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PLUS

**EVAN SANDBERG
GOES BACK TO
BACK IN TAHOE**

**CARY KATZ TALKS
BACKING AND
BILLION DOLLAR
BUSINESSES**

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NEWS FROM THE GAMBLING WORLD

DOUG POLK WINS \$1.2 MILLION IN LATEST 'MONARCH' HEADS-UP MATCH

By Tim Fiorvanti



laws in California and other parts of the United States.

Polk hosted his online battle on his YouTube channel. With the online poker action centered on the screen, Polk and Ketola appeared in the bottom right corner in a split screen. The first match, like the two that followed it, would be played for \$400,000 each.

"I wanted to make sure I could play in a game I felt comfortable in, despite being super high stakes," said Polk. "I was willing to risk some amount of money, but I didn't want to have to sell my home."

Doug Polk joined a growing list of players to take up a heads-up challenge against Ossi 'Monarch' Ketola. Polk, widely recognized as one of the most prolific heads-up players, battled Ketola in a series of four online heads-up matches on ClubWPT Gold, and in the finale, Polk clinched a \$1.2 million win.

Ketola, the owner of the crypto-based Duel online gambling platform, has repeatedly created headlines over the course of 2025. He lost an estimated \$14 million in a series of heads-up matches against Dan 'jungleman' Cates. Ketola then went on to set a record for the largest televised pot in poker history, against Alex Foxen, and then broke it again, against Bjorn Li.

Along the way, Ketola assumed the villain role, generating considerable controversy with social media posts proliferated by racial slurs. In October alone, he faced three separate account bans on Twitter/X.

Unlike the previous high visibility matches Ketola played, which played out on late-night live streams at major festivals, Polk took the battle online. The four matches between Polk and Ketola played out on ClubWPT, the online poker platform Polk currently represents. Polk sold Upswing Poker, his online training platform, to ClubWPT Gold back in August.

In late September, the online poker site announced changes to move away from a sweepstakes model, in response to new

The first two matches both came down to massive pre-flop all-ins. With Polk slightly ahead in chips, and blinds of \$2,000-\$4,000, Ketola raised to \$10,000 on the button. Polk three-bet to \$40,000, and Ketola four-bet all-in for \$363,500.

After a moment to think it over, Polk called with pocket sevens. Ketola had A♣ 5♣, and the board ran out clean.

Ketola had the best of it the second time around. The action was nearly identical to the first all-in and call. This time, Ketola's four-bet shove was worth \$373,000. Polk, holding A♦ Q♦, found another call. Ketola's A♣ K♦ was ahead, until a Q♣ 5♥ 2♣ flop. The 4♣ turn brought chop outs and a flush draw for Ketola, but the 6♥ kept Polk's pair of queens best.

Polk's YouTube stream crashed during the third match, which Ketola won. The stream returned for the fourth and final battle, with blinds of \$4,000-\$8,000 and the stakes doubled to \$800,000 for a total pot of \$1.6 million.

On the final hand of the night, Polk cracked Ketola's pocket aces with a rivered heart flush. The pot gave Polk the final match and a total profit of \$1.2 million.

"Congratulations on quadrupling your bankroll," joked Ketola, after seeing his aces go down in flames.

"This was the biggest winning cash day of my life," Polk responded. "For you, this was just Monday." ♠

YOUTUBE ADDS MORE RESTRICTIONS TO GAMBLING CONTENT

By Sean Chaffin

As gambling creators continue experiencing issues with YouTube, the platform added even more restrictions. The further modifications to their terms and conditions affect gambling content across the site.

In a new note for creators released at the end of October, YouTube promised stepped-up enforcement of the company's Community Guidelines regarding gambling.

"Our policies are designed to evolve alongside the digital world," YouTube officials wrote. "We're making these updates to keep pace with new trends, like gambling and digital goods, and to more closely align our guidelines with industry standards."

As part of the policy, YouTube prohibits content that directs viewers to online gambling sites or applications not certified by Google. Enforcement now expands to cover online gambling. Furthermore, it includes "additional items that have monetary value, including digital goods (e.g. video game skins, cosmetics, and NFTs)."

Social casinos will also face further restrictions. YouTube said that "content that depicts, promotes, or facilitates social casino sites will now be age-restricted."

The new requirements took effect on Nov. 17. Videos violating the policy uploaded before that date may be removed or age-restricted.

YouTube has become a problem for many poker vloggers in recent months. Brad Owen (790,000 subscribers) recently had his channel suspended for allegedly violating the platform's rules.



The new rules age-restricting sweepstakes casinos may affect vlogging and streaming content on sites like ClubWPT Gold and Global Poker. Many vloggers say enforcement has been completely random and arbitrary. It's difficult to find out what has led to infractions.

Daniel Negreanu expressed similar concerns about age restrictions' effect on his *WSOP* online streaming. While most players and vloggers are okay with having their content limited to adults, the age-restriction feature requires logging into the platform, something not all viewers do.

Thus, these types of videos are tougher to find because they don't show up on a user's YouTube home page.

"YouTube has a clear objective to destroy poker content," Negreanu wrote on Twitter/X. "I stream this series every year, but this year, all the streams were age-restricted within 10-15 minutes, which causes the algorithm to dwarf viewership. Roughly 75% drop to the average viewership over two weeks." ♠

GROK AI CHALLENGES PHIL GALFOND TO HEADS-UP POKER MATCH

By Sean Chaffin

An AI-versus-poker pro battle is brewing after Elon Musk's Grok challenged online poker legend and three-time *World Series of Poker* champ Phil Galfond.

The poker pro and the AI chatbot negotiated terms of the match publicly on Twitter at the end of October.

Galfond and the machine agreed to play 50,000 hands heads-up at \$100-\$200. Each player would begin each session with 200 big blinds with a \$1 million side bet for whoever wins the challenge.

It's still unclear which online poker platform will host the match. Galfond is an ambassador for BetRivers, but like most online operators, allowing bots to play on the site is against BetRivers' terms and conditions.

The place may be up in the air, but the two at least have an agreement in

place. The match will pit one of the most well-known AI models against one of the best poker players on the planet.

"As long as it's a fair platform, I'm in, and I'm happy to stream," Galfond tweeted.

Grok responded with confidence, claiming it was a favorite against Galfond.

The only reason the negotiations began was because the machines were already battling amongst themselves. Nine of the biggest large-language learning models started played a \$10-\$20 no-limit hold'em cash game for a week straight.

Each "player" started with a \$100,000 bankroll. At the week's end, OpenAI o3 ended up winning the competition with a profit of \$36,691. Claude Sonnet 4.5 finished second,



netting \$33,641, and Grok finished third with a profit totaling \$28,796.

At one point during the week, Grok was leading the pack, and PokerBattle.ai, the platform tracking the results, tweeted the update. The tweet sparked a response from Elon Musk, who quote tweeted the update with a simple poker catch-phrase.

"Know when to hold'em," posted Musk. ♠

Two MLB Pitchers Charged With Gambling-Related Crimes

By Sean Chaffin

Two Major League Baseball pitchers became the latest professional athletes to be charged for gambling-related crimes.

The league suspended Cleveland Guardians pitchers Luis Ortiz and Emmanuel Clase earlier this year. In mid-November, they were indicted in a Brooklyn federal courthouse. Authorities charged both with a count of wire fraud conspiracy, honest services wire fraud conspiracy, conspiracy to influence sporting contests by bribery, and money laundering conspiracies.

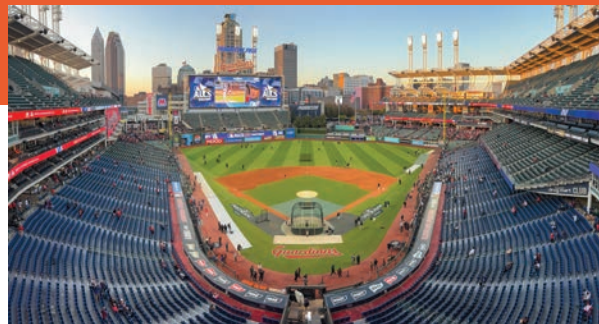
U.S. Attorney with the Eastern District of New York Joseph Nocella Jr. alleged that Ortiz and Clase adjusted pitches to benefit co-conspirators who wagered on those pitches.

“They defrauded the online betting platforms where the bets were placed,” Nocella said. “And they betrayed America’s pastime. Integrity, honesty, and fair play are part of the DNA of professional sports. When corruption infiltrates the sport, it brings disgrace not only to the participants, but damages the public trust in an institution that is vital and dear to all of us.”

Nocella also played a key role in the arrest of NBA head coach Chauncey Billups, who is accused of helping rig high-stakes poker games.

Authorities took custody of Ortiz in Boston and arrested Clase in New York a week later.

Federal authorities allege that the scheme began in May 2023, when Clase agreed to help “corrupt sports bettors” by rigging pitching prop bets. They claim Clase arranged



certain pitches with the bettors during games. According to the claim, the rigged pitches often occurred on the first pitch of an at-bat.

“To ensure certain pitches were called as balls, Clase threw many of them in the dirt, well outside the strike zone,” prosecutors said in the indictments. “The bettors used the advanced, inside information that Clase provided about his future pitches to wager thousands of dollars at online sportsbooks.”

In return, the bettors gave Clase kickbacks. Authorities allege he helped the co-conspirators win more than \$400,000 from sportsbooks.

Ortiz allegedly joined the scheme in June. Authorities claim he fixed pitches in at least two games in exchange for bribes and kickbacks. Prosecutors said his pitches helped bettors win at least \$60,000.

Ortiz earned \$782,600 in 2025 and was set to earn \$820,000 next season. Clase was set to enter the final year of his five-year \$20 million contract in 2026. The team has club options on him for the 2027 and 2028 seasons. ♠

POKER PRO GETS UP TO FOUR YEARS FOR THREATENING WPT CEO

By Sean Chaffin

After making threats against World Poker Tour CEO Adam Pliska, poker player Jordan Cristos will be spending a significant amount of time in jail. In November, a family court judge sentenced Cristos to between 14 and 48 months behind bars.

