The 30-year-old poker pro currently leads all contenders in points (10,507), POY-qualified titles (eight), and final tables (25) after this series.

Lonis, who took down the *PGT PLO Series* held back in April, needed just over an hour to close out the win at the final table. Just like last spring, Lonis had significant side action on the line, with a prop payout worth more than the first-place prize.

“Was a sick one to win, had a \$50k must-win side bet with five others,” said Lonis in a social media post. “Made the dynamic and decisions completely different!”

Eight of Lonis’ 15 largest tournament scores have come this year, including a career-best \$3.4 million in the \$100,000 high roller at *Triton Montenegro*. Lonis’ career earnings now sit at nearly \$27.4 million, thanks in large part to his incredible streak in 2025.

Lonis wound up cashing three times during the series, with this win and another final-table finish. He now sits 1,136 POY points ahead of the nearest competition in the POY standings. His 10,507 has already surpassed the final total of 10,174 that won Adrian Mateos the POY title in 2024, with Lonis still having two months to add to his tally.

One day after Lonis’ impressive win, perennial POY contender **Alex Foxen** issued a dramatic response. He took down the very next event, a \$5,300 PLO Quattro Bounty event, for a total payday of \$177,000 between the first-place prize and his bounties.

Foxen’s victory also pushed him up to second place overall in the POY standings with 9,371 points. He now has five titles, 19 final-table finishes, and more than \$10.8 million in POY earnings. This win was Foxen’s only final-table showing

of the series, but he did cash four more times.

Foxen now has four *PGT* wins on the year. With 24 cashes in *PGT* events totaling 2,816 points, he remains the player to beat in the season-long rankings for the high-stakes centric tour. He is the only player with more points than Rheem (2,340).

Event no. 3 was the final \$5,000 buy-in on the slate, and won by living poker legend **Erik Seidel**, who beat out a field of 143 entries to earn \$171,500. This was the latest in a long list of victories that includes 10 gold bracelets, a *World Poker Tour* main event title, and several marquee high roller wins.

The 65-year-old New York native broke onto the scene with his runner-up finish in the 1988 *WSOP* main event, and has gone on to accumulate more than \$49.7 million across 447 recorded in-the-money finishes. (pg. 43)

Double The Stakes

Ben Lamb took down the first of three \$10,000 buy-in tournaments on the slate. The two-time *WSOP* main event final tablist and two-time bracelet winner overcame 117 entries on his way to hoisting the trophy. The \$292,500 first-place prize grew his career haul to more than \$19.2 million.

More than \$5 million of Lamb’s earnings have come in PLO tournaments, including his \$814,436 win in the 2011 *WSOP* \$10,000 PLO championship. That puts Lamb just outside the top 10 on the game’s all-time tournament earnings leaderboard.

Sean Winter cashed in three of the first four events, placing eighth, third, and sixth to bring his haul to \$162,800 heading into the midpoint of the series. After all of those close calls, the Floridian broke through with a win in event no. 5, which featured a progressive knockout (PKO) format.

The high-stakes regular earned \$122,300 from the main prize pool as the champion, along with \$155,000 in bounties



to bring his total haul to \$277,300. Winter added one more cash during the second half of the schedule, placing sixth in event no. 8. He went on to finish third in the standings with 459 total points.

Winter now has more than \$36.8 million in lifetime cashes, with 19 recorded victories along the way.

The final \$10,000 title was secured by two-time bracelet winner **Bryce Yockey**. The 88-entry turnout made for a \$237,600 top prize for Yockey, who defeated *WPT* champion and bracelet winner Matthew Wantman heads-up. Yockey was far from finished making moves at this series, though.

Raising The Stakes Again

Veselin Karakitukov took down the first of the three \$15,000 events. While he might not be a household name for tournament poker fans, the Bulgarian four-card crusher has \$3.8 million in recorded earnings, including two massive

cashes in *WSOP* PLO high rollers. Those two scores collectively account for more than \$1.3 million of his career haul.

Karakitukov navigated his way through a field of 86 entries to earn \$348,300, defeating Joao Simao heads-up to close out the win.

The \$15,000 mystery bounty drew 65 entries, with **Taylor Wilson** coming out on top in the end. Wilson claimed the \$195,000 first-place prize, and essentially doubled that sum with \$190,000 worth of bounties.

That \$385,000 total payout represents the second-largest live result of Wilson's career. Back in January, he took down a \$25,500 high roller during the 2025 *Lucky Hearts Poker Open* in South Florida for \$511,900.

Wilson's victory came in his second final-table appearance and third cash of the festival, including a fourth-place showing in event no. 5 just a few days earlier. He would go

on to finish sixth in the series standings.

Bryce Yockey bested 65 entries in event no. 9, locking up \$290,000 for the win, which came just three days after his triumph in event no. 6. All told, his two wins and three cashes during the series brought his series-wide total to \$537,600.

Yockey added 232 *PGT* points with his second victory, increasing his points to 487. That gave him a 32-point lead over second-ranked Sean Winter in the standings heading into the \$25,000 buy-in finale.

Yockey defeated Ben Tollerene heads-up for the win this time around. This was Tollerene's 16th final-table showing of the year, with two titles won along the way. He now has nearly \$11.9 million in POY earnings and 6,917 points, which places him eighth in the POY standings.

Karakitukov placed fourth for his second big score of the festival. With 358 total points, he finished in fifth place in the battle for series champion honors.

Rheem Comes Up Clutch With A Buzzer-Beating Win

The \$25,000 finale generated a \$1,700,000 prize pool that was reserved for the top 10 finishers. Sean Rafael was the first player to hit the rail for the day, and the last to do so without a payday. He bubbled when his overpair of aces and nut flush draw were unable to overcome the two pair of two-time bracelet winner Dylan Weisman.

LaDarren Banks recorded his fourth cash of the series, finishing 10th for \$51,000. German bracelet winner Christopher Frank soon followed for the same payout. Jason Mercier then won a big three-way all-in on the final table bubble to bust both Alex Foxen (8th) and Weisman (7th). The duo both earned \$68,000 for their efforts.

Despite scoring that double elimination, Mercier ended up as the next to hit the rail. The six-time bracelet winner got the last of his stack in against two-time bracelet winner Joao Simao, and the Brazilian turned a better hand to narrow the field to five. Mercier took home \$94,000, growing his tournament earnings to \$21.5 million.

Rheem won several hefty clashes with Artem Maksimov during five-handed play, with the final being the last of Maksimov's tournament. The chips went in with Rheem's pair of aces and nut flush draw facing second pair, straight draws, and a lower flush draw for his opponent. The turn and river kept Rheem ahead, though, and Maksimov settled for \$127,000.

Two-time bracelet winner Sam Soverel also lost a big one to Rheem, finding himself with just a handful of big blinds to work with afterwards. Simao won the rest with trip fours to end Soverel's run in fourth place for \$170,000.

Shortly after that, Simao squared off against Isaac Haxton in a set-over-set scenario. Haxton would improve to quads to win the pot and eliminate Simao in third place for \$230,000.

The final showdown began with Rheem up nearly 2:1. The stacks stayed the same in the early going, but the decisive hand that swung the match soon arrived.

Haxton raised from the button with $A\heartsuit A\clubsuit 7\spadesuit 3\diamondsuit$ and Rheem defended his big blind with $J\diamondsuit 10\spadesuit 8\clubsuit 7\heartsuit$. The flop came down $6\clubsuit 5\spadesuit 2\diamondsuit$ and Rheem checked with his flush and straight draws. Haxton bet, Rheem check-raised, and Haxton called to see the $3\clubsuit$ roll off on the turn. Rheem checked and then called Haxton's bet. The $9\clubsuit$ completed the board, prompting another check from Rheem. Haxton fired 2,550,000, leaving just a single 5,000 chip behind. Rheem shoved and Haxton folded, leaving himself with a shot at an improbable 'chip-and-a-chair' comeback that never materialized.

Haxton earned \$331,000 as the runner-up. This was his third final-table finish and fourth overall cash of the series. His 360 points were good for fourth in the final standings. The bracelet winner and two-time *Super High Roller Bowl* champion now boasts nearly \$63.6 million in lifetime cashes, the sixth-highest total of any player in poker history. (pg. 43)

The series came to a close, but another massive PLO showdown was set to kick off just days later. Check back next issue to find out who came out on top in the \$100,000 buy-in *PLO Super High Roller Bowl*. ♠

PGT PLO Series II - Aria PokerGO Studio - Las Vegas, NV

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$5,300 PLO Oct. 14-15 Entries: 146 Prizepool: \$730,000	1 Jesse Lonis	\$175,000	576
	2 Chino Rheem	\$106,000	480
	3 Josh ArieH	\$76,700	384
	4 Artem Maksimov	\$58,400	288
	5 Isaac Haxton	\$43,800	240
	6 Anthony Hu	\$36,500	192
	7 Frederic Normand	\$29,200	144

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$5,300 PLO PKO Oct. 15-16 Entries: 133 Prizepool: \$665,000	1 Alex Foxen	\$87,000	528
	2 Michael Wang	\$60,000	440
	3 LaDarren Banks	\$44,000	352
	4 Kamel Mokhammad	\$32,000	264
	5 Joseph Serock	\$24,000	220
	6 Christopher Hannel	\$20,000	176
	7 Dan Shak	\$16,000	132

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$5,300 PLO Oct. 16-17 Entries: 143 Prizepool: \$715,000	1 Erik Seidel	\$171,500	576
	2 John Riordan	\$103,700	480
	3 Sean Winter	\$75,100	384
	4 Daniel Kim	\$57,200	288
	5 James Chen	\$42,900	240
	6 Caleb Furth	\$35,800	192
	7 Brevin Andreadis	\$28,600	144

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$10,500 PLO Oct. 17-18 Entries: 117 Prizepool: \$1,170,000	1 Ben Lamb	\$292,500	600
	2 Fernando Habegger	\$181,400	500
	3 Christopher Costa	\$128,700	400
	4 Stefan Christopher	\$99,400	300
	5 Cary Katz	\$76,100	250
	6 Sean Winter	\$58,500	200
	7 Daniel Aharoni	\$46,800	150



Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$10,500 PLO PKO Oct. 18-20 Entries: 106 Prizepool: \$1,060,000	1 Sean Winter	\$277,300	600
	2 Sam Soverel	\$141,300	500
	3 Nicholas Palma	\$92,100	400
	4 Taylor Wilson	\$73,200	300
	5 Jesse Lonis	\$74,700	250
	6 Kamel Mokhammad	\$33,800	200
	7 Stephen Hubbard	\$29,300	150

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$15,700 PLO Mystery KO Oct. 22-23 Entries: 65 Prizepool: \$975,000	1 Taylor Wilson	\$385,000	432
	2 Frederic Normand	\$216,800	360
	3 Allan Le	\$117,800	288
	4 Dylan Linde	\$80,000	216
	5 Chino Rheem	\$48,700	180
	6 Sean Winter	\$35,700	144
	7 Andjelko Andrejevic	\$26,000	108

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$10,500 PLO Oct. 20-21 Entries: 88 Prizepool: \$880,000	1 Bryce Yockey	\$237,600	480
	2 Matthew Wantman	\$154,000	400
	3 Frederic Normand	\$110,000	320
	4 Brevin Andreadis	\$79,200	240
	5 Evan Krentzman	\$61,600	200
	6 Christopher Frank	\$44,000	160
	7 Andjelko Andrejevic	\$35,200	120

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$15,700 PLO Oct. 23-24 Entries: 65 Prizepool: \$975,000	1 Bryce Yockey	\$290,000	432
	2 Benjamin Tollerene	\$190,000	360
	3 Isaac Haxton	\$130,000	288
	4 Veselin Karakitukov	\$99,000	216
	5 Artur Martirosian	\$73,000	180
	6 Matthew Wantman	\$53,000	144
	7 Sean Rafael	\$40,000	108

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$15,700 PLO Oct. 21-22 Entries: 86 Prizepool: \$1,290,000	1 Veselin Karakitukov	\$348,300	576
	2 Joao Simao	\$225,800	480
	3 Joni Jouhkimainen	\$161,300	384
	4 Sean Rafael	\$116,100	288
	5 Matthew Wantman	\$90,300	240
	6 Chino Rheem	\$64,500	192
	7 Benjamin Tollerene	\$51,600	144

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$26,000 PLO Oct. 24-25 Entries: 68 Prizepool: \$1,700,000	1 Chino Rheem	\$510,000	504
	2 Isaac Haxton	\$331,000	420
	3 Joao Simao	\$230,000	336
	4 Sam Soverel	\$170,000	252
	5 Artem Maksimov	\$127,000	210
	6 Jason Mercier	\$94,000	168
	7 Dylan Weisman	\$68,000	126

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HARALD SAMMER CLAIMS \$1 MILLION AT WSOP SUPER CIRCUIT CYPRUS

By Tim Fiorvanti & Erik Fast



Harald Sammer has had a few brushes with the spotlight in his poker career. Most notably, back in 2018, the German-born pro was in the thick of things at the final table of the *World Series of Poker Monster Stack* event, staring down the possibility of a seven-figure score.

But dreams of a life-changing score were dashed when he lost a coin flip with A-K against pocket queens to go out in eighth, and Sammer didn't come close to another spot like that for more than seven years.

That all changed in a hurry in the 2025 *WSOP Super Circuit Cyprus* \$5,300 buy-in main event. Sammer defeated the formidable Daniel Rezaei heads-up, coming from behind in the final match to claim \$1 million and the *WSOP Circuit* ring.

This time, with all of the chips in the middle, it was Sammer that held the pocket queens against Rezaei's A-K. His queens held up, and with that pot came the title.

Sammer's win denied Rezaei an incredible double. Back in August, Rezaei claimed a seven-figure victory of his own at the same venue, the Merit Royal Hotel in Cyprus. Rezaei took down the *Onyx Super High Roller* \$5 million guaranteed event for \$1,043,530.

Rezaei had to settle for second place and \$670,000 this time around. The Austrian pro was hunting a third seven-figure result for 2025, having also finished third in a \$10 million guaranteed event at Wynn Las Vegas over

the summer for \$1,181,360. He now has \$8.7 million in live tournament earnings.

For outlasting a field of 1,372 entrants, Sammer earned 1,920 POY points, his first qualifying result of 2025. Rezaei's 1,600 points for this result pushed him up to 33rd place in the year-long standings.

This festival hosted 19 events in total, with several champions walking away with six-figure payouts thanks to their performances.

Two-time bracelet winner **Ognyan Dimov** topped 980 entries in the \$3,300 mystery bounty event for \$305,000. **Kirill Shcherbakov** took home \$410,000 as the last player standing from a field of 180 entries in the \$10,400 no-limit event.

Like Rezaei, **Fahredin Mustafov** won an *Onyx* event at this venue back in August. At this series, the Bulgarian triumphed in the \$26,000 high roller, surviving a field of 22 entries to earn \$217,000. He's now claimed the 36th-place spot in the POY race with 11 final-table showings so far.

Bracelet winner **Quan Zhou** outlasted 421 players in the \$5,300 mystery bounty event for \$319,000 during the final few days of the series. This was his first title and 14th final-table finish of the year. He climbed to fifth on the POY leaderboard after adding 1,440 points with this title. The Chinese player has now accumulated 7,724 points and more than \$3.3 million in POY earnings.



WSOP Circuit - Merit Royal Casino - Kyrenia, Cyprus

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$1,650 NLH Oct. 9-10 Entries: 444 Prizepool: \$632,700	1 Giia Iakobishvili	\$118,000	720
	2 Ekrem Sanioglu	\$80,000	600
	3 Aren Bezhanyan	\$55,000	480
	4 Anton Danilov	\$38,000	360
	5 Cengizhan Isikkaya	\$28,500	300
	6 Tahsin Cankurtaranli	\$22,000	240
	7 Matte Karjalainen	\$17,000	180
	8 Michal Wojtkowiak	\$13,000	120
	9 Vitalii Pankov	\$11,000	60

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$1,100 NLH Oct. 9 Entries: 666 Prizepool: \$629,420	1 Maxim Lykov	\$126,000	840
	2 Daniel Dragoi	\$80,000	700
	3 Xiaosheng Zheng	\$57,000	560
	4 Quan Zhou	\$41,000	420
	5 Hao Tian	\$29,000	350
	6 Alexey Losev	\$21,000	280
	7 Milen Bakardjiev	\$16,000	210
	8 Guoliang Wei	\$12,000	140

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$2,200 NLH Oct. 11-13 Entries: 1257 Prizepool: \$2,388,300	1 Govea Quevedo	\$375,000	960
	2 Alexandr Chernikov	\$250,000	800
	3 Nariman Yaghmai	\$177,000	640
	4 Vladas Burneikis	\$126,000	480
	5 Cheng Hu	\$95,000	400
	6 Volkan Karacocuk	\$67,000	320
	7 Andrei Konopelko	\$52,000	240
	8 Yuejun Zhao	\$38,500	160
	9 Linus Goh	\$30,000	80

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$26,000 PLO Oct. 13-14 Entries: 11 Prizepool: \$266,750	1 Christopher Sly	\$173,000	168
	2 Daniel Perkusic	\$93,750	140



TOURNAMENTS



Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$3,300 NLH Mystery KO Oct. 15-16 Entries: 980 Prizepool: \$1,813,000	1 Ognyan Dimov	\$305,000	1,368
	2 Stefano Spataro	\$201,000	1,140
	3 Yilu Yuan	\$141,000	912
	4 Alexey Savenkov	\$104,000	684
	5 Chengxu Hu	\$72,000	570
	6 Nikola Radevic	\$53,000	456
	7 Denis Zelenkin	\$40,000	342
	8 Frank Cucchiara	\$30,500	228
	9 Wouter Beltz	\$23,500	114

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$1,650 NLH Oct. 15-16 Entries: 541 Prizepool: \$770,925	1 Aleksandr Razinkov	\$150,000	840
	2 Levente Szabo	\$100,000	700
	3 Tobias Peters	\$68,000	560
	4 Raoul Kanme	\$48,000	420
	5 Nikolai Fal	\$34,000	350
	6 Nichan Khorchidian	\$25,000	280
	7 Semen Komlev	\$18,000	210
	8 Agharazi Babayev	\$14,000	140
	9 Charbel Salloum	\$10,525	70

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$10,400 NLH Oct. 15-16 Entries: 180 Prizepool: \$1,710,000	1 Kirill Shcherbakov	\$410,000	840
	2 Italo Modena	\$272,000	700
	3 Yiannis Liperis	\$188,000	560
	4 Ashkan Fattahi	\$132,000	420
	5 Lev Margolin	\$95,000	350
	7 Ian Bradley	\$53,000	210
	8 Vadzim Lipauka	\$41,000	140
	9 Damir Zhugralin	\$33,000	70

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$5,300 NLH Oct. 16-21 \$5,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,372 Prizepool: \$6,860,000	1 Harald Sammer	\$1,000,000	1,920
	2 Daniel Rezaei	\$670,000	1,600
	3 Bernardo Neves	\$475,000	1,280
	4 Ali Al-Kubasi	\$345,000	960
	5 Jon Kalmar	\$250,000	800
	6 Konstantin Voronin	\$185,000	640
	7 Radoslav Stoyanov	\$140,000	480
	8 Andrei Spataru	\$107,500	320
	9 Georgios Tsouloftas	\$82,000	160

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$26,000 NLH Oct. 16-17 Entries: 22 Prizepool: \$533,500	1 Fahredin Mustafov	\$217,000	252
	2 Bernard Larabi	\$144,600	210
	3 Mikalai Vaskaboinikau	\$97,900	168
	4 Ognyan Dimov	\$74,000	126

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$5,300 NLH Mystery KO Oct. 18-19 Entries: 421 Prizepool: \$1,030,750	1 Quan Zhou	\$319,000	1,440
	2 Tobias Peters	\$207,000	1,200
	3 Aleksei Istomin	\$256,000	960
	4 Oshri Lahmani	\$210,000	720
	5 Yiannis Liperis	\$167,000	600
	6 Xiaohu Liu	\$53,000	480
	7 Fahredin Mustafov	\$115,000	360
	8 Hao Tian	\$23,000	240
	9 Yilu Yuan	\$18,500	120

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$10,400 NLH Oct. 20 Entries: 45 Prizepool: \$427,500	1 Anatoly Zlotnikov	\$145,000	300
	2 Claas Eyke Segebrecht	\$93,000	250
	3 Vlastimil Pustina	\$62,000	200
	4 Johan Guilbert	\$44,000	150
	5 Paul Esau	\$33,500	125
	6 Hao Tian	\$27,000	100
	7 Aren Bezhanyan	\$23,000	75

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$2,200 NLH 6-Max Oct. 20-21 Entries: 485 Prizepool: \$921,500	1 Yuxi Huang	\$175,000	720
	2 Gor Musinyan	\$115,000	600
	3 Chyngis Satu	\$77,500	480
	4 Daniel Heredi	\$53,000	360
	5 Roman Korenev	\$37,500	300
	6 Az Musa	\$27,500	240



TOURNAMENTS

Christopher Sly



Giia Iakobishvili



Aleksandr Razinkov



Anatoly Zlotnikov



Yuxi Huang



Govea Quevedo



Maxim Lykov



ANDRAS NEMETH, GABY LIVSHITZ CELEBRATE PLO GRAND SLAM MALTA TITLES

By Tim Fiorvanti



Andras Nemeth



Gaby Livshitz

It's an exciting time to be a pot-limit Omaha tournament player, with dedicated PLO festivals on two continents in the month of October alone. While the *PGT PLO Series II* played out in Las Vegas (pg. 24), the 2025 *Diamond Poker Series PLO Grand Slam* festival served up a week of four-card action at Casino Malta, highlighted by two signature events with seven-figure guarantees.