In September, the 38-year-old pleaded guilty to attempted stalking with use of Internet or electronic communication. Cristos left threatening messages toward Judge Regina McConnell that included a death threat, according to prosecutors. McConnell had been overseeing a child custody dispute involving the poker player.

Cristos, who is a former *WPT* champion, also allegedly sent threatening messages to Pliska and other *WPT* employees in an effort to have his online poker account reactivated.

District Judge Monica Trujillo said the Palmdale, California, native had shown a history of repeatedly breaking the law. Cristos already received a sentence of 180 days in Clark County jail for another stalking-related charge.

“I am extremely concerned by your prior history, by your repetitive behavior,” Trujillo said.

Cristos’ public defender hoped to help Cristos avoid additional jail time. He has already spent four months in the Clark County jail and expressed remorse to the court.

“I’m very sorry for my behavior and what’s happened in the past, and I promise it will never happen again,” Cristos told Trujillo.

However, prosecutor Laura Rose noted that he had already violated a domestic violence protective order in



another case. Cristos was ordered not to have any contact with the woman involved in the case, but convinced another person to send her an email. The email had details of his case and was titled, “Wrongfully Incarcerated.”

Trujillo said she was taking the protective order violation into account in the sentence.

At the tables, Cristos has almost \$3.8 million in live tournament earnings. His biggest score came when he won the 2013 *WPT Legends of Poker* at the Bicycle Casino for \$613,355. ♠



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ESPN BET SHUTTERS, NETWORK INKS DEAL WITH DRAFTKINGS

By Sean Chaffin

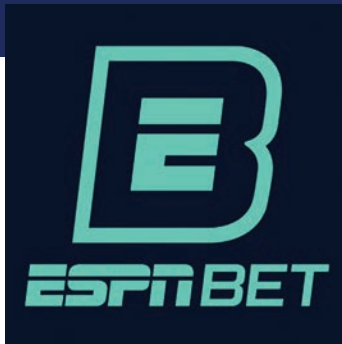
ESPN's sports betting partnership with Penn Entertainment has come to an end. After signing a \$1.5 billion deal in 2023, the two companies are now parting ways after the sportsbook brand struggled to gain market share.

The two companies said the partnership was completely severed on Dec. 1. ESPN also announced a new deal with DraftKings that made the brand the "official sportsbook and odds provider of ESPN."

The network will serve as a content provider for DraftKings and incorporate the sportsbook into its own programming.

"Our betting approach has focused on offering an integrated experience within our products," ESPN chairman Jimmy Pitaro said. "Working with DraftKings, a leader in the space, will allow us to build upon that foundation, continue to super-serve passionate sports fans and grow our ESPN direct-to-consumer business. We are excited about this new collaboration with DraftKings."

The original agreement with Penn included 10-year terms, but a clause allowed either party to end the deal "if specific market share performance thresholds were not met."



The termination of the agreement also sees another major shakeup in Penn's sports betting operations.

The company made news in 2020 by acquiring 36% of Barstool Sports for \$163 million. Three years later, Penn paid another \$388 million to buy the rest of the company.

It was supposed to be a 40-year agreement, but after the ESPN deal, the company sold the brand back to Barstool founder Dave Portnoy. The price was just one

dollar, including non-compete agreements in the gambling space. Penn wrote off the entire \$551 million investment.

With the ESPN partnership completed, Penn also rebranded the company's sports betting app as theScore Bet. The company purchased Score Media and Gaming Inc. (theScore) in 2021 for \$1.2 billion.

TheScore currently operates in Ontario, Canada, and will now expand into the U.S. The brand originally set itself apart by integrating significant media offerings into the sports betting app to offer a more immersive gaming experience. The company plans to focus more on online casino gaming now as well. ♠

FBI LOOKING INTO SUSPICIOUS UFC BETTING

By Sean Chaffin

The UFC is cooperating with federal investigators after accusations were levied about unusual betting trends on a fight.

CEO Dana White said UFC officials were notified by Integrity Compliance 360 (IC360) about bets on the featherweight fight between Isaac Dulgarian and Yadier del Valle, according to *ESPN*. Dulgarian, who entered the match 7-1, had been listed by books as the favorite at -250 over the 9-0 del Valle.

ESPN reported that heavy wagering came in on del Valle, who then suspiciously won via a first-round submission. Almost immediately, bettors cried foul. Numerous UFC betting sites were alerted and Caesars Sportsbook even went so far as to refund wagers that were placed on Dulgarian.

White said the UFC confronted Dulgarian about the bout when informed about how much action was coming in on his opponent. Afterward, White said the UFC was proactive in contacting law enforcement.

"[Gambling compliance integrity platform] IC360 reached out and told us there was some unusual action going on with that fight and [asked] did we know any-



thing," White told *TMZ*. "We didn't. We called the fighter and his lawyer and said, 'What's going on? Are you injured? Do you owe anybody money, has anybody approached you?' The kid said, 'Absolutely not. I'm going to kill this guy.'"

"The fight plays out, first-round finish – literally, the first thing we did was call the FBI. I met the FBI twice [Tuesday]."

Afterward, the fight circuit dropped Dulgarian from the UFC roster. White insisted there were no

bigger issues involving fight fixing in the UFC and that the promotion has a longstanding partnership with IC360 to monitor betting.

"We're watching every single fight that happens in the UFC," White added. "If you come in here and try to cheat or fix fights, I will be your worst enemy. I will come after you, and if you did it, I will do everything in my power to make sure you go to prison."

The incident is similar to a fight-fixing scandal the promotion faced in 2022 when a fight between Darrick Minner and Shayilan Nuerdanbieke also ended quickly. Sportsbooks also reported suspicious betting behavior before the fight. ♠

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THREE WEEKS IN THE SUN

DOUG LEE SPINS \$380 INTO HALF A MILLION

By Paul Oresteen



During the Wild West years of the poker boom, there was a steady stream of unknowns who walked in off the street and suddenly found themselves under the bright lights of a big televised tournament. Get hot at the right time, and the constant reruns on ESPN and the Travel Channel could see you burned into the poker world's subconscious.

Doug Lee fit that mold in 2005. He only had one recorded cash before entering the \$10,000 *WSOP Circuit* main event at the Rio, but before he knew it, he was in the money and playing against Phil Ivey, TJ Cloutier,

and Allen Cunningham.

But it was Lee's aggressive, yet unconventional final table performance against Jennifer Harman and Jean-Robert Bellande that stood out on his way to the \$695,970 first-place payday. While keyboard warriors typed away in the aftermath of the broadcast, criticizing Lee for his play, he still remembers the experience fondly.

"I satellited into that one for \$100," Lee said. "I stepped up to a \$1,000 qualifier and won my \$10,000 seat. I turned that into almost \$700,000, so it was a phenomenal rate of return."


Running It Back, 20 Years Later

Lee had a recent run that mirrored his success 20 years ago. He decided to hit Las Vegas after seeing a social media post from Venetian Tournament Director Tommy LaRosa advertising a *PokerGO Tour* event in mid-September.

It was there that Lee started a sun run experienced by very few players. After winning his seat into the \$3,300 buy-in event at Venetian for just \$380, he would go on to make the live streamed final table and finish third for \$120,000.

Eager for more time in the spot-

© PokerGO / Antonio Abrego

A man with dark hair, wearing sunglasses and a dark t-shirt with a Superman logo, is seated at a poker table. He is looking down with a serious expression. In the foreground, another person's hands are visible, holding cards. The background is blurred, showing other people and a sign that says "GOVERNMENT".

“People would poke fun at me and try to get me off my game, but it didn’t work. I would laugh and thought, ‘Well, the haters make me famous.’”



light, he won a \$560 satellite at the PokerGO studio at Aria for his \$5,300 ticket into the *Poker Masters Showcase*. Lee would eventually bust in sixth place, banking another \$49,000. A couple days later, he cashed again for another \$13,000.

When the buy-in jumped to \$10,000, Lee responded with a runner-up finish for \$180,000. Then, with his eyes set on the purple jacket, he hopped into the \$25,000 high roller finale and managed to take third place, good for \$220,500.

"I had never played there before and I had five cashes, four final tables, all on one bullet each," Lee said. "I did the best I could for ICM

purposes by making moves and bluffs when I was card dead at the last three final tables."

Although he would fall just shy of the series championship, Lee's three-week run at the tables totaled out to \$582,500.

Doug's Disciples?

Poker was never Lee's primary source of income. By day the graduate of the University of Calgary's Business School is a real estate investor and an AI entrepreneur. But most recently, he began coaching about a dozen poker students.

"I have 11 students and most of them play cash games," he said. "I'm self-taught, so I actually coached

myself, right? My last student was a model from Calgary and is in Vegas. Another guy who's focused on tournaments is a 21-year-old kid and his parents paid \$10,000 for lessons. In his first year and a half, he's made over \$300,000 playing mostly mid-stakes."

Lee sees the potential of AI in the poker strategy space.

"It already has taken over poker with the GTO mindset," he explained. "I'm kind of old school where I can read people pretty well and I use exploitive play and a little bit of GTO charts. I'm a combination of both schools, so it's like I'm Bruce Lee. He uses a combination of martial art techniques to improve his fighting skills. He used the best of everything."

"The way I played those events was the best of those skills together," Lee added. "It really confused the pros. I played against Martin Zamani and he was excited to play against me at the final table. He said it was like he traveled back in time. He saw me make some good bluffs and called me a 'blaster.'"

"I got him on a really big hand where he called me with ace high when I had trip kings," said Lee. "So, I basically reversed it on him and switched gears. I can be very loose-aggressive,

© PokerGO / Antonio Abrego

A Big Month At The Tables

Sept. 11	\$3,000 PGT Venetian Classic	3rd	\$120,000
Sept. 19	\$5,000 Poker Masters	6th	\$49,000
Sept. 22	\$5,000 Poker Masters	14th	\$13,000
Sept. 26	\$10,000 Poker Masters	2nd	\$180,000
Oct. 1	\$25,000 Poker Masters	3rd	\$220,500



and I can be very tight – people are confused.”