A €2 million guaranteed, €10,300 buy-in event kicked off the festivities. A few days later, a €5,200 buy-in with a €1 million guarantee generated similar enthusiasm.

Hungary's **Andras Nemeth** emerged from Malta as the winner in the first event. The *Triton* champion and high-roller veteran captured the title, topping a field of 182 entries for \$477,189 in prize money and 840 POY points.

Nemeth made a heads-up deal with PLO specialist Aku Joentausta of Finland. Joentausta banked \$380,655 for second place, marking the biggest live result of his career.

The final table also featured 2019 *World Series of Poker* main event champion Hossein Ensan, bracelet winner and two-time *World Poker Tour* champion Ole Schemion, and 2023 *WSOP Paradise* main event winner Stanislav Zegal.

Joentausta started the final table with the chip lead, with Nemeth close behind in second. Andreas Thelin of Sweden briefly popped into the top spot, and the trio that would ultimately make up the final three traded the lead several times before Nemeth temporarily distanced himself from the pack.

Joentausta knocked off Ensan in fifth, and Nemeth made a boat to bust Schemion in fourth. Thelin, a relative live tournament amateur, got it in good against Nemeth, but busted in third to a rivered straight.

After a heads-up deal, Nemeth blasted his way through heads-up play. On the final hand, the chips got in on the turn of a 4♥ 2♥ 2♣ 2♦. Nemeth's pair of kings in his hand bested Joentausta's pair of nines in a final battle of full houses, and his victory was secured.

In the second seven-figure guaranteed tournament of the series, **Gaby Livshitz** overcame 189 entries. The Israeli player won an online *WSOP* bracelet in PLO back in 2021, but prior to this win, hadn't won a major live title in the game.

Livshitz was awarded \$255,177 as the champion. That result was his third-biggest cash overall, and came with 672 POY points.

He defeated Jelle de Kroon of the Netherlands heads-up. De Kroon held the chip lead six-handed, and while Livshitz was second at that point in the tournament, his stack slipped

over the course of several major pots. But in one significant pot, against a player who managed to remain anonymous in the field, Livshitz got the chips in on the turn of a 10♠ 9♥ 6♦ Q♦ with the nut straight and a redraw, and held to claim the chip lead three-handed.

At one point, Livshitz became perilously short-stacked and was one card away from elimination before rivering a diamond flush against de Kroon. Another rivered flush, this time in clubs, gave Livshitz a gigantic double through Aki Vihikainen and the lead.

By the time Livshitz busted Vihikainen in third with a flopped straight against an overpair, his lead was at roughly 12:1. He made quick work of the heads-up match to leave Malta with his first live PLO title. ♠

€10,300 PLO

Event	Player	Payout	POY
1	Andras Nemeth	\$477,189	840
2	Aku Joentausta	\$380,655	700
3	Andreas Thelin	\$230,958	560
4	Ole Schemion	\$189,189	420
5	Hossein Ensan	\$151,749	350
6	Stanislav Zegal	\$117,702	280
7	Anonymous	NA	
8	Filip Lovric	\$63,999	140
9	Aki Vihikainen	\$51,012	70

€5,200 PLO

Event	Player	Payout	POY
1	Gaby Livshitz	\$255,177	672
2	Jelle de Kroon	\$173,160	560
3	Aki Vihikainen	\$117,000	448
4	Anonymous	NA	
5	Filip Lovric	\$75,641	280
6	Carlo van Ravenswoud	\$58,617	224
7	Anonymous	NA	
8	Anonymous	NA	
9	Espen Myrmo	\$25,560	56

HARVEY CASTRO WINS INAUGURAL WPT PRIME LODGE

By Tim Fiorvanti

Harvey Castro has recorded several big scores on the circuit in recent years, including winning the 2023 *WSOP Circuit* main event at Choctaw. He also came close to securing a couple other big wins this year, finishing runner-up at *WPT Rolling Thunder* and second in a *PokerGO Cup* event back in February.

Castro's latest score saw him make a bit of poker history. The 23-year-old won the inaugural *WPT Prime Lodge Championship*, outlasting a field of more than 1,600 entrants.

Castro's triumph came with \$225,020, a pair of trophies, and a seat in December's *WPT World Championship at Wynn Las Vegas*. This was the second-largest payday yet for Castro, who now has nearly \$1.6 million in career cashes.

This tournament drew a sizable turnout across five standard starting sessions and a turbo flight. In all, 1,648 entrants put up the \$1,100 buy-in, producing a prize pool of \$1,598,560 to easily top the \$1 million guarantee. There were 209 players who advanced to day 2, securing a spot in the money, and the final 17 returned for day 3.

Among the notables to run deep was Esther Taylor, who took third place in the \$50,000 *WSOP Poker Players Championship* this summer. Taylor was ultimately eliminated in fourth, earning \$79,000 for her latest deep run. She now has \$3.2 million in career earnings.

Castro opened with a 2:1 lead and extended it to 4:1 early in the heads-up bout. Joshua Stewart shoved his last 15 big blinds on the button with $J\heartsuit 10\clubsuit$, and Castro called



with pocket nines. The board ran out $K\spadesuit Q\spadesuit Q\heartsuit Q\heartsuit 6\heartsuit$, and Castro's full house earned him the victory. ♠

Player	Payout	Payout	POY
1	Harvey Castro	\$225,020	1,080
2	Joshua Stewart	\$143,000	900
3	Steve Hwang	\$106,000	720
4	Esther Taylor	\$79,000	540
5	Nicholas Scott	\$60,000	450
6	Rafael Reis	\$45,500	360
7	Martin Torres	\$35,000	270
8	David Sollee	\$27,500	180
9	Hai Pham	\$21,400	90

KAREEM COWART 'MANIFESTS' \$300K WINDFALL IN \$600 TOURNAMENT

By Erik Fast

New York's Kareem Cowart came agonizingly close to a big tournament win in 2024, finishing second in the \$1 million guaranteed \$500 buy-in at the *Borgata Spring Poker Open* for \$145,642. Roughly a year-and-a-half after that near miss, the construction company owner found himself deep in another huge-field event with a hefty guarantee. This time around, though, he would not be denied.

Cowart overcame 3,693 total entries in the \$2 million guaranteed \$600 *Lions Of The Atlantic* event, earning \$305,000 for the win.

"It's something really big off my vision board," he told *Poker.org*. "I've come in second before, I've won smaller tournaments, but I wanted a big one, something that felt like proof. I was manifesting this every day. During breaks, in the mornings, I was meditating, saying I already won. Manifestation is real, man."

The tournament ran from Oct. 8-19, with seven starting flights each at two properties in the MGM National Harbor in Maryland and Borgata in Atlantic City. Those who made it to day 2 locked up at least \$1,550 for their efforts, with six-figure paydays for the top four.

Accomplished tournament pro Daniel Buzgon placed fifth for \$65,000, bringing his career haul to more than \$3.9 million in the process.

Cowart then busted Sungwoon Yoo (4th – \$100,000) and Anton Saich (3rd – \$140,000) to enter heads-up play against



Michael McGrath with the lead.

McGrath soon was all-in and at risk with pocket queens leading A-J suited. An ace-high runout, however, gave Cowart the pot and the title. McGrath banked \$200,000 as the runner-up. ♠

Player	Payout	Payout	POY
1	Kareem Cowart	\$305,000	660
2	Michael McGrath	\$200,000	550
3	Anton Saich	\$140,000	440
4	Sungwoon Yoo	\$100,000	330
5	Daniel Buzgon	\$65,000	275
6	Jhordy Sanchez	\$50,000	220
7	Benny Bianco	\$36,000	165
8	Joseph Stevens	\$28,500	110
9	Wen Jin	\$22,100	55

© WPT

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TUAN LE TRIUMPHS IN POKERSTARS OPEN MANCHESTER

By Erik Fast

Tuan Le took down the *PokerStars Open Manchester* main event, besting a field of 927. This was not the two-time bracelet winner and two-time *WPT* champion of the same name, however, but a relatively new player on the live scene from the UK.

The Manchester local is a recreational player with just a handful of prior cashes. He earned \$198,436 and his first major title for this win, defeating British pro Christopher Brammer heads-up for the title.

“It was tough playing against a pro. I’ve got four kids, so I’ve got no time,” Le said to *PokerStars* reporters. “I’m not technically good, I can’t think numbers. These guys talk about how many big blinds have you got – I’ve got no idea!”

Brammer, a bracelet winner with more than \$2.8 million in career cashes, secured 760 POY points as the runner-up. This was his fifth final-table showing of the year.

The event ran from Oct. 22-26 at The Manchester Deansgate Hotel. The top 135 finishers all earned a share of the £1 million guaranteed prize pool, which amounted to \$1,333,200 in USD.

The top three walked away with six-figure paydays, with Hasmukh Khodiyara earning \$103,554 after he lost to Brammer’s two pair.