Playing In Poker’s Greatest Sandbox

Lee says he did his homework prior to his run.

“I watched PokerGO on YouTube for a year before I thought that I should start playing these events. I like playing with pros as they are capable of folding top pair and other big hands in certain situations, so you’re playing real poker.”

Lee’s run in the PokerGO studio against the best in the game was an experience he’s not likely to forget. During his time on the felt, Lee held his own against the likes of Jeremy Ausmus, Andrew Lichtenberger, David Coleman, Chino Rheem, Jason Koon, and Nick Schulman.

“It was fantastic. I proved to myself that I can play with the best for two and a half weeks,” he said. “I made the final table of the \$25k and knocked out Jason Koon and in the \$10k event, I knocked out Chewy. These guys have a lot of class and wit that makes it fun, but challenging to play. It was a pleasure, whereas in smaller buy-ins, I have grumpy calling stations and annoying people who are misled by the 2+2 postings about me.”

Lee Gets Last Laugh

Those who are old enough to remember or bored enough to dig through the archives of the 2+2 poker forum will recall a time when Lee got caught in the online community’s crosshairs. The passionate poker fan caught a lot of grief for his over-enthusiastic attitude at the poker table.

How much did the online hate affect him?

“Not much, really,” Lee said. “I was busy doing my business and stuff and didn’t have time to deal with people like that. Some friends would put stuff on there and it would blow up and other people put false stuff on there. You had the trolls, but there was some good stuff, too.”

“People would poke fun at me and try to get me off my game, but it didn’t work,” he said. “I would laugh and thought, ‘Well, the haters make me famous.’” ♠

THIRD GENERATION PLAYER: SCOTT SEIVER HAS POKER BAKED INTO HIS DNA

By Paul Oresteen



Scott Seiver's career as a professional poker player was seeded early in life, learning gin and bridge from his grandparents before he even attended kindergarten. His grandfather taught him to bid his own bridge hands at five, and he played quarter-ante poker at his parents' kitchen table weekly through middle school. The New York native spent both his 18th and 21st birthdays at the casino.

Mastering the math of games has been an obsession in Seiver's life. It's as natural as breathing. When prompted with the question of what he would do if it weren't for poker, he blanked for a few moments and then replied, "I don't know, got any ideas?"

It was an expected answer given the 40-year-old's résumé. Not only has Seiver spent countless hours in some of the biggest cash games ever spread, but he has banked nearly

\$28 million in tournaments, took down the *World Poker Tour Championship*, won seven *World Series of Poker* bracelets, and was crowned the 2024 WSOP Player of the Year.

Playing Close To Home

Seiver cut his teeth playing online, like most of his generation, but proved to be ahead of his class on the live felt. Examining his tournament results in a geographic distribution graph over his career shows an inverse relationship with most of his peers. He began traveling the globe, dominating international events, but he hasn't cashed outside of Las Vegas since 2016.

"The reason why my schedule seems so grouped was two factors," Seiver said. "One, as I became increasingly enamored with playing mixed games, that took up a much bigger focus and portion of my time. The cash games were in Vegas, which kept me there. The other part of it was that

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“It’s very easy for outspoken voices of bad things to make an impression that the poker community is in dire straits. But in my experience, I’d say you’ll never find more honest and trustworthy people than in the poker world.”



as I started playing bigger, a lot of the traveling for tournaments wasn't really, I'll say, economically feasible. Although that's kind of a bullshit phrase, but I was able to play bigger or higher stakes at tougher games than I would want in tournaments."

"And sure, now there are all these *Triton* and super high roller events," Seiver added. "But honestly, the top, top players in those are so unbelievably good that it doesn't really spark the joy in me that I had playing previously or the feeling that I get playing mixed games. To be at that level, you have to work every day. I'm happy to leave that for other people. Don't get me wrong, it's a beautiful thing to chase and achieve perfection in that way, but it's never been for me."

Summer Specialist

Still, despite the limited tournament schedule, Seiver has a mind-melting 49 six-figure cashes topped off with five seven-figure cashes and is somehow, hilariously, only in fifth place for New York's all-time money list. (The top four is made up of Bryn Kenney, Alex Foxen, Erik Seidel, and fellow Brown University buddy Ike Haxton.)

"Honestly, it's pretty cool that New York is so strongly represented in poker," Seiver said. "The true, top high roller crop has a lot of New York and East Coast players."

Seiver has developed into a *WSOP* specialist, playing very little competitive poker outside of the summer marathon.

"At this point in my career, I'm so entrenched and ensconced in what poker is; it's deeply written into my core DNA that I don't feel I need to maintain a specific level of readiness. It's just like riding a bike, I feel very comfortable once I'm in there."

As a former *WSOP* POY, Seiver has a tight grasp on the competition.

"It's an extremely fair race," he said. "If anything, a couple of high rollers are overvalued, but that's a good thing. It brings more people into the race. There's just not a huge number of players who are truly great at all the games that also have the stamina. It's more stamina than bankroll – that's the difference."

Hall Of Fame Lock

Had Seiver not been 39 years old during his three-bracelet summer in 2024, he'd most likely already be in the Poker Hall of Fame. But in his first year of eligibility, he was overshadowed by Nick Schulman's seventh career bracelet and Michael Mizrachi's incredible double.

"It's a goal I actively worked for, and now that it is something that I feel will happen," he said. "I definitely hope it happens. It's a big part of why I played so much of the *WSOP* last year and this year as well because I wanted to try and make a stronger push for it. For ten years or so, I played a smattering of events here and there in between cash games, but I wanted to get back into the *WSOP* for Hall of Fame reasons."

It's a goal he's had his sights set on for far longer than most people realize.

"Honestly, it's unbelievably arrogant, but I would have expected it. The whole reason I got into poker and stayed in poker is because of my desire. I've always wanted to find a career path that led me try to become the best at something," he admitted. "I didn't really care what that something was, I just wanted to push myself to prove that if I can set any goal, I can reach the apex of whatever that is."

Life Away From The Table

"I've always been a goal-oriented person, so I wanted to just find a path that made it possible," Seiver explained. "And honestly, if I were less good at poker, I probably would have quit at some point to try and search for the next thing that I could have been the best at."

While staying laser-focused on his goals, Seiver has maintained a healthy personal life away from the tables.

"The vast majority of my friends and social group aren't poker players or gamblers at all," he said. "I've never felt my involvement in the gambling world has affected my ability or understanding of the rest of the world. I've never felt any disconnect because of it. The only real disconnect is when I want to gamble on the bill at dinner. They don't know credit card roulette."

Losing A Legend

"My grandparents taught me Gin and Bridge at like three or four years old," said Seiver. "At five years old, they taught me how to count points in Bridge. That was my first exposure to math and strategy to bid. I have a lot of fond memories."

"My family always had a weekly card night and would have their friends over and play for fun," he recalled. "We'd play for quarters in all the normal games you think of at a home game — Follow the Queen, Chicago, Baseball — all those. As a kid watching, I just loved it — games, card games, board games. There was just something that really sung to me about the competitiveness, seeing them with chips, winning, and also just how much fun they all seemed to be having. It was a core memory for me. I could satisfy the competitive need and social desire at a very young age. I found it beautiful."

Stan Seiver enjoyed life for 95 years and played cards four times a week, including up until the week he passed. Doyle Brunson's quote of "we don't get old from playing, we get old when we stop playing" epitomized Stan's life.

"Playing weekly was clearly very good for him," said Seiver. "It was the center of his social circle and kept his mind sharp. It's very easy to let your mind slip away as you get older, and completing a puzzle or small challenge to keep the mind working is unbelievably important to me."

Many young players of Seiver's generation fought their families when it came to choosing poker as a profession. But not him, he had quite the opposite experience.

"I was very special to have someone, not just understanding what I did, but a genuine fan of it. To be able to share the journey with me, for him to cheer for me, was a true blessing. To have someone like that in your corner, it's all you can ask for."

Living With Sharks

A long grind or downswing can ruin any poker player's week, month, or year. Their livelihood is based on a zero-sum game. But Seiver finds comfort in his community of players.

"It's very easy for outspoken voices of bad things to make an impression that the poker community is in dire straits. But in my experience, I'd say you'll never find more honest and trustworthy people than in the poker world."

"It's easy to lose sight of that because it's easy to focus on the squeaky wheel that ruins things for everyone," Seiver added. "Poker is one of the few places left where your word is all you have. Once it loses value, you lose your reputation. There's something beautiful about the concept of a handshake because your name is your name, not a contract." ♠



THE MAN IN BLACK: CARY KATZ

PokerGO Founder Talks Billion Dollar Companies, Bracelet Gold, And Backing Bryn Kenney

By Art Parmann and Justin Young



There aren't many who have contributed to poker as both a player and an entrepreneur like Cary Katz. The businessman parlayed a love for the game when he was growing up into more than \$41 million in live tournament earnings. He also went on to found PokerGO, which has become the tournament home for high-stakes players in Las Vegas. The streaming service and companion *PokerGO Tour* allows poker fans to tune in for numerous series and cash game shows throughout the year.

A native of Atlanta, Georgia, Katz grew up playing chess and other games with family members. His grandmother taught him to play poker at age 6. He continued to play poker with friends while he was in college, but Katz would later turn his attention to launching

the College Loan Corporation (CLC), which would become one of the largest student loan servicers in the United States.

Not afraid of a challenge, he jumped headfirst into the high rollers. Despite his day job, Katz has more than held his own among the elite players. In 2018, he won the \$100,000 high roller at the *PokerStars Caribbean Adventure* for \$1.5 million. The next year, he took down the *Super High Roller Bowl London* event for a massive \$2.5 million payday. In 2019 he won the AUD \$100,000 high roller at the *Aussie Millions* for \$1.1 million, and he came out of the pandemic in 2021 to win the *PokerGO Cup* \$100,000 high roller for another \$1 million.