The final two battled for a bit before they agreed to chop the remaining prize money for \$178,486 each, leaving the title and an additional \$19,950 to play for. After



a swingy clash, Le’s A-J suited held against the K-6 of a short Brammer to bring the event to a close.

Event	Player	Payout	POY
1	Tuan Le	\$198,436	912
2	Christopher Brammer	\$178,486	760
3	Hasmukh Khodiyara	\$103,554	608
4	Adam Andersson	\$79,654	456
5	Mohamed Kerkeni	\$61,273	380
6	Sinead Davenport	\$47,135	304
7	Iulian Petrache	\$36,256	228
8	Ravi Sheth	\$27,890	152
9	John Adderley	\$21,453	76

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CIRCUIT RESULTS



Aaron Pinson

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Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit Horseshoe Baltimore, MD \$1,700 NLH Oct. 9-13 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 332 Prizepool: \$453,910	1 Aaron Pinson	\$102,668	480
	2 Joshua Mischel	\$68,489	400
	3 Jimmy Born	\$46,792	320
	4 Christian Harder	\$32,759	240
	5 Matthew Richardson	\$23,516	200
	6 Harrison Dobin	\$17,320	160
	7 Dennis Grizzle	\$13,097	120
	8 Anthony Mcie	\$10,175	80
	9 Changfeng Fan	\$8,128	40



Ahamad Meman

© Wynn Las Vegas

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Fall Classic Wynn Las Vegas, NV \$1,600 NLH Oct. 9-13 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 689 Prizepool: \$1,000,000	1 Ahamad Meman	\$160,350	840
	2 Kfir Nahum	\$155,108	700
	3 Bin Weng	\$92,356	560
	4 Michael Rossitto	\$72,221	420
	5 Ronald Scott	\$56,031	350
	6 Ping Liu	\$42,648	280
	7 Victoria Livschitz	\$31,823	210
	8 Ryan Hunsinger	\$23,411	140
	9 Bradley Gafford	\$16,829	70



Travis MacMillan

© WSOP

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit Deerfoot Casino Calgary, Canada C\$2,250 NLH Oct. 9-13 Entries: 910 Prizepool: \$1,327,863	1 Travis MacMillan	\$222,205	912
	2 Victor Li	\$148,117	760
	3 Kwong Au	\$103,908	608
	4 Sheraz Nasir	\$74,057	456
	5 Kyle Chang	\$53,638	380
	6 Jun-Yu Huang	\$39,489	304
	7 Nicholas Lee	\$29,559	228
	8 Gabriel Vezina	\$22,698	152
	9 Calvin Chow	\$17,430	76



Taylor Black

© Wynn Las Vegas

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Fall Classic Wynn Las Vegas, NV \$1,100 NLH Oct. 16-19 \$400,000 GTD Entries: 477 Prizepool: \$460,305	1 Taylor Black	\$93,998	720
	2 Daniyal Gheba	\$58,737	600
	3 Stephen Foutty	\$44,837	480
	4 Bert Geens	\$34,571	360
	5 Mitchell Halverson	\$26,929	300
	6 Michal Nahum	\$20,322	240
	7 Christopher Burks	\$15,387	180
	8 Matt Affleck	\$11,292	120
	9 Tongguang Sun	\$8,399	60

All payouts in USD.
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Nicholas Burris



© RGPS

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
RunGood Grand Prix	1 Nicholas Burris	\$65,435	360
	2 Dexter Wise	\$43,627	300
Hard Rock Catoosa, OK	3 Wesley Jones	\$32,627	240
	4 John Heckenkamp	\$24,104	180
	5 Bobby Randolph	\$18,190	150
\$800 NLH Oct. 24-26 \$100,000 GTD Entries: 469 Prizepool: \$328,300	6 Mika Evans	\$13,869	120
	7 Allen Freeman	\$10,684	90
	8 Terry Harrell	\$8,318	60
	9 Jon Kreder	\$6,544	30

Aku Joentausta



© Diamond Poker Series

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
PLO Grand Slam	1 Aku Joentausta	\$61,250	240
	2 Filip Alešić	\$44,168	200
Casino Malta St. George's Bay, Malta	3 Csaba Fenyvesi	\$28,139	160
	4 Tomasz Kozub	\$21,353	120
€5,200 PLO Mystery KO Oct. 18-19 €300,000 GTD Entries: 58 Prizepool: \$194,222	5 Tomasz Krzesinski	\$16,497	100
	6 Marcus Dieleman	\$12,636	80
	7 Dennis Weiss	\$10,179	60

Paul Eidem



© Canterbury Park

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Fall Poker Classic	1 Paul Eidem	\$108,638	912
	2 Mark Fink	\$101,677	760
Canterbury Shakopee, MN	3 Wesley Cannon	\$64,100	608
	4 Sami El-Dein	\$47,560	456
	5 Christopher Nelson	\$35,845	380
\$1,100 NLH Oct. 16-19 \$300,000 GTD Entries: 718 Prizepool: \$689,280	6 David Bashel	\$26,880	304
	7 Joe Larson	\$20,680	228
	8 Cody Espeseth	\$16,540	152
	9 Jeffrey Birt	\$12,405	76

Jinrong Zhang



© MSPT

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Canadian Poker Championship	1 Jinrong Zhang	\$117,150	960
	2 Sebastien Proulx	\$84,213	800
Playground Poker Kahnawake, Canada	3 Lyndon Webster	\$82,026	640
	4 Kevin Javier	\$46,217	480
	5 Scott Babbitt	\$35,216	400
C\$1,150 NLH Oct. 15-19 C\$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,057 Prizepool: \$752,004	6 Carter Swidler	\$27,143	320
	7 Adam Cader	\$21,275	240
	8 Rami Hammoud	\$16,138	160
	9 Pierre-Alexandre Lessard	\$13,206	80

TOURNAMENTS



© GUKPT

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
GUKPT	1 Bryan Taylor	\$58,414	384
	2 Anonymous	NA	
Grosvenor Edinburgh, Scotland	3 Serghei Zglavoci	\$30,284	256
	4 Shi Dong	\$20,283	192
	5 Nicholas Swann	\$14,218	160
£1,000 NLH Oct. 16-19	6 Andrew Hulme	\$10,520	128
£150,000 GTD Entries: 233 Prizepool: \$263,299	7 Fraser Bellamy	\$8,432	96
	8 Craig Mccairns	\$7,155	64
	9 Mitchell Johnson	\$6,331	32



© U Series of Poker

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Grand Loyal Championships	1 Henri Hinds	\$155,705	540
	2 Van Sang Nguyen	\$111,478	450
	3 Thi Nguyen	\$77,414	360
Grand Loyal Poker Club Hanoi, Vietnam	4 Yue Jia	\$57,361	270
	5 Fan Li	\$42,868	225
VND 20,000,000 NLH Oct. 16-20	6 Anh Le	\$33,926	180
	7 Ferdinand Lu	\$28,211	135
VND 18,000,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,564 Prizepool: \$1,024,868	8 Sergei Korzhenko	\$20,486	90
	9 Tuan Nguyen	\$15,569	45



© Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit	1 Carter McMahon	\$212,703	912
	2 Ricardo Eyzaguirre	\$141,777	760
Harrah's Pompano Beach, FL	3 Jeffrey Gale	\$97,967	608
	4 Maurice Hawkins	\$68,952	456
	5 Romeo Mendoza	\$49,449	380
\$1,700 NLH Oct. 16-20	6 Matthew Yorra	\$36,146	304
\$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 820 Prizepool: \$1,110,910	7 Stewart Yancik	\$26,942	228
	8 Anthony Ruttler	\$20,484	152
	9 Joshua Gibson	\$15,893	76



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Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Nordic & Baltic Championship	1 Mikko Ylamaki	\$89,689	360
	2 Pasi Sormunen	\$80,020	300
Olympic Park Tallinn, Estonia	3 Tommi Lankinen	\$47,795	240
	4 Pasi Laihin	\$34,925	180
	5 Antti Maki-Franti	\$26,735	150
€3,500 NLH Oct. 18-19	6 Duncan Horst	\$21,587	120
	7 Mathias Siljander	\$17,375	90
Entries: 101 Prizepool: \$378,262	8 Roope Tarmi	\$13,982	60
	9 Guillermo Gordo	\$11,058	30

TOURNAMENTS



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Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Nordic & Baltic Championship	1 Krisjanis Stankevics	\$93,495	600
	2 Guillermo Gordo	\$78,144	500
	3 Kai Lehto	\$34,808	400
Olympic Park Tallinn, Estonia	4 Quoc Ly	\$23,810	300
	5 Otto Kiiskinen	\$17,960	250
€1,100 NLH Oct. 18-22	6 Mikael Haapaniemi	\$14,567	200
	7 Ville Mesiranta	\$11,993	150
Prizepool: \$427,167	8 Jae Kim	\$10,238	100
	9 Joel Jimenez	\$8,717	50

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
PokerStars Open	1 Charles Furey	\$111,976	840
	2 Melanie Hennigan	\$70,014	700
Livel Casino Hanover, MD	3 Arthur Zabronsky	\$50,032	560
	4 Paul Lilly	\$38,505	420
	5 Frankie Zeta	\$29,638	350
\$1,100 NLH Oct. 22-26	6 Torsten Boker	\$22,817	280
	7 Samuel Press	\$17,564	210
Prizepool: \$581,030	8 Andy Bartalone	\$13,526	140
	9 Daniel Lim	\$10,418	70



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Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
PokerStars Open Manchester	1 Ian Simpson	\$70,676	240
	2 Nicholas Swann	\$45,619	200
Deansgate Hotel Manchester, United Kingdom	3 Antoine Labat	\$32,585	160
	4 Andrew Hulme	\$25,057	120
	5 Rui Bouquet	\$19,285	100
£2,200 NLH Oct. 21-22	6 Joan Perez	\$14,843	80
	7 Gerard Cortes	\$11,864	60
Prizepool: \$270,682	8 Mitchell Johnson	\$9,496	40
	9 Javier Gonzalez	\$7,900	20

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
APPT Championship	1 Edgar Asehan	\$86,190	192
	2 Miyoung Cho	\$56,270	160
Okada Manila Manila, Philippines	3 Leonardo Drago	\$38,760	128
	4 Florencio Campomanes	\$28,730	96
	5 Jayden Zalac	\$22,440	80
PHP 500,000 NLH Oct. 22-23	6 Kaoru Kishimoto	\$17,925	64
	Prizepool: \$250,315		

TOURNAMENTS



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Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
APPT Championship	1 Minwoong Jeong	\$201,450	900
	2 Craig Jones	\$125,885	750
Okada Manila Manila, Philippines	3 Eng Choi	\$89,930	600
	4 Aditya Agarwal	\$69,207	450
	5 Van Sang Nguyen	\$53,244	375
PHP 165,000 NLH Oct. 23-27	6 Waris Soontorn	\$40,953	300
PHP 60,000,000 GTD Entries: 384 Prizepool: \$1,018,800	7 Anonymous	NA	
	8 Ngoc Anh Cao	\$25,976	150
	9 Daniel Lei	\$21,692	75

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Pinktober Poker Open	1 Rafael Reis	\$70,810	480
	2 Patrick Ibrahim	\$47,050	400
Seminole Hard Rock Tampa, FL	3 Stuart Phillips	\$34,430	320
	4 Clyde Maliauka	\$25,490	240
	5 Sanjib Acharya	\$19,100	200
\$1,200 NLH Oct. 23-26	6 Luis Medina	\$14,480	160
\$200,000 GTD Entries: 322 Prizepool: \$338,100	7 Roberto Melo	\$11,110	120
	8 Igor Tretjakov	\$8,630	80
	9 Alfredo Basu	\$6,770	40

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 EPT Malta
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Konstantyn Holskyi
868,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 34%
After Flop: 17%
After Turn: 9%



Adria Calonge
400,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 34%
After Flop: 15%
After Turn: N/A



Jiaming Zhao
843,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 32%
After Flop: 67%
After Turn: 91%



PREFLOP

With 66 players remaining and blinds of 3,000-6,000 with a big blind ante of 6,000, Konstantyn Holskyi raised to 12,000 from under the gun. Jiaming Zhao called from the hijack, and Adria Calonge called from the big blind.



Calonge and Holskyi checked. Jiaming bet 20,000. Calonge called, and Holskyi check-raised to 85,000. Jiaming called, and Calonge folded.

Holskyi bet 100,000, and Jiaming called.

Holskyi checked, and Jiaming bet 150,000. Holskyi moved all-in. Jiaming called for 646,000 total.

COMMENTARY:

After almost a decade on ice, *EPT Malta* returned in October, and the €5,300 main event drew 898 entries to produce a prize pool of €4,355,300. The remaining 66 players were already in the money but still pretty far from the final table when this hand took place. Konstantyn Holskyi's play on the flop was non-standard, as double-Broadway flops are generally favorable for a preflop early opener in a single-raised pot. He decided to start laying a trap with a check, and Jiaming Zhao had a clear bet with bottom set. Adria Calonge decided to come along with an overcard and a nut straight draw, but any hope of seeing a cheap turn was quickly dashed when Holskyi came alive with the big check-raise. Jiaming could have raised with his set, but stacking off with bottom set and more than 100 blinds deep in a tournament can be a dicey proposition. He continued with a call. Once the turn arrived and completed some straights, Holskyi picked a bit of an in-between size, around 40% of the pot. He bet big enough to threaten stacks on the river without making it easy for a hand like Q-10 to fold. Jiaming continued to play it slow, and the river brought a very interesting board pair. At that point, Holskyi checked. His hand had been devalued and he wasn't likely to get called by many worse holdings unless he bet very small. Jiaming was supposed to jam for value according to the solver. Instead he opted for a small size, and Holskyi could have plausibly called, folded, or turned his hand into a bluff. He decided on the latter, perhaps thinking Jiaming wasn't betting the river without at least trips, and understanding that K-J blocked most of the available full houses. Jiaming's hand was too strong and under-represented to fold, and he was rewarded with an enormous double up.

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

ALL-TIME MONEY LIST: THE \$50 MILLION CLUB



Rank	Player	Earnings	Titles	Cashes	Age
1st	Bryn Kenney	\$79,777,539	34	227	38
2nd	Stephen Chidwick	\$74,448,806	48	381	36
3rd	Justin Bonomo	\$69,415,857	36	245	40
4th	Jason Koon	\$69,331,098	37	246	40
5th	Mikita Badziakouski	\$69,065,404	24	190	33
6th	Isaac Haxton	\$63,561,083	20	251	40
7th	Dan Smith	\$63,262,642	32	264	36
8th	Adrian Mateos	\$56,419,186	29	318	31
9th	Daniel Negreanu	\$56,299,255	49	536	51
10th	Alex Foxen	\$55,657,147	33	484	34
11th	David Peters	\$54,711,389	48	452	38
12th	Phil Ivey	\$54,059,427	36	249	48
13th	Fedor Holz	\$52,159,251	19	142	32

The exclusive club of poker players with tournament earnings of \$50 million or more has just 13 members.

Bryn Kenney has spent much of the past few years as the top earner on the circuit. His lifetime haul currently sits at nearly \$79.8 million, with 13 scores of seven figures or more, including five multi-million-dollar payday. The New York native still holds the record for the largest payday in poker history with the \$20.6 million windfall he earned via a heads-up deal in the 2019 *Triton Million Charity Invitational*, which remains the largest buy-in tournament ever held with its £1,050,000 (\$1,321,950) price tag.

British tournament crusher **Stephen Chidwick** is Kenney's nearest competition, although he trails by more than \$5.3 million. The Deal, England native has nearly \$74.5 million in recorded scores, putting him on the verge of becoming just the second player to top the \$75 million mark. Although he has been playing high rollers for more than a decade, two of Chidwick's top three scores were earned just this fall. He took down a \$200,000 short deck event for \$3.4 million, then finished second in a \$125,000 no-limit hold'em event less than a week later for more than \$1.9 million.

The rest of the top five finds themselves in a close battle for third place. **Justin Bonomo**, **Jason Koon**, and **Mikita Badziakouski** all boast more than \$69 million in lifetime cashes.

Bonomo, who at one point took turns trading the lead with Kenney, won the 2018 *WSOP Big One For One Drop* for \$10 million, and also two *Super High Roller Bowl* titles that same year. Those three triumphs alone account for more than \$19.8 million of the Virginia native's career haul.

Koon is the all-time *Triton Poker* titles leader, so it's no surprise that 10 of his 16 seven-figure scores have come on that nosebleed-stakes tour. Although he doesn't play as much as he used to, the West Virginia native still has three seven-figure scores this year, including the \$150,000 event at *Triton Montenegro* for \$3.4 million, and his second bracelet this summer in the \$50,000 *WSOP* high roller for another \$2 million.

Badziakouski is one of two players on this list with fewer than 200 recorded cashes. The Belarusian's average payday across his 190 in-the-money finishes clocks in at a whopping \$363,502. His biggest cash remains the \$7.1 million prize he banked for winning the \$1 million buy-in *WPT Big One For One Drop*.

The baker's dozen players on this list will soon have some more company. Poker Hall of Famer Erik Seidel is one of three players, alongside Steve O'Dwyer and Daniel Dvoress, who are right on the cusp with over \$49 million. Seidel is still running up the score at the age of 65, having just won a title during the recent *PGT PLO Series II* (pg. 24). ♠

Head Games: What The Pros Focus On To Grow Their Game

By Craig Tapscott



In a game where precision meets emotion, the mental side of poker often separates the elite from the merely talented. In this *Head Games* series, a diverse lineup of professionals open up about the subtle — and often overlooked — dimensions of improvement that define their edge at the tables. These players are not just refining strategy or memorizing solver outputs, they are exploring the inner architecture of performance — balance, intuition, and adaptation.

This is not about charts or cold calculations. It's about what happens behind the scenes — the mindset work, personal growth, and self-examination that fuels sustained excellence. Poker may be a game of cards, but as these pros reveal, the real battleground is the mind.

The Pros: Esther Taylor, Zak VanKeuren, Ashley Frank, Derek Kwan, Dara O'Kearney, and Rayan Chamas

What is one aspect of the game you are working on?

Esther Taylor: I am working on volume, specifically focusing on quality over quantity.

I think that before you get to a certain point in your career, you absolutely have to put as much volume as your bankroll allows to get as many hand scenarios as possible under your belt as a professional.

But there is a point at which you have to take into account how much time you are spending at the tables vs. your EV. You have to consider the value of your time. I am being more selective about the tournaments I play lately, while staying true to the balance in my home and personal life, and relationships.

Poker should be only a part of your circle. I find the most successful people, not only in poker but in life, have a fulfilling amount of balance in all areas of their lives.

Being able to leave poker “at the tables” and not let it

negatively affect the rest of your life is a severely underrated skill!

Zak VanKeuren: There are so many different aspects of poker that I love to study and refine, but the area that's made the biggest difference in both my happiness and my results is designing a life I truly love and playing the game from that foundation of alignment.

Poker can consume us if we let it. For a long time, I felt that subtle pressure of needing to “make money” from the game. And any time I played from that mindset, I felt off, disconnected from the deeper purpose that drew me to poker in the first place. What I'm working on now is cultivating inner alignment: making sure that how I live, how I feel, and how I play are all congruent.

That means creating freedom in my schedule, living intentionally, and investing in my overall well-being. By understanding and caring for myself on different levels, I show up at the table more present, grounded, and clear-minded. Ironically, when I stopped feeling like I needed to win and started focusing on living my highest version of life, my game, and my enjoyment of it, skyrocketed.

The most undervalued skill in tournament poker right now is emotional regulation and energetic awareness—the ability to stay calm, centered, and connected to your intuition no matter what's happening around you. So many players obsess over technical theory, solver outputs, and population tendencies, but very few train how to actually access that knowledge under pressure.

Poker is an emotional rollercoaster by design—it exposes fear, greed, attachment, and ego—and if those internal states aren't managed, they subtly steer decision-making. The best players aren't just the ones who study the hardest;

they're the ones who can maintain clarity, patience, and composure deep into a 12-hour day or after taking multiple bad beats in a row.

At the highest levels, technical skill is table stakes. The true separator is energetic mastery—being able to hold a calm, confident presence through every phase of a tournament. The players who can stay in that space are the ones who perform at their peak when it matters most.

Ashley Frank: Lately, I've been reconnecting with the human side of poker, the part you can't find in a solver. My journey has come full circle. When I first started, I had no grasp of theory, so I played purely off intuition, feel, and instinct. That natural approach was my strength.