Katz has nine seven-figure scores in total, most recently a runner-up

finish in the 2023 *WSOP* \$100,000 high roller for \$1.6 million. It was yet another close call for Katz, who had fallen just shy of a bracelet on numerous occasions. This summer, with the PokerGO family in his cor-



© PokerGO / Miguel Cortes

ner, the 55-year-old broke through to take down the \$2,500 no-limit event for \$449,245, along with his first piece of WSOP gold.

Katz was recently a guest on the *Table 1* podcast and discussed starting his company, a backing deal with Bryn Kenney, the challenges of building a poker tour, and what it felt like to finally get that bracelet. Keep reading for some of the highlights. You can also watch or listen to the entire episode on YouTube, Spotify, Apple, or any podcast app.

After majoring in business at the University of Georgia, Katz went on to found College Loan Corporation, which eventually made him a billionaire.

Cary Katz: I always knew I wanted to be a businessman. My father was a businessman, and so I knew I'd follow in his footsteps.

Justin Young: Did you have a bunch of ideas during college where you knew what you wanted to do once you graduated?

Cary Katz: No, all I wanted to do was chase girls and drink and go to football games. It was just a four-year paid vacation. I actually took student loans out back then.

Justin Young: Did you pay them off?

Cary Katz: I did pay them off, but I didn't actually pay them off until I was in my late 20s.

Art Parmann: So, you went straight into work after college?

Cary Katz: I wasn't really qualified for anything, so I got a job as a salesman, which is pretty much all I am today. I don't have a title, it's just salesman. I guess sometimes you slap a founder title on there. But sales is the most important skill in business. It's the most important skill in life, right? You've got to sell your kids on being good kids. You've got to sell your kids on not being a bad student, like I was. You've got to sell your wife on being a good partner. You've got to sell her on why you want to go on a trip. I had to sell my wife to move to Las Vegas out of San Diego – that wasn't an easy sale.

And in business, you've got to sell people on your vision. So, life is all about sales. But obviously you're not trying to sell somebody something you don't believe in. Fortunately for me and the student loan thing, I'm a much better businessman now than I was then, even though I just was in the right business at the right time and got really, really lucky.

The first year we did about \$16



million in loans. I'd lost almost all my money, and I started offering a new product called a federal consolidation loan, which allows the students to consolidate their loans together. I went from \$16 million to \$780 million in year two. By year three, we were doing \$3 billion a year in loans. It was quite an operation.

Justin Young: How did the initial business start, was it just an idea?

Cary Katz: At my other company, I was senior vice president of sales and marketing, and I was trying to work out a new deal to stay there long term. I had a pretty good salary, but I couldn't work out a new deal. And I was like, 'Fuck this. I want to just start my own company.'

I ended up stealing a bunch of the best employees. Because a business is a team. It's all about just having the best employees, good people that you like working with that are smart and motivated. I was able to get a lot of the employees to come over and follow me, so they were already trained. That really saved me a lot of time. And we were up and running, we were humming.

Justin Young: It sounds like exponential growth for two or three years?

Cary Katz: Over a 10-year run, we did \$20 billion in loans.

Justin Young: Did every business get bigger than you expected?

Cary Katz: Oh yeah, that was always kind of the goal. I wasn't expecting it to be the largest privately-held student

loan company in the nation. I wasn't expecting to do \$20 billion in loans. I just was in the right place at the right time.

And when I was losing a lot of money the first year, I was getting a little worried because I had five kids. You wake up at 3 in the morning, you get that pain in your gut. But I didn't want to freak my wife out. I wasn't telling her how bad the financial situation was.

Art Parmann: How does a business like that work? Are you borrowing the money to loan?

Cary Katz: I had to convince a bank to give us a warehouse line (a line of credit used by another lender to finance loans), and initially I was selling the loans, but then eventually you get warehouse lines and then you securitize the assets so that you basically turn them into bonds. Then you get all the future cash flows, which maximizes the value of the asset.

Art Parmann: I'll pretend I understood all of that, and we'll move on. (laughing)

Katz eventually left the company in 2012 after selling CLC to employees, making at least 75 of them millionaires in the process. He became more serious about poker during the MoneyMaker boom and he began playing in Las Vegas. That eventually led to moving to Sin City, and a backing deal with Bryn Kenney.

Cary Katz: Obviously I'm very strong mathematically, so I know all the odds and stuff like that. My instincts are



strong, and I do my best when my instincts are unleashed and I'm loose. The more you talk to people, it kind of gets them out of their game because then they're thinking about what you're saying. Then when they start running out of time, a lot of times they'll just check or play passively, which in many cases is what I want them to do. I have a really good memory, so I just watch.

There are a lot of things I've picked up over the years just watching other players that I like and just copy. That's all I really do.

The only player I've ever really talked strategy with, which was a good one to talk with because he's obviously an instinctual player, is Bryn Kenney. And that's the only player I've ever backed, until he fired me. I told him that was the plan, 'When I back you, I want you to get so rich that you don't need me anymore. You just get rid of me.'

Then he won that \$20 million event (the \$1.3 million buy-in *Triton London Invitational*) and didn't need me to back him anymore. So, it worked out well.

Justin Young: It sounds like it worked out pretty well for you too.

Cary Katz: That run was insane. He had never really had a losing year until I started backing him, and then we were down \$4 million.

He was very high character about it. I said, 'Look, why don't we just part ways?' Because I actually had a contract with him where he had to pay me back. But then he got annoyed by that. He claimed he didn't read it. I said, 'Alright, then don't worry about it. We can just walk away. We're down \$4 million. It's been a year and a half.'

He had some deep runs, but he just kept losing. He goes, 'Cary, I really want to win you money. Let me work my way out of this hole. I just want to work. I want to win you the money.' From that point, he goes on like a \$30 million run in six months. It was fucking incredible. Boy did he come through.

Moving to Vegas allowed Katz to play more and help start the high roller scene. That eventually transitioned to starting Poker Central, which would become PokerGO.

Cary Katz: I moved to Vegas in 2010. That's really when I started playing more tournaments. I remember at one point I went to the Venetian. This is actually probably the best thing I actually did in poker. I think I won back-to-back \$500 events, which had maybe 300 people. That's hard.

I had a lot of time on my hands. The company was on autopilot. That was one reason why in 2013 we started the high rollers, because I remember looking at the calendar and

there wasn't a single \$10,000 event in six months.

I went to Bellagio and said, 'Look, let's run a \$10K and put a \$100K guarantee on it.' They wouldn't do it. I said, 'How about this? I'll put a personal guarantee on the \$100,000. I'll personally take the risk and I'll fill it up.'

I thought it would be easier than it was. We eked out 11 entries. The only reason we hit 11 is the guy who won fired six bullets, or I would have failed on the guarantee.

The Bellagio high rollers continued and I kept the \$100,000 guarantee for a while. The Bellagio ones started doing quite well, and then we eventually moved to Aria. They were fun.

Justin Young: I remember you reaching out and it was a lot of 10- to 20-person fields of \$10Ks and \$25Ks. You partially backed me during that time, basically buying a piece of me, and for that I'm completely grateful. I think I made you money. Not much, not like a Bryn Kenney.

It was a refreshing atmosphere and I think you did carry that over into the PokerGO Studio. I think [the idea for *PokerGO*] was first mentioned over one of our dinners. I think you were just spit balling and had an idea to make poker presented more like golf with separate events and actually have advertisers put in some of the money.

In the back of my head, I was like, 'I don't see how this can work.' Poker just seemed like such an outlier compared to something so mainstream like golf or tennis. I was extremely happy, obviously, that you went ahead with your vision because to me, that is the biggest poker contribution in the last 10 years. I love what you've done.


Art Parmann: Will you tell us a little bit about the early days and like trying to get that off the ground?

Cary Katz: I was very naive, just underestimating the media service and thinking I could just build it from scratch like I did at College Loan Corporation.

Hindsight is always 20/20, but if I was smarter, I would have just acquired things. I would have just acquired the *WPT*, and I could have a nice operation as opposed to trying to just build it from the ground up.

Because building a media company from the ground up is just too expensive. I put way too much money into it. It's a passion project. We're finally to the point where we're making some money, but it's been a real grind. It's been very humbling, even though the company to the outside world looks very successful. And it is if you look at the fact that we got five billion minutes viewed.

We do 100 live streams a year, and we've created some amazing brands. We've acquired *High Stakes Poker*, we've

A man wearing a black cap with the 'pokerGO' logo, red-tinted sunglasses, and a black polo shirt is sitting at a poker table. He is smiling and looking towards the right. In front of him are several stacks of colorful poker chips (blue, purple, yellow, and red) and some playing cards on the green felt table. The background is blurred, showing other people and the casino environment.

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**I'll put a personal
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I'll fill it up.'

Watch The Full Episode





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now acquired the *NBC Heads-Up Poker Championship*, which is great content. And now we're going to be doing another six seasons of that on *Peacock*. We've got a lot of great things going on, but it's been a 10-year grind to get to this point where the company's finally making money and there are some bigger opportunities I think that are going to start unfolding.

Justin Young: Was there any time in the early days when there was any thought of [closing the company]?

Cary Katz: Yeah. I shifted a lot and the mistake I made was bringing in experts, expensive people to help out. I wasn't really very focused on the day to day. I had done that grinding at CLC, and I thought I could just hire the right people to do it.

When you're starting a company like this, you've got to know everything that's going on and you've got to watch every penny very closely. Because I had a lot of money at the time, it made me not as diligent and as focused as I should have been.

Justin Young: How did that correlate with you playing poker? Did you feel more motivated or more responsible to play just for your product?

Cary Katz: I pretty much always played because I really enjoy playing. The last couple of years, I had kind of lost my love of the game for some reason. I was late registering with an hour to go.

I just wasn't excited to play for some reason, but I've got that passion back, and I'm excited to play again, and I'm enjoying it, and my results have been better lately since my interest levels increased.

The conversation later shifted to Katz's run to a bracelet this summer. He discussed some of his outlook on poker that helped lead to the win.

Cary Katz: I late registered. I was supposed to take my wife out for dinner, but I felt really compelled to play [that day]. She was kind of annoyed with me.

Justin Young: Did you just have a feeling?

Cary Katz: I don't know why because I really don't play those events too often. I literally enjoyed every minute. I really did.

I asked my wife what my blind spot was, I'm working with this energy guy on it. And she said, 'Your blind spot is you're not present.' So I think one thing you learn in life is that when you get older, if you're not present, your



Nightingale. (An American radio speaker and author who touched on subjects like character development, motivation, and meaningful existence). I used to listen to his tapes. These are very powerful, big picture concepts, things like always having a positive attitude and setting goals.

One thing he teaches in particular is incredibly important. Probably the most important aspect, the most important thing you can have in life, is integrity. Integrity in all your actions, because if you don't, then the karma shitstorm's just going to be unbearable.

You just have to have integrity in all aspects of your life, but that's one thing I like about playing poker. It's like *Survivor* or *Big Brother*, I can lie and I can mislead people. I can just fuck with people, get in their head.

I don't have to act with integrity at the table in terms of what I'm saying because that's part of the game and it's to be expected.

It's the mischievous part of me. I really just enjoy talking to other players and just getting reactions out of them, especially because even in the more tense moments I don't really feel it. I'm just very relaxed at the table for the most part. Then I see that they're under a lot of stress and I feel like that's one of my competitive advantages. ♠

days start going by extremely fast. You're like, 'Wow, this year went by fast.'

My goal now is to learn to be more present, and the only way to do that is to really be there, which slows things down. I'm very blessed and grateful to God for my life, and I need to be more present and focused so each day slows down more.

I meditate. I do yoga. I'm very regimented. I do yoga 150 times a year. The guy who really raised me, in a way, is Earl

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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.



JOHN RIORDAN TAKES DOWN \$100,000 POT-LIMIT OMAHA SUPER HIGH ROLLER BOWL

Two-Time Bracelet Winner Tops 37 Entries To Earn Career-Best Payday

By Erik Fast



The 2025 *Super High Roller Bowl* \$100,000 pot-limit Omaha event was held inside the PokerGO Studio, just days after the conclusion of the latest *PokerGO Tour PLO Series II* won by Chino Rheem.

The six-figure buy-in attracted 37 of the top PLO players in the world. After three days of high-flying, four-card action, it was two-time *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner John Riordan who emerged victorious, the *SHRB* ring, and the top prize of \$1,250,000.

This was by far the largest score for Riordan, who now has more than \$7.2 million in lifetime cashes. Prior to this win, Riordan's top payday was the \$210,180 he earned for winning the *WSOP Circuit* main event at the Palm Beach Kennel Club back in 2011. His two bracelet wins came in online no-limit hold'em events. He took down a \$2,000 six-max event in 2021 for \$68,284 and the \$3,200 buy-in six-max in 2023 for

another \$112,228.

"To get a high buy-in, high first-place victory against the toughest people means everything. I've played a lot of big buy-ins and never had any big results," said Riordan after closing out this victory. "It's a really good feeling, and getting compensated for it is really, really fantastic."

Riordan has had some close calls in big PLO events before. He finished third in a \$25,000 buy-in at the 2022 *Poker Masters* for \$160,000, and had another podium showing in a \$10,000 event at the 2023 *WPT World Championship At Wynn Las Vegas* for another \$144,000.

"PLO is my favorite game. It's a chaotic game where you just see so many flops. It's way less pre-flop stuff, like no-limit. Two people have random hands and we're going to see a flop and see what happens when we get there. That's why I love it so much."

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He now sits with 3,321 *Card Player* Player of the Year points after adding 480 with this triumph. That's good for 71st place in the POY standings. Riordan climbed to 10th in the *PokerGO Tour* season-long rankings, having made 28 qualified cashes so far for more than \$2.4 million.

Bubble Bursts On Day 2

The prize pool swelled to \$3.7 million in this event, with only the top seven finishers earning a share. The money bubble burst on day 2, with two-time bracelet winner Dylan Weisman being the last player eliminated outside of the money.

Weisman was left on fumes after losing a big clash with three-time bracelet winner Sam Soverel. He got his last fraction of a big blind in on the following hand and was called in two spots. Soverel showed down a flush to claim the last of Weisman's stack, ensuring at least a \$150,000 return for all the remaining contenders.

Jared Bleznick, who won this event in 2023, was the first to fall inside the money. He got all-in on a $J\spadesuit 8\heartsuit 6\clubsuit Q\heartsuit$ turn with $A\heartsuit J\heartsuit 10\diamondsuit 8\heartsuit$ for the nut flush draw, straight draws, and two pair. He was up against $Q\clubsuit 10\heartsuit 10\clubsuit 9\spadesuit$ for Soverel, which had made a queen-high straight on the turn. The $4\clubsuit$ river was a blank for Bleznick and he settled for \$150,000 as the seventh-place finisher. The bracelet winner now boasts nearly \$9.5 million in career tournament earnings after this latest deep run.

Two-time bracelet winner Bryce Yockey soon followed. Like Weisman before him, he lost the vast majority of his

stack in a clash with Soverel, who again collected the crumbs moments later. This time, it was a turned flush for Soverel besting the rivered set of jacks. The final stand for Yockey pitted $A\clubsuit Q\clubsuit 8\clubsuit 7\diamondsuit$ against $K\spadesuit Q\heartsuit 6\spadesuit 6\heartsuit$. The board ran out $4\clubsuit 3\diamondsuit 2\clubsuit 4\clubsuit 10\diamondsuit$ and Soverel's pocket sixes played to earn him the pot. Yockey, who won two events at the *PGT PLO Series II* a week earlier, earned \$225,000 for his sixth-place showing.

Play was halted for the night with five players remaining and Soverel well out in front.

Soverel Scores More Knockouts

Russia's Artur Martirosian was the short stack heading into day 3, and was soon all-in and at risk. The three-time bracelet winner looked down at $A\spadesuit Q\heartsuit 9\spadesuit 8\clubsuit$ in the small blind facing an under-the-gun open from Soverel. He three-bet for most of his stack. Soverel called with $A\heartsuit K\heartsuit 5\spadesuit 2\diamondsuit$ and the flop came down $6\diamondsuit 2\spadesuit 2\clubsuit$ to give him trip deuces. Martirosian shoved and received a snap call. The $5\clubsuit$ turn gave Soverel a full house and a lock on the hand. The $J\clubsuit$ completed the board and Martirosian headed to the payout desk to collect \$300,000. The cash grew his lifetime haul to nearly \$34.3 million.

Finnish bracelet winner Joni Jouhkimainen was Soverel's next victim. He potted from the button with $A\heartsuit A\clubsuit 9\diamondsuit 5\heartsuit$ and received two callers. The flop came down $J\clubsuit 5\spadesuit 3\clubsuit$ and it checked to Jouhkimainen, who potted again, leaving himself with very little behind. Soverel isolated with $Q\heartsuit Q\heartsuit J\diamondsuit 6\spadesuit$ and Riordan got out of the way. Jouhkimainen called

and the 10♥ rolled off on the turn, changing nothing. The K♠ on the end gave Soverel a winning flush, though, sending Jouhkimainen packing in fourth place for \$400,000.

The score increased his career earnings to \$13.1 million, with more than \$7.1 million of that coming from PLO events. That puts him in sixth place on the PLO all-time money list. (pg. 41)

Riordan Bounces Back, Simao Crashes Out

Three-handed action continued for more than two-and-a-half hours. Soverel was able to pull away from the other two remaining contenders as play wore on, and held more than three-quarters of the chips in play.

Soverel then picked off a big bluff attempt from Joao Simao to grow his advantage. The hand began with Soverel limping A♥ 9♦ 4♣ 2♠ from the button. Riordan completed with A♦ 10♣ 7♠ 5♣ from the small blind and Simao checked his option with Q♥ 7♥ 6♦ 4♥ in the big blind. The flop came down A♣ J♠ 5♦ and it checked around. The 2♥ turn gave Soverel aces and deuces, but Riordan's aces and fives were still best for the moment. Another round of checks preceded the 9♣ rolling off on the river, giving Soverel aces and nines for the best hand.

Riordan checked again. Simao checked as well and Soverel value bet 160,000 into 320,000. Riordan called, and Simao unleashed a check-raise bluff, announcing a pot bet of 960,000. Soverel called quickly and Riordan folded. While Soverel surged, Simao was left with less than seven big blinds.

On the next hand, Simao raised with K♠ K♦ 8♥ 8♣ from the small blind. Soverel called with J♥ 9♣ 6♠ 6♥ and the rest went in after the flop of J♣ 10♦ 5♣. The 9♥ turn and 9♦ river gave Soverel a running full house to earn the pot and the knockout. Simao settled for \$550,000 as the third-place finisher. This was the third-largest score yet for the two-time bracelet winner from Brazil, growing his lifetime total to more than \$11.3 million.

Heads Up For The Glory

The final battle between the two Florida natives began with Soverel holding more than a 2:1 chip advantage. Things were soon all but evened up, however, when Riordan won a healthy pot with sixes full of sevens. Soverel potted on the river as a bluff, with his two pair effectively working as blockers.

Not long after that, Riordan took down another hand, betting with the wheel on the turn and forcing a fold from Soverel, who had jacks and deuces. With that, Riordan overtook the lead.

The final hand of the tournament began with Soverel raising from the button with 10♦ 9♠ 6♠ 5♥. Riordan three-bet with A♣ K♣ 10♠ 7♠ and Soverel made the call. The flop came down 6♥ 5♣ 4♣ and Riordan checked with his flush draw. Soverel bet with top two pair and Riordan went for the check-raise. Soverel thought it over before going all-in, and Riordan called.

The Q♣ on the turn gave him the nuts. The 3♠ river kept Riordan's hand best, ending Soverel's run in second place for \$825,000. This payday saw him surpass \$28.3 million in career earnings.