Once I discovered solvers, I became obsessed with playing "perfectly," chasing solver-approved jams and bluffs, and my results tanked. I forgot that theory only matters if your opponents are playing perfectly, too. Poker isn't static. It's alive and changing from moment to moment.

Now, I study theory as a foundation. Solvers teach math, not feel. My focus is on hyper-exploitative play and live pattern recognition, studying how people actually behave under fatigue, frustration, or pressure. And obviously, their player types, so I can learn how to exploit them.

Emotional regulation has also become key. Tilt isn't just anger; it's being disconnected from the present. I've been training to stay in flow longer, using calm as a weapon when others unravel.

Intuition plays a huge role in staying present. It's subconscious pattern recognition built through experience. I'm learning to trust it again, alongside logic. The real goal is human adaptation: sensing when momentum shifts, when an opponent's confidence cracks, and playing the person, not the chart.

Solvers gave us structure, but it's time to bring the soul back into the game. The best players will not be those who mimic GTO. They will be the ones who can see beyond it.

To me, poker is an endurance sport of the mind. It's about maintaining awareness across a marathon of decisions and finding that flow state where instinct and logic merge. You don't reach that by memorizing charts; you reach it through presence. Because in the end, poker is still a human game, and the calmest player usually ends up with the chips.

What are the most undervalued skills in tournament poker today?

Derek Kwan: I am extremely unbalanced against some specific player types, especially those who are not observant. And I think deeply about how to maximize EV in hands against these types, as I believe your biggest pots will come from them.

For example, the majority of flops in most phases of tournaments call for smaller bet sizing. But if a player tends to be very sticky on flops but gives up to multiple barrels, you need to find quite literally the max bet size they will call on the flop (is it 200%?) and use that sizing, or I believe you are making a massive error.

There are many different examples like this, but I think most high-stakes pros prioritize the max EV for a scenario rather than for a specific player, and their deviations tend to still be within a "solver-approved" set of choices. But that's not how you maximally exploit these types.

If I had to estimate, I think upwards of 50 percent of the total tournament ecosystem has attempted to learn from some form of solver, or at least learning materials that



Dara O’Kearney



Rayan Chamas



teach solver-like concepts. But only maybe 20 percent have stuck with it for more than a month. I honestly believe less than five percent have put in moderate, consistent work for several months or longer.

But you can’t jump to exploits before learning the baselines. While exploits are important, the technical bits are the most significant levers to focus on to make you a better player.

Dara O’Kearney: I would say multiway pots are usually neglected. The solvers only recently became capable of multiway solutions, and this is the area I’ve been studying the most recently, both to improve my own game and for a course I’m currently putting together.

Another skill is game selection. Most pros seem not to put much thought into this anymore. It’s true that you often don’t have many options when playing live, but for example, during the summer in Vegas, when every property has a series, you should be trying to game select the best games every day.

One trick my friend Andy Hills taught me is that whenever there are competing series, the second or third most prestigious one is usually the best value in terms of likely edge or EV.

So, if everyone is at a *European Poker Tour* stop, the next biggest festival on at the same time is usually your best option, unless that’s high status too, like a *World Poker Tour* event, in which case you go for the third biggest.

Rayan Chamas: Self-analysis is so undervalued. Everyone points out others’ mistakes all the time, but they are too scared to criticize themselves.

From my experience, the best players are the ones who are critical of everything they do. This provides a hunger to improve continually, even if you are winning huge tournaments. It’s never enough to stop at the top.

However, you cannot mistake this for greed. Wanting more out of yourself is not tied to money. Elite players tend to review their best moments and still find mistakes. This self-awareness allows them to consistently improve, while their peers waste time pointing out others’ errors.

It’s like a little loop that you can only break by doing it yourself first in order to stay ahead of your competition.

I also believe no one focuses enough on in-game performance. It’s one thing to learn theory, but it doesn’t put you in the best state to apply that knowledge during long tournament grinds.

Tournament grinds are eight hours on average, and you always need to be dialed in 100 percent. In order to achieve that, you cannot rely on what you learned from solvers. You must focus on your durability, physical health, and mental health to withstand the pressure that comes with poker. ♠

Esther ‘E-Tay’ Taylor is a self-proclaimed ‘mommy and part-time poker player.’ This summer, the Oregon native became only the second woman to reach the final table of the \$50,000 WSOP Poker Player Championship, taking third for \$595,136. The mixed-games standout has more than \$3.1 million in career tournament earnings. You can follow Taylor on Twitter/X @e_tay.

Zak VanKeuren took the poker world by storm last December when he captured the WPT Prime event at the WPT World Championship for nearly \$1.2 million, capping off a year where the New Yorker also took down an WSOP Online bracelet. VanKeuren is a peak performance/ men’s wellness coach who offers both online coaching and in-person retreats. Follow via IG @lucid_poker or on X at @ZakVanKeuren.

Ashley ‘Pokerface Ash’ Frank is a major influencer in the poker community, a talented commentator, and a prominent vlogger. With thousands of subscribers, the BetMGM ambassador’s engaging content has captivated a wide audience. Find the Arizona native @ pokerface_ash on IG, X, and YouTube.

Derek Kwan is a long-time respected grinder on the Southern California tournament circuit with \$1 million in career cashes, including a win in this year’s LA Poker Classic mini main event. The two-time WSOP Circuit ring winner is the creator and host of the popular poker YouTube channel 10MinutePokerTips. Follow Kwan’s poker grind on X @ kwansfull.

*Dara O’Kearney is a renowned coach, author, commentator, and an ambassador for WPT Global. The co-host of the award-winning podcast *The Chip Race*, O’Kearney is also the author of seven poker strategy books and the co-founder of the training site *SimplifyPoker.com*. Follow the Irish poker pro on X @daraokearney.*

*Rayan ‘Beriuzy’ Chamas is a longtime professional grinder from Lebanon who resides in Canada. In 2023 he narrowly missed out on a WPT title, and in September, the online crusher took down two major events on the same day. Chamas also produced and starred in the YouTube documentary *The Reality Of Being A Poker Player – Dealing With \$800,000 Downswings*. Follow Chamas on X @beriuzy.*

BE SURE TO DEFEND ADEQUATELY

By Jonathan Little

Early in a \$500 buy-in poker tournament with blinds at 25-50, our Hero raised to 150 out of his 5,000 stack from second position with J♣ J♠. Only a strong, loose, splashy player called on the button.

The flop came K♥ K♦ 8♣. Hero bet 200 into the 375 pot and his opponent raised to 600.

I like Hero's flop bet. If the stacks were shorter, I would prefer a smaller bet of 125, although when playing 100 big blinds deep, half-pot is fine.

When raised, given the read that the opponent is loose, splashy, and more than capable of bluffing, calling is mandatory. While Hero could easily be crushed by trip kings, if he folds J-J, he is folding almost every hand in his range, especially if he continuation bets with most of his range on this uncoordinated board.

When playing against competent players, you must be aware of which hands make up your range. If you fold too many of them when raised or bet into, your opponent can profit by blindly applying aggression.

Overly aggressive players fare well in small and medium stakes games because their opponents fold too often. Overly aggressive players become significant losers in high-stakes games because their opponents know they cannot fold too often, resulting in them defending



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correctly.

In this situation, the opponent is risking 600 to win a 575 pot. This means that if he steals the pot more than 51% of the time (600/1175), he will immediately profit.

If Hero folds J-J, he is certainly folding more than half of his range, making a fold not a viable option. In fact, depending on how wide Hero is continuation betting, he may have to defend with hands as weak as ace-high or backdoor draws like Q♥ 10♥ in order to not let his opponent immediately profit by raising with any two cards.

Hero called, and the turn was the 2♠. Hero checked and his opponent bet 700 into the 1,575 pot.

Using the same logic that resulted in Hero calling on the flop, he has to call on the turn. If he folds this hand, he is folding almost his entire range.

Notice that if Hero opted to reraise his full houses and trips on the flop (which I do not recommend), A-A, Q-Q, and J-J are the absolute best hands in his range. You never want to be in a spot where you are tempted to fold the best hands in your range when facing a competent opponent. Even if Hero calls with all his trips on the flop, J-J is still quite high in his range.

Hero called, and the river was the 4♣. Hero checked and his opponent checked behind, showing down 5♥ 4♥, giving Hero a nice pot.

Had the opponent not rivered a hand with a bit of showdown value, he may have pushed all-in for a bit more than the size of the pot. This would have put Hero in a nasty spot.

Depending on how his range is comprised, he may be

able to fold to a river all-in. If the opponent pushed for the size of the pot, he needs to steal it roughly 50% of the time to show a profit. This means that Hero must call with at least 50% of his range.

If his range only contains decent pairs and trips, perhaps J-J is close enough to the bottom of the range to justify folding. If his range contains lots of ace-highs though, folding J-J would be much too tight.

Especially when playing against strong opponents, always think about the composition of your range and play it in a manner that leads to difficult spots for your opponent. Do not play in a manner that allows your opponents to win simply by betting whenever you show weakness. ♠



Jonathan Little is a WSOP bracelet winner, two-time WPT winner, and PokerGO Cup champion. The best-selling author of 15 educational poker books and 2019 GPI Poker Personality of the Year wants to help you increase your poker skills and learn to crush the games. Check out PokerCoaching.com/CardPlayer.



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TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 EPT Malta
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Aliaksei Boika
2,290,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 74%
After Flop: 72%
After Turn: 84%



Adria Calonge
4,460,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 25%
After Flop: 27%
After Turn: 16%

PREFLOP

With five players remaining and blinds of 50,000-100,000 with a big blind ante of 100,000, Aliaksei Boika raised to 300,000 from the small blind. Adria Calonge called from the big blind.



Both players checked.



Both players checked.



Boika checked. Calonge bet 850,000, and Boika called.