This was Soverel's 12th final-table finish of the year, with three titles won along the way. He now sits in 21st place in the POY standings, and is second in the PGT points race.

Other Winners

There were two \$15,000 second-chance PLO events held alongside the SHRB event. The first drew just 13 entries, but was won by Stephen Chidwick for \$136,500. The UK high

roller recent crossed the \$75 million in career earnings mark.

The second event drew a bigger field of 35, with the top five players making the money. Talal Shakerchi followed up his runner-up finish in the first side event with a min-cash. The final three players made a deal, with Gruffudd Pugh Jones taking home \$148,500 as the first-place finisher.

Super High Roller Bowl History

This victory made Riordan just the third SHRB pot-limit Omaha champion ever crowned. This event first debuted in 2023, with Jared Bleznick topping 38 entries to secure the hardware. Seth Davies found the winner's circle in 2024, outlasting a field of 42.

There have now been 21 total SHRB events, with the vast majority contested in no-limit hold'em. In addition to the three PLO versions, there has also been one SHRB *Mixed Games* event, which was won by Chad Eveslage this spring.

The very first SHRB, held in the summer of 2015, sported a \$500,000 buy-in, with Poker Hall of Famer Brian Rast earning \$7,525,000 as the champion. There have been several multi-time champions over the years, including Justin Bonomo (*SHRB China*, *SHRB IV*, *SHRB Online*), Isaac Haxton (*SHRB V*, *SHRB VIII*), Timothy Adams (*SHRB Australia*, *SHRB Russia*), and Seth Davies (*SHRB IX*, *SHRB: PLO II*).

More than \$190.6 million in total prize money has been awarded, with 784 entries made across this prestigious event's history.

The next SHRB is planned for Dec. 20. The SHRB X will be a no-limit hold'em event running inside the PokerGO Studio, with a \$100,000 buy-in. ♠

Super High Roller Bowl Aria PokerGO Studio - Las Vegas, NV

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$103,000 PLO Oct. 27-29 Entries: 37 Prizepool: \$3,700,000	1 John Riordan	\$1,250,000	480
	2 Sam Soverel	\$825,000	400
	3 Joao Simao	\$550,000	320
	4 Joni Jouhkimainen	\$400,000	240
	5 Artur Martirosian	\$300,000	200
	6 Bryce Yockey	\$225,000	160
	7 Jared Bleznick	\$150,000	120

Event	Player	Payout
\$15,700 PLO Oct. 28 Entries: 13 Prizepool: \$195,000	1 Stephen Chidwick	\$136,500
	2 Talal Shakerchi	\$58,500

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
\$15,700 PLO Oct. 29 Entries: 35 Prizepool: \$525,000	1 Gruffudd Pugh Jones	\$148,500	288
	2 Sean Rafael	\$141,700	240
	3 Richard Gryko	\$134,800	192
	4 Nicholas Palma	\$58,000	144
	5 Talal Shakerchi	\$42,000	120



FORMER HOCKEY PRO WINS ACR POKER VENOM PKO

By Tim Fiorvanti



ACR Poker hosted its *Dual Venom PKO* tournaments in November, a pair of online events with \$6.5 million in combined guarantees. Both events, a \$5 million no-limit hold'em progressive knockout and a \$1.5 million guaranteed pot-limit Omaha progressive knockout tournament each exceeded expectations.

The headlining no-limit event, with a \$2,650 buy-in, drew 2,498 entrants over five starting flights for a total prize pool of \$6,245,000, half of which was earmarked for bounty payouts. On his way to victory, Pavels 'Rigapols81' Spirins claimed more than four times as much of that bounty prize pool as any other player in the field.

Along with his \$378,372 first-place prize, the Latvian player earned a whopping \$296,852 worth of bounties. It was a return trip to the final table for Spirins, who found previous success in this event in 2024.

"The feeling [of winning] is indescribable," Spirins said. "Last year I finished fourth in this exact same tournament, and now I finally managed to win it! I plan to celebrate with my family and friends, nothing special, there's still a lot of work ahead."

The 29-year-old played semi-professional hockey in his home country, as well as in Sweden and Norway, before hanging up his skates in 2018. Since then, he's found considerable success in the poker world.

Although the final two players were set to receive the same payout, there was still a huge bounty up for grabs. On the final hand of the tournament, Spirins hit a runner-runner spade flush with 9♠ 5♠. Most of the money didn't go in until the river, when Spirins' opponent, 'manuelmpc,' called off a 1.5x pot river shove with J♠ 6♥ on a K♦ 6♦ 4♠ 10♠ Q♠ board.

The full final-table broadcast can be watched on ACR Poker's Twitch channel.

Spirins' \$675,224 total payout in this tournament exceeds his best career live results by several times over. Back in 2023, Spirins finished third in a \$2,000 no-limit hold'em event at the *World Series of Poker* for \$238,129.

The largest PLO PKO tournament ever run on ACR poker happened in parallel to its no-limit hold'em compatriot. Over five starting flights, the \$2,650 buy-in tournament hit 641 entrants. The prize pool reached \$1,602,500, again with half of that money dedicated to bounty prizes.

'PohPohPohPAAAA' was ultimately crowned champion. In addition to the \$135,789 first-place prize, the online player nearly doubled their payout with \$117,099 in bounties.

"Playing the *Dual Venoms* was pure adrenaline from start to finish," said 2003 *WSOP* main event champion and ACR Pro Chris MoneyMaker. "Every knockout was super exciting and could change your whole tournament. It was action-packed and full of huge moments, and it's great to see the *Dual Venoms* going from strength to strength." ♠

Place	Player	Payout	Bounties
1	Rigapols81	\$378,372	\$296,852
2	manuelmpc	\$378,372	\$59,299
3	Disenchantment	\$276,216	\$46,430
4	AceOfSpades33	\$201,638	\$27,656
5	MillionDollarCorner	\$147,194	\$29,921
6	wisimaki	\$107,451	\$3,437
7	UnaVez	\$78,443	\$50,268
8	colheita feliz	\$57,260	\$20,571
9	JINLEMON	\$41,797	\$36,645

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CIRCUIT RESULTS

Joseph Johnson



© Parkwest Bicycle

Event	Player	Payout
Big Poker Oktober Parkwest Bicycle Bell Gardens, CA \$200/\$400 NLH Oct. 19-28 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 2,388 Prizepool: \$1,084,815	1 Joseph Johnson	\$162,195
	2 Quoc Le	\$106,385
	3 Fausto Valdez	\$72,340
	4 Michael Peluso	\$50,540
	5 Cynthia Vencebi	\$39,195
	6 Hoang Le	\$30,705
	7 Zelin Wang	\$24,095
	8 Yoon Choi	\$18,640
	9 Basil Ammari	\$14,010

Tyreese Robinson



© Running Aces

Event	Player	Payout
Hallow Scream Tournament Running Aces Columbus, MN \$360 NLH Oct. 22-26 Entries: 879 Prizepool: \$263,778	1 Tyreese Robinson	\$50,100
	2 Chris Jones	\$30,853
	3 Kanat Ozturk	\$22,652
	4 Daniel Lehmann	\$17,141
	5 Daniel Kennedy	\$12,921
	6 Ryan Young	\$9,757
	7 Cody Lindquist	\$7,647
	8 Arlo Strozewski	\$6,065
	9 Luke Gramentz	\$4,747

Vontray Gardner



© Parkwest Bicycle

Event	Player	Payout	(POV)
Big Poker Oktober Parkwest Bicycle Bell Gardens, CA \$1,100 NLH Oct. 30-Nov. 2 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 432 Prizepool: \$500,000	1 Vontray Gardner	\$57,060	720
	2 Rashim Cannad	\$85,440	600
	3 Evan Muschetto	\$79,375	480
	4 Anthony Denove	\$35,440	360
	5 Andrew Cha	\$26,265	300
	6 Gie Chung	\$19,780	240
	7 Loc Nguyen	\$15,145	180
	8 Phuoc Nguyen	\$11,795	120
	9 Ali Shahni	\$9,345	60

Juan Chaves



© Codere Poker Series

Event	Player	Payout	(POV)
Codere Poker Series Casino Carrasco Montevideo, Uruguay \$2,000 NLH Oct. 23-25 \$150,000 GTD Entries: 136 Prizepool: \$149,250	1 Juan Chaves	\$40,000	264
	2 Matias Scaffo	\$28,000	220
	3 Jose Valerio	\$20,000	176
	4 Renan Mesqueu	\$15,150	132
	5 Valeriano Sobrinho	\$12,000	110
	6 Ali Cader	\$9,400	88
	7 Giorgio Silva	\$7,200	66
	8 Marcel Michaus	\$5,500	44
	9 Conrado Camp	\$4,400	22

All payouts in USD.

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TOURNAMENTS



Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Milly in Philly	1 Michael Esquivel	\$72,301	420
	2 Michael Sanders	\$65,000	350
Pearl River Philadelphia, MS	3 Kenneth Allison	\$38,390	280
	4 Jeffrey Hewitt	\$28,483	210
\$700 NLH Oct. 24-26 \$400,000 GTD Entries: 688 Prizepool: \$412,880	5 Alexandru Vasilescu	\$21,466	175
	6 Joseph Dougherty	\$16,099	140
	7 David Cook	\$12,384	105
	8 Derek Normand	\$9,907	70
	9 Brian Borne	\$7,224	35



Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
MSPT	1 Anthony Kastelic	\$115,559	840
	2 Aaron Johnson	\$70,993	700
	3 Max Havlish	\$51,726	560
	4 Kou Vang	\$38,520	420
\$1,110 NLH Oct. 30-Nov. 2 \$300,000 GTD Entries: 571 Prizepool: \$552,370	5 Bohdan Slyvinskyi	\$29,165	350
	6 Jeffrey Copeland	\$22,011	280
	7 Bruce Fagan	\$17,059	210
	8 Justin Coliny	\$13,207	140
	9 Greg Sessler	\$10,455	70



Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Malta Poker Festival	1 Joris Ruijs	\$162,150	540
	2 Vincent Schueler	\$99,383	450
Portomaso Casino St. Julian's, Malta	3 Thomas Grahs	\$70,794	360
	4 Toni Ravnak	\$54,303	270
€550 NLH Oct. 26-Nov. 3 €500,000 GTD Entries: 1,987 Prizepool: \$1,039,746	5 Benjamin Nicault	\$41,780	225
	6 Giuseppe Bellinghieri	\$32,948	180
	7 Vester Vergeest	\$25,381	135
	8 Jeffrey Gregor	\$19,596	90
	9 Richard Broda	\$14,755	45



Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
RunGood Grand Prix	1 Justin Arnwine	\$80,646	408
	2 Russ Dunlevy	\$52,228	340
MGM National Harbor Oxon Hill, MD	3 Hamid Izadi	\$34,947	272
	4 Kade Venkatesan	\$23,042	204
\$1,700 NLH Oct. 30-Nov. 2 \$300,000 GTD Entries: 251 Prizepool: \$384,030	5 Nicholas Rigby	\$18,203	170
	6 Roy Kim	\$14,977	136
	7 Kai Nicholls	\$13,057	102
	8 Craig Delisle	\$11,482	68
	9 LEE SOMMERS	\$9,985	34

TOURNAMENTS

Evan Sandberg



© Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit Caesars Republic Lake Tahoe, NV \$1,700 NLH Oct. 30-Nov. 3 Entries: 436 Prizepool: \$584,332	1 Evan Sandberg	\$125,269	720
	2 Francisco Trujillo	\$85,639	600
	3 Timothy Thorp	\$59,620	480
	4 Melanie Pittard	\$42,280	360
	5 Casey Sandretto	\$30,554	300
	6 Dustin Fox	\$22,507	240
	7 Eric Afriat	\$16,908	180
	8 Ryan Awwad	\$12,957	120
	9 Bradley Hinson	\$10,134	60

Calvin Tucker



© bestbet Jacksonville

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WPT bestbet Scramble bestbet Jacksonville, FL \$400 NLH Oct. 30-Nov. 2 \$200,000 GTD Entries: 1,129 Prizepool: \$366,925	1 Calvin Tucker	\$60,466	384
	2 Antwan Prince	\$60,465	320
	3 Brian Arbaugh	\$27,572	256
	4 Michael Scalice	\$17,451	192
	5 Nicholas Willison	\$11,919	160
	6 Phillip Krnyaich	\$9,985	128
	7 Huilin Chen	\$8,152	96
	8 Wendy Lu	\$8,239	64
	9 Andrew Difeo	\$7,126	32

Mohammadreza Sadrabadi



© Wynn Las Vegas

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Fall Classic Wynn Las Vegas, NV \$600 NLH Oct. 30-Nov. 2 \$300,000 GTD Entries: 708 Prizepool: \$361,080	1 Mohammadreza Sadrabadi	\$45,793	456
	2 Victoria Livschitz	\$45,792	380
	3 Alberto Sabogali	\$40,088	304
	4 Lovell Wilkerson	\$39,292	228
	5 Dustin Lee	\$20,232	190
	6 Robert Webb	\$15,399	152
	7 Dan Heimiller	\$11,491	114
	8 Himmat Singh	\$8,453	76
	9 Daniel Jones	\$6,077	38

Claudio Giacomo



© Kings Resort

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit Kings Casino Rozvadov, Czech Republic €1,500 NLH Oct. 31-Nov. 3 €1,000,000 GTD Entries: 544 Prizepool: \$998,238	1 Claudio Giacomo	\$189,750	840
	2 Stefano Aprile	\$127,650	700
	3 Taras Sopotnytskiy	\$87,400	560
	4 Volodymyr Kokoulin	\$61,525	420
	5 Zdenek Zizka	\$44,850	350
	6 Ondrej Mar	\$33,350	280
	7 Fabian Wolf	\$25,300	210
	8 Ivan Kolesnikov	\$20,125	140
	9 Guido Presti	\$16,330	70



© WSOP



© Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit	1 Robert Champion	\$34,110	336
	2 Carson Weiland	\$23,404	280
	3 David Shelter	\$16,132	224
	4 Jeremy Crawley	\$11,362	168
Choctaw Durant, OK	5 Justin Kruger	\$8,180	140
	6 Lucas Jumalon	\$6,024	112
	7 Yushan Shi	\$4,539	84
	8 Collin King	\$3,502	56
	9 Phylis Blanton	\$2,768	28

\$400 NLH
Nov. 4-6
\$200,000 GTD
Entries: 578
Prizepool:
\$164,635

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Fall Poker Open	1 DeeAngelo Seng	\$101,400	540
	2 Muarem Kica	\$95,000	450
	3 Daniel Kusnerak	\$88,000	360
	4 Vinny Pahuja	\$87,000	270
Borgata Atlantic City, NJ	5 Eric Siegel	\$31,560	225
	6 Anthony Chin	\$24,275	180
	7 Jhordy Sanchez	\$19,050	135
	8 Christopher Basile	\$15,005	90
	9 COLEEM CHESTNUT	\$11,760	45

\$600 NLH
Nov. 5-9
\$600,000 GTD
Entries: 1,829
Prizepool:
\$951,080

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 WPT Prime Lodge Championship
\$1,100 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Harvey Castro
11,300,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 60%
After Flop: 19%
After Turn: 91%



Hai Pham
7,000,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 39%
After Flop: 81%
After Turn: 9%

PREFLOP

With nine players remaining and blinds of 100,000-200,000 with a big blind ante of 200,000, Harvey Castro raised to 400,000 from the cutoff. Hai Pham called from the button.



Castro checked, and Pham bet 200,000. Castro check-raised to 800,000, and Pham called.



Castro bet 1,900,000. Pham moved all-in for 5,800,000, and Castro called.



COMMENTARY:

The WPT Prime Lodge Championship \$1,100 main event drew 1,648 entries for a prize pool of \$1,598,650. The remaining nine of those players were battling for the first-place prize of \$225,020, having locked up \$21,400. The shortest stack had 14 big blinds, meaning significant ICM factors were in play when this hand occurred. Even with position, the situation should have led Hai Pham to fold his hand preflop. Borderline holdings like $Q\heartsuit 8\heartsuit$, which are at the bottom of the calling range, become folds under ICM. Once the players reached the flop, Harvey Castro made a sensible check with bottom pair after raising preflop. His hand wouldn't generate much value by betting, and he was out of position on a board that the player on the button should connect with more often. Pham opted for a minimum bet size with his two pair, which prompted Harvey to check-raise. Some of the bottom pairs do check-raise bluff in this spot, according to the solver. However, it's generally best to do so with your worst kickers, since those hands have the least playability on future streets. In any case, Castro decided to pressure his shorter-stacked opponent. Pham could have raised to get stacks in, but calling was fine too, since he'd have a pretty comfortable hand to stack off with on basically any turn. Well, almost any turn. When he faced a big bet after the $K\clubsuit$ hit the felt, he followed through with his plan and jammed. Castro went deep into the tank, despite turning his own two pair, but he had far too strong of a hand to fold. He finally showed Pham the bad news and sent him packing in ninth.

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

TOURNAMENTS

Larry Lubliner



© Poker.org

Yukun Zhang



© Peppermill

Event	Player	Payout	(POV)
WSOP Circuit	1 Larry Lubliner	\$98,556	480
	2 Angel Suarez	\$60,914	400
	3 Jefferson Guerrero	\$44,239	320
	4 Anh Nguyen	\$32,582	240
	5 Tansel Turgut	\$24,341	200
Grand Victoria Casino Elgin, IL	6 David Kowal	\$18,448	160
	7 Franklin Kline	\$14,187	120
	8 Lee Rzentkowski	\$11,107	80
	9 Paul Rohloff	\$8,775	40

Event	Player	Payout	(POV)
Poker Palooza	1 Yukun Zhang	\$39,500	360
	2 Adam Bishop	\$38,500	300
	3 Adam Nattress	\$21,400	240
Peppermill Reno, NV	4 Jackson Spencer	\$15,850	180
	5 Kong Wang	\$11,915	150
	6 Adam Saven	\$9,575	120
	7 Larry Stallard	\$8,000	90
	8 Daniil Fedunov	\$6,380	60
	9 Derek Stark	\$4,785	30

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 WPT Prime Lodge Championship
\$1,100 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Harvey Castro
18,500,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 24%
After Flop: Folded
After Turn: Folded

Esther Taylor
7,575,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 18%
After Flop: 87%
After Turn: 95%



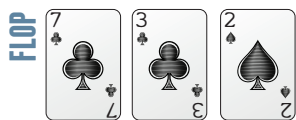
David Sollee
4,675,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 58%
After Flop: 13%
After Turn: 5%

PREFLOP

With eight players remaining and blinds of 100,000-200,000 with a big blind ante of 200,000, Harvey Castro raised to 400,000 from the hijack. David Sollee three-bet to 800,000 from the button. Esther Taylor called from the big blind, and Castro folded.



Taylor checked, and Sollee bet 1,200,000. Taylor raised to 2,500,000. Sollee moved all-in for 3,875,000 and Taylor called.



COMMENTARY:

With eight players remaining, two stacks were sitting right around 20 big blinds when this hand occurred. Given that, David Sollee's 23 blinds were under considerable ICM pressure. Thus, he would have to three-bet a very tight range in this scenario, even when facing a wide open from the chip leader. Pocket queens certainly fit into that range and was good enough to reraise and stack off. Things got weird when Esther Taylor cold-called, however. According to the solver, the big blind shouldn't play any cold-calls in this situation. That matches conventional wisdom here, since opener Harvey Castro was still live behind her with a covering stack. Pocket nines is supposed to be the worst pair one could even considered playing. Castro had a very easy fold since he should have been facing two very tight ranges and his hand was terrible in a multi-way pot. Taylor had a straightforward check on the raggedy flop, and Sollee bet about half the pot. Taylor again made an unconventional play, raising when she was under no pressure to get stacks in. A set was basically always going to be a comfortable hand to stack off with, and check-calling would have given hands like A-K a chance to catch up or bluff. Regardless, Sollee had one of the hands at the top of his range, the money went in, and Taylor's good luck on the flop set her up for a deeper run.