COMMENTARY:

With five players remaining, everyone had secured €200,550, with the next pay jump looming to €260,750. One player was down below 15 big blinds when this hand occurred, so there was a fair amount of ICM pressure on Aliaksei Boika sitting in fourth place. Given that, he could have played A♦ J♦ as a limp preflop, but it's certainly good enough to raise and stack off in that situation. Adria Calonge had a hand that was right on the border between calling and folding, and he decided to see a flop. After Boika completely whiffed the flop with no pair, no draw, and no backdoor on a board that would frequently connect with the big blind's defending range, check was the only play, and that's what he did. Bluffing the flop would have been reasonable from Calonge with a gutter and an overcard and a hand that had basically no showdown, but checking was a fine option as well. The situation was much the same on the turn. Though Boika picked up a straight draw of his own, ace high still could win a showdown. Calonge had a little less incentive to bluff since he picked up a better draw and could plausibly still win with a pair, though the solver still likes to mix in some bluffs at a low frequency. On the river, Boika had a mandatory check with a hand that was likely best, but Calonge had a hand that should basically never win a showdown. Most of his good hands would have bet prior to the river, however, so he was really only representing trip sixes by bombing it on the end. Boika was able to sniff it out and called for almost half of his stack with a hand that the solver prefers to fold, although it's close and it does do a fair amount of calling with A-K. That hand plays pretty similarly, although the jack does block a few more bluffs (such as J-9) than the king.

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

HOW TO EXPLOIT FIVE MISTAKES YOUR LOCAL TOURNEY REGS KEEP MAKING

By Alex Fitzgerald

Local poker tournaments are full of predictable patterns, and the biggest edge often comes from knowing how to exploit them. In this article, we'll break down five common mistakes recreational players make and show you exactly how to capitalize on each one.

Never Folding Multi-Way

Most of your opponents have never folded top pair or a draw in a multi-way pot to the first bet.

This is a huge problem for them, because if somebody raises from early position and then continuation bets 75% pot into four people, they're usually not messing around.

If that's a solid live player, that range tends to be sets, two pairs, top pair with top kicker, and huge combo draws. You can easily fold your mediocre top pairs and draws to that range.

However, your opponents tend to feel weak if they do that. They feel like they're being exploited. "If I fold this hand, aren't I folding every hand? What am I even doing here? It's hard to make these hands! I can't just fold them."

This fixed manner of thinking doesn't allow them to appraise each situation for its individual merits. The lack of flexibility traps them when they're playing against a person who is just going for extreme value with a great hand.

You can take advantage of their lack of flexibility by betting larger with your made hands multi-way. Every good player at the table will know what you're doing, but there's not many of them.

Playing Too Many Hands Preflop

I know you've heard this before, but it's overwhelming how bad most people are at this. If you're playing at a nine-handed poker table, it's you versus eight people. You're supposed to be folding most of the time! But the average local tournament player will fold for 14 minutes and then start telling everyone who will listen how bad they are running.

If I'm ever playing and one of my book readers or students watches me, they're always stunned at how tight I am most of the time. It's not that I'm a tight player, it's just that they are playing that loose.

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I'm using standard opening and three-betting ranges most of the time, because it takes a while to develop reads that allow you to deviate. Those solid ranges will have you hanging out for a long while before you strike. You can't just fling chips in because you're bored.

The most common ways people play too many hands is with too many preflop raises, cold calls, limps, and three-bet flats. If you see someone show up at showdown with a goofball hand, you can start value betting more thinly versus them. You can also choose to run a bluff versus their weaker ranges if you believe they don't want to play a big pot yet.

Never Three-Betting

It's rare to find someone who doesn't have this leak in local tournaments stateside. Americans especially, believe three-bets are supposed to be used sparingly and primarily with good hands. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sure, you don't have to spam the three-bet out there every chance you get, but a three-bet is the most fundamental aggressive play in the toolbox. It only costs seven to nine big blinds generally, and it's a great counter-punch to someone who is opening way too many weak hands and is continually trying to steal your positional raises.

You don't have to three-bet with 9-2 suited or anything junky like that, but some unsuited big cards or suited gappers are good enough to take into combat. You can also three-bet more of your middle pairs if you believe someone is opening too wide.

Only Bluffing When They're Frustrated

Most people in local tournaments only bluff when they're frustrated, which tends to mean they bluff when

their A-K misses the flop or their pocket queens see yet another overcard. They will also bluff when they miss their third draw of the day. It's generalized agitation.

The problem they have when they run these bluffs is they often don't represent much of anything. If they checked back a turn to see if they could hit their overcards, for example, that makes it less likely they have a set or two pair or great top pair – they would generally fire with those hands in hopes of making more money with the hand. If there was a flush draw on the board, it's more likely they would be betting to protect their hand as well.

When they suddenly rip it with their frustrated hand on the river, their opponent can ask an obvious question. "Wouldn't they have bet turn with all the hands I'm worried about here?"

A better time to bluff is when your opponent is capped at all of their weak hands. When you raise and the big blind flats you, for example, that's a situation where many people would three-bet their best hands. If that person then declines to check-raise you on a dangerous board with draws, it's more likely they have mediocre pairs. It's possible they would have check-raised with sets or two pairs to protect themselves from potential draws, so you can keep firing if the turn is a scare card to most of the pairs.

The average person in a local tournament doesn't know an ideal bluff spot, so what they do is bluff when they feel like it, which tends to be when they're frustrated with how they're running. If they capped their range earlier in the hand with a check back or call on a draw-intensive board, we can use that information to make

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thinner hero calls.

Never Finding A Fold On The River

This is the largest leak most people have in small tournaments where they can easily re-enter. If they don't like the guy? They're calling. Do they feel like their hand should be good, damn it? They're calling. Are they mad about how they're running and they want to make something happen? They're calling.

It's hilarious to see these folks at the *WSOP* when suddenly their decisions account for much more money and they don't have a solid A-game gear, but in their local games they can flail around and hope for the best.

In general, if a boring recreational player or reg triple barrels you, three-bets and fires multiple streets, raises turn, or raises river they generally have it. You don't have to rack your brain for bluffs they probably don't have, especially on the river where bets are largest and most of your opponents are squeamish.

Conclusion

By recognizing these leaks in your opponents' games, you can turn every hand into an opportunity for profit. Sharpen your awareness, adjust your strategy, and watch your results improve at the local tables. ♠



Alexander Fitzgerald is a professional poker player and bestselling author who lives in Denver, Colorado. He is a WPT and EPT final tablist with numerous online tournament wins. Free training packages of his are available to new newsletter subscribers who sign up for free at www.pokerheadrush.com

**PUNT OF THE DAY: RANGES!
RANGES! RANGES!**

By Sam Greenwood

Even the best players in the world make mistakes. Join Sam Greenwood as he breaks down and analyzes hands played from the circuit on his Punt Of The Day Substack.

An important skill in poker is pattern recognition. You can't possibly remember every detail of your own play, your opponent's play, or a solver output. So, you look for a natural human shortcut -- you find patterns and extrapolate what you think should happen in a similar situation.

I am blessed with a good memory and good pattern-mapping skills, which is helpful when using empirical information to improve at a game, but can be very annoying when doing other things, such as writing ~100,000 words on the same subject in a short period of time while hoping you are not being repetitive.

If there are tics, word choices, and arguments that you, the reader, have noticed I keep returning to, I assure you, I have noticed them as well and am trying my best to not make this column monotonous. My biggest stylistic challenge is mixing it up and not repeating the same poker jargon within an individual newsletter, and sometimes I resort to a trick I learned from my days as a lazy university student, which is using 'ctrl+F' to see just how many times I used a

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 EPT Malta
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Aliaksei Boika
4,300,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 80%
After Flop: 9%
After Turn: 5%



Mykhailo Ostash
14,350,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 20%
After Flop: 89%
After Turn: 95%

PREFLOP

With four players remaining and blinds of 50,000-100,000 with a big blind ante of 100,000, Aliaksei Boika raised to 200,000 from under the gun. Mykhailo Ostash called from the big blind.



Both players checked.



Ostash bet 500,000, and Boika called.



Ostash moved all-in, and Boika called.

COMMENTARY:

After Tom-Aksel Bedell busted out, the remaining four players had €260,750 secured. Aliaksei Boika and Adria Calonge were clustered at the bottom of the counts, so there wasn't a ton of ICM in play. Boika opened with his kings, and Mykhailo Ostash defended with his own pair of fives, flopping a set. As the commentary noted, leading was a viable option, and one the solver prefers with bottom set, but Ostash may have been playing a check-only strategy on the flop. The better the overpair, the more viable checking back is on this flop since giving free cards is less risky, and that's the route Boika chose. After the flop checked through, an overbet would have been the best way for Ostash to start threatening stacks on the turn. With a board that coordinated, no small sizes made sense, and he opted for a pot-sized wager. Boika could do nothing but call. On the river Ostash had a good hand to overbet jam with, and Boika was in a sticky spot. He was beating a slew of missed draws and losing to a ton of two pair and better hands. He didn't take long before calling, probably due to how under-repped his hand was. It is interesting to note that he held the combo of kings that the solver likes calling the least with on the river. It prefers to call off with K♥ K♠ because the stronger missed flush draws are supposed to give up on the river, meaning those cards don't block bluffs. Most people probably wouldn't play that way, though, so Boika's combo may have been a better call in real life and certainly made sense in a spot where he could expect the chip leader to pile on the pressure.

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JC Alvarado

that is knowing how to play the hand you are holding at any given time.

Today, we go back to 2018 for *Triton Jeju* to look at a hand where I was so interested in playing a perfect range strategy, that I forgot how to play my actual hand and got all-in with a draw, when a more passive approach would have been ideal.

Event: 2018 *Triton Jeju* \$500,000 HKD High Roller

The Hand

With a stack of 205,000 and blinds at 1,000-2,000 with a 2,000 big blind ante, I raised on the button to 4,000 holding 5♦ 4♦. JC

specific word.

If I had to guess, the most common poker word I use is ‘range.’ Often, first drafts will have dozens of ‘ranges’ in them, and I’m torn about removing them, because ‘range’ really is the best word to describe what I am trying to say. The concept of playing a range of hands instead of an individual hand is one of the most important concepts for any poker player to understand. So, I should be using the word ‘range’ a lot, but it still feels like too much.

If you master how to play your range, you will be an excellent poker player, but the goal of the game is not to ace a poker quiz about your range. It’s about executing the best strategies in the moment under time constraints and stress. Part of that is knowing how to play your range, but part of

Alvarado, sitting with 105,000, made the call from the big blind.

Flop: 8♦ 6♥ 2♦ (pot: 11,000)

JC checked, and I bet 8,000. He check-raised to 20,000, and I shoved. He called all in with 8♥ 6♠.

Turn: K♣

River: 10♥

JC’s two pair holds and he doubles up to 216,000.

What Was I Thinking?

I remember learning that low-card boards with lots of potential straight draws were often played as a big bet or check for the preflop raiser. I only had five high, but I had a monster draw, and I wanted to start inducing folds right away.

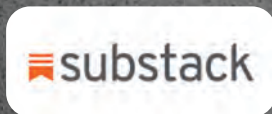
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Hi, my name is Sam Greenwood.

I’ve played millions of hands of poker and cashed for millions of dollars in tournaments, but I’ve also made millions of mistakes along the way.

Every day on my Substack I am going to revisit the blunders I’ve made, walk you through what I was thinking in the hand, and explain why I was unable to execute to the best of my abilities. My hope is that you’ll gain some insights from my punts and we can all learn something together.

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POKER STRATEGY

Once I got check-raised, I figured I'd have enough equity to get all-in vs. anything and decided to shove over his flop check-raise and try to hit my 15-outer.

What Did I Get Wrong?

The preferred bet size on low boards where no flopped straights are possible is often a large polar size, but it is not always a large polar size. I have a wide array of hands here, and while vulnerable one-pair hands like 9-9 and A-8 want to bet big so they can get all-in before scare cards can roll off, they do not comprise my entire range.

I have a range advantage and a whole host of hands like sets, flush draws, or middle pair, that are happy to use a smaller size on the flop. One of those hands is 5♦4♦.

It's an odd hand because it the second nut low and on many runouts will remain second nut low, but it often improves into a very strong hand. It's the type of hand that has 40% equity vs. a set, but only has 68% equity vs. J♣10♣. It's a very powerful hand that I am happy to play in position, value bet when I hit, bluff when I miss, and try to win as much money as possible with.

Do you know what is a bad way to maximize my earn with this hand? Getting all in with 48% equity and collecting my share of the overlay from the pot. 5-4 also has poor all-in equity vs. his semi-bluffs, which are hands that often give up on the turn or river if they miss, and which I could bluff later in the hand.

Bluffing ten high with five high is as good a bluff as there is, and getting all-in and losing to ten high is as bad a feeling as there is.

Additionally, since a lot of my opponent's value range is top pair, having one or two overcards to an eight is an appeal-

ing quality for a hand that wants to get all in on the flop. So, I'd rather have a 10♦9♦, 10♦7♦, 9♦7♦ type of hand to three-bet shove the flop with.

5-4 is not a hand that wants to bet big and not a hand that wants to shove over a flop bet. It's a big draw, but on the flop it's a bad hand, and you'd rather wait to see how the board runs out before getting all-in with a bad hand.

Grade

Today, the type of mistake I wrote about was fundamentally about trying to play my range instead of trying to play my hand. In this situation, I believed my range would play a big bet or check, without thinking about what my actual hand wanted to do.

I was wrong in many ways; this board does get small bets with range, and if I could only play big bet or check, my hand would want to check.

The goal is not to play your hand or range well; it is to play both well. In this hand, I didn't do either, and while my flop big bet is not that costly, shoving over the check-raise is.

I never thought getting all-in with a double gutter and a flush draw could be such a bad play, but I continue to find ways to surprise myself. This one is a C-. ♠



Sam Greenwood is one of the winningest tournament poker players ever and is third on Canada's all-time money list, having cashed for \$42 million and counting in high roller events all over the world. The former stock trader-turned-champion has played millions of poker hands and is breaking them down street by street on his Punt Of The Day Substack. You can reach out to the Run It Once coach on Twitter/X for private coaching @SamGreenwoodRIO.

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 EPT Malta
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Mykhailo Ostash
16,100,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 56%
After Flop: 91%
After Turn: 75%



Tomasz Brzezinski
11,050,00 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 43%
After Flop: 9%
After Turn: 25%

PREFLOP

With two players remaining and blinds of 100,000-200,000 with a big blind ante of 200,000, Mykhailo Ostash raised to 500,000 from the button. Tomasz Brzezinski called from the big blind.



Brzezinski checked, and Ostash bet 400,000. Brzezinski called.



Brzezinski checked, and Ostash bet 2,000,000. Brzezinski called.



Brzezinski bet 5,000,000, and Ostash called.

COMMENTARY:

The final two players had come to a deal, securing more than €600,000 apiece, so the stakes weren't huge with about €30,000 and a trophy at risk. They were likely both ready to gamble, hence Tomasz Brzezinski's willingness to check-call the flop in this spot with nothing but a couple of backdoors against Mykhailo Ostash's continuation-bet. That hand makes for an okay check-raise bluff, but it doesn't play well as a check-call. In any case, the players went to a turn that favored Brzezinski a bit, as he picked up a combo draw after calling the flop with air. The turn was a dangerous enough card that the weaker top pairs lost a lot of value and were supposed to check back pretty often, but Ostash liked his position enough to keep barreling. The pot-sized bet didn't deter Brzezinski, although it should have, since check-calling a draw with no showdown value is pretty dicey. The solver likes check-jamming these combo draws as a semi-bluff, but there was no need as Brzezinski got lucky on the river. Understanding that his opponent was likely to check back with any pair, Brzezinski went for a large-sized lead, and Ostash had a good enough hand to look him up. With only a fraction of the pot left behind, it didn't make sense to use the nut flush blocker as a bluff, so he paid off Brzezinski instead. Brzezinski would hoist the trophy a couple of hours later.

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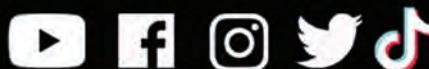
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	Nov. 24-Dec. 23	DeepStack Extravaganza IV	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Nov. 27-Dec. 8	WSOP Circuit - North Carolina	Harrah's ■ Cherokee, NC
	Nov. 28	Turkey Shoot Tournament	Ocean's Eleven Casino ■ Oceanside, CA
	Nov. 28-30	Superstacks Tournament	Turning Stone Resort & Casino ■ Verona, NY
	Nov. 28-Dec. 21	Orleans Winter Open	Orleans Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Nov. 28-Dec. 4	RunGood Dream Factory	Thunder Valley Casino & Resort ■ Lincoln, CA
DECEMBER	Dec. 2-5	PGT True Classic Rags to Riches	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Dec. 2-22	WPT World Championship Festival	Wynn ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Dec. 3-14	European Poker Tour	Hilton Hotel ■ Prague, Czech Republic
	Dec. 3-20	Aria Poker Open	Aria Resort & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Dec. 4-18	World Series of Poker Paradise	Atlantis Resort & Casino ■ Paradise Island, Bahamas
	Dec. 20-22	Super High Roller Bowl X	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Dec. 26-Jan. 6	Trailblazer Poker Tour	Texas Card House - Rio Grande Valley ■ Edinburg, TX
JANUARY	Jan. 5-12	PGT Last Chance Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 5-19	Signature Series	Wynn ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 6-20	Lucky Hearts Poker Open	Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino ■ Hollywood, FL
	Jan. 7-19	Beau Rivage Heater	Beau Rivage Resort & Casino ■ Biloxi, MS
	Jan. 14-Feb. 2	Trailblazer Poker Tour	Texas Card House ■ Houston, TX
	Jan. 25-31	PGT Kickoff Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 29-Feb. 1	Diamond Poker Championship	Talking Stick Resort ■ Scottsdale, AZ
FEBRUARY	Feb. 3-10	PGT Mixed Games Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Feb. 10-16	Ohio Poker State Championship	Jack Casino ■ Cleveland, OH
	Feb. 12-14	Mixed Games Super High Roller Bowl	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Feb. 15-March 2	Trailblazer Poker Tour	Texas Card House ■ Dallas, TX
	Feb. 17-22	MSPT Club Poker Championship	Potawatomi Hotel & Casino ■ Milwaukee, WI
	Feb. 18-March 1	European Poker Tour	Palais des Congres de Paris ■ Paris, France
MARCH	March 26-April 6	Irish Open	Royal Dublin Society ■ Ballsbridge, Ireland
	March 31-April 12	World Series of Poker Europe	Hilton Hotel ■ Prague, Czech Republic

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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.

Feltd - 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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POKER ODDS



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CALCULATING ODDS

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		48%	28%
12	Flush Draw With One Overcard, Or With Gutshot	45%	26%
11	Straight Draw With One Overcard	42%	24%
10	Flush Draw With One Overcard, Or With Gutshot	38%	22%
9		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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On the first hand of a \$500 buy-in turbo tournament, you have 100,000 at 500-1,000. The cutoff raises to 2,500 and everyone folds to you in the big blind with K♦ 5♦.

Question 1: Should you fold, call, reraise to 9,000, or reraise to 18,000?

Answer: K-5 suited with 100 big blinds is generally a call, although you should mix in some three-bets with hands like K-8 suited, K-7 suited, and K-6 suited every once in a while. If you think your opponent is raising too often or will fold too often to a three-bet, making it 9,000 could become an excellent option.

You call and the flop comes 6♦ 2♦ 2♠, giving you a flush draw. You check and the cutoff bets 6,500.

Question 2: Should you fold, call, raise to 17,000, or raise to 24,000?

Answer: When you flop a flush draw, both raising and calling are viable options. In general, as your opponent uses a larger bet size, they are indicating they have a strong, polarized range. When they use a smaller bet, they are saying they are betting with a much wider range (perhaps their entire range).

For that reason, when facing a large bet, you should raise far less often compared to when facing a small bet. Calling is also nice because if your opponent has a worse hand, they may be inclined to give up, resulting in you winning the pot with only king high.

You call. The turn brings a Q♦, giving you a flush.

Question 3: Should you check, bet 3,000, bet 9,000, or bet 19,000?

Answer: Even though you improved to a premium hand on the turn, you should check with your entire range because your opponent's range also contains plenty of flushes. The only time you should lead is when the turn gives you a strong equity advantage, which is not the case in this situation, even though your range contains some premium hands.

You check and your opponent checks behind. The river is the 9♣.

Question 4: Should you check, bet 3,000, bet 9,000, or bet 19,000?

Answer: Both betting and checking are reasonable options. While betting may seem like the obvious play because you have a flush, checking gives your opponent a chance to bluff with all their hands that cannot win at the showdown.

As your opponent will be more inclined to bluff or value bet thinly, you should be more inclined to check. If they will rarely bluff or if they will be inclined to hero call down with many marginal made hands, you should be more inclined to bet using a large size.

You bet 19,000 and your opponent folds. ♠



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