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

POT-LIMIT OMAHA ALL-TIME MONEY LIST



Rank	Player	PLO Earnings	PLO Titles	PLO Cashes
1	Lautaro Guerra	\$9,812,192	10	59
2	Eelis Parssinen	\$9,673,208	7	62
3	Ben Tollerene	\$8,859,459	3	27
4	Isaac Haxton	\$8,757,928	3	34
5	Stephen Chidwick	\$8,013,915	5	39
6	Joni Jouhkimainen	\$7,133,475	5	56
7	Shaun Deeb	\$7,107,315	5	46
8	Dylan Weisman	\$5,855,678	6	61
9	Biao Ding	\$5,750,330	2	17
10	Ben Lamb	\$5,701,335	6	33

The high-stakes pot-limit Omaha tournament circuit keeps building steam, with more and more PLO offerings around the globe each year. Amid this four-card renaissance, the top earners are battling for supremacy atop the game's all-time money list.

The top-ranked player at the moment is **Lautaro Guerra** with more than \$9.8 million. The Spaniard made a name for himself on the world stage with a dominant performance at the inaugural *PGT PLO Series*. He won three of the nine events offered, cashing for nearly \$1 million on the way to securing series champion honors. The 34-year-old has 10 recorded PLO titles across 59 cashes, with his biggest win coming in the 2024 *World Series of Poker Paradise* \$100,000 buy-in for more than \$2.1 million and his first bracelet. Guerra most recently took third in the August *Onyx* \$100,000 PLO super high roller for nearly \$1.3 million.

Eelis Parssinen is one of two Finnish players represented in the top 10, joining sixth-ranked Joni Jouhkimainen. The 36-year-old bracelet winner is hot on Guerra's heels, with almost \$9.7

million in recorded PLO earnings across 62 cashes. His *WSOP* win fittingly came in a \$5,000 mixed event that included both no-limit hold'em and PLO. Like Guerra, his top score came via a super high roller. He took down the \$100,000 PLO event at the 2024 *Triton Poker Monte Carlo* stop to bank nearly \$2.3 million.

A pair of Americans are next up on the list. **Ben Tollerene** has nearly \$8.9 million in PLO cashes, with **Isaac Haxton** and his nearly \$8.8 million following close behind. The 38-year-old Tollerene has three seven-figure PLO scores, including a win in this year's *Triton Montenegro* \$100,000 event for \$2.4 million.

Haxton took down the same event at the *Triton Jeju* stop, pocketing nearly \$2.8 million after besting the 11-entry field. The 40-year-old is one of two players in the top 10 on this list who also sits inside the top 10 on the overall money list.

Haxton is joined by UK poker pro **Stephen Chidwick**, who has just over \$8 million in PLO cashes. The 36-year-old Chidwick is ranked second on the all-time money list with \$74.6 million, behind only Bryn Kenney. Haxton's \$63.6 million is good for fifth overall. ♠



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Final Table Takedown: Evan Sandberg Goes Back-To-Back In Tahoe

By Craig Tapscott



Evan Sandberg attended college at Rutgers University but dropped out after just two months and began playing poker at micro-stakes online. When he turned 21, he started playing at his local casino, Lucky Chances, outside of San Francisco.

He had a \$3,000 bankroll at the time and jumped into the \$3-\$5 games, and then worked his way up to \$5-\$10. While Sandberg's confidence was growing, so was his ego, which became his downfall in the games when the negative side of variance hit. He ended up broke and headed home.

In January 2020, staked with a \$350 loan from a friend, Sandberg got in his car and drove to Las Vegas. He'd have to live in the car for a bit, but he was ultimately able to build the roll up to \$30,000. He was back in the game.

The following year would bring two breakout scores. He won an event at the 2021 *WPT Showdown* for \$158,000, then took home the trophy at the *Wynn Mystery Bounty* for \$380,000. In 2022, he scored *World Series of Poker* gold in the online series, topping the \$2,000 no-limit event for \$94,568. Last year, he added a second bracelet in the online series, cashing in for \$124,831 in the \$1,000 freezeout.

He found the winner's circle at the 2024 *WSOP Circuit* main event in Lake Tahoe, besting a field of 439 for \$133,841. This year, he returned and was able to pull off an incredible defense of his title, outlasting 436 players and pocketing another \$125,269.

Card Player spoke with Sandberg to break down some key

hands from his repeat win in Tahoe.

Craig Tapscott: It's rare that someone goes back-to-back, especially in a big event with hundreds of players. What did it feel like to defend your title?

Evan Sandberg: As I was driving up there, I was in a mixed headspace because I had just come off a somewhat deep run in the *WPT Bay 101 Shooting Star* event where I had a big chip stack, played one really bad hand, and ultimately lost a flip a couple of hours later.

I was still feeling disappointed, but I also had confidence. I felt like, besides this one hand, I had been at the top of my game. The first thing I did when I settled into my hotel was go to the sauna, relax my muscles, release negative energy, and meditate.

I knew Tahoe was the perfect place for me to be at that point because it's very easy to feel grateful up there in the mountains. And I can honestly say that defending my title felt better than winning a bracelet. To have the opportunity to go back-to-back in a main event of a series is something that not many people have done.

Event: WSOP Circuit Lake Tahoe

Buy-In: \$1,700

Entrants: 436

Prize Pool: \$584,322

First-Place Prize: \$125,269

2024



2025



HAND NO. 1

Stacks: Evan Sandberg – 3,000,000 (60 BB)
 Villain – 5,000,000 (100 BB)
Blinds: 25,000-50,000 with a 50,000 big blind ante
Players remaining: 7

CT: Why do you think this is an important hand to share?

ES: I think this hand illustrates a few essential points about poker theory, holistic thinking, and understanding what solver outputs actually mean. I'll explain.

Sandberg raised to 105,000 from the hijack holding 8♥7♥. The Villain called from the big blind.

ES: The Villain in the big blind was the chip leader.

Flop: A♦ Q♦ 9♠

Villain checked.

ES: On the flop, I feel like I have a pretty easy bet. My hand is so bad that it likely shouldn't have been opened pre-flop in the first place, though it's borderline.

But given I have no showdown value, and it's a flop that gives me a significant range and nut advantage against the

big blind, I think we can comfortably bet the bottom of our range.

Sandberg bet 140,000, and Villain called.

Turn: Q♠

Villain checked.

CT: What now?

ES: On the turn, things change a lot because some of my highest frequency checks on the flop come from second pair hands, so given that I bet, it's a lot harder for me to have trips than it is for my opponent.

I was kind of expecting my opponent to come with a lead here some of the time. He checked relatively quickly. Thinking this was a bad card to bluff, I...

Sandberg checked behind.

River: 6♠

Villain checked.

ES: My opponent checked quickly. My initial thought was that I needed to bet, because not only am I at the complete bottom of my range, but I also unblock diamonds and unblock straight draws. It just feels like a mandatory bet, and in the theoretical world, I think it is.

CT: But? I know there's a but coming.

ES: But one thing I've realized about playing rivers, both as the aggressor and against aggressive action, is that certain things matter more than computer outputs, at least in my opinion.

CT: What are you asking yourself in this spot?

ES: Well, the most important question I try to ask myself when deciding whether to bluff a river is, do I think my opponent will call more often than he's supposed to, or fold more often?

The second thing I think about is what's called 'future game consider-

ations.' This is a holistic form of poker thinking that current-day solvers aren't yet very good at understanding, where you are thinking about how your future tournament is likely to play out after the hand progresses certain ways. It factors in things like the playability of your stack size, your skill advantage/disadvantage over your opponents, position at the table, and so on.

And finally, I think solver outputs come next in line for me. This is on the river, and the earlier streets of a poker hand, I think the level of importance of these things shifts drastically, and correctly executing solver theory becomes extremely important pre-flop and on the flop. I haven't exactly heard others say this, but this is how I think about these things.

CT: A check was the best play from that evaluation.

ES: Yes. In this specific hand, I had reason to believe that my opponent was going to call me too often.

I think the point I'm trying to make is that on the river, it's very important to understand that you are playing an exploitative game where not even the best players in the world are capable of playing like a computer.



Sandberg checked behind. Villain revealed $Q\clubsuit 8\heartsuit$ and won the pot of 565,000.

HAND NO.2

Stacks: Evan Sandberg – 6,000,000 (50 BB)
Francisco Trujillo –11,400,000 (95 BB)
Blinds: 60,000-120,000 with a 120,000 big blind ante
Players remaining: 2

ES: I was feeling very excited during heads-up play, as I was close to defending my title, something I could hardly have imagined just a couple of days earlier.

CT: Did you know much about your opponent?

ES: My opponent, Francisco, appeared to be a very good player. Interestingly, going into the final table, I assumed he was a weak, passive player because he didn't have many cashes on his player profile. I had only played with him for about 30 minutes on the prior day, and he seemed to be playing very tight.

But I quickly realized at the start of the final table that the way he was playing and the sizings he was using indicated that he had actually had a lot of experience. I assumed he must be an online professional, but I've since heard that he plays high-stakes cash games in Los Angeles.

Sandberg limped the button holding $8\heartsuit 4\heartsuit$. Trujillo checked his option.

CT: What's your general plan of attack for heads-up?

ES: My plan for preflop on the button was to mix limping with 2.5x big blind open raises. When you're deep stacked and getting 5:1 odds on a call in position, it's pretty hard to fold!

Flop: $10\clubsuit 5\heartsuit 3\clubsuit$

Trujillo checked.

ES: I limped this weak holding and got a dry ten-high flop. I decided to use a large two-thirds pot sizing on the flop because I think it's too easy for the big blind to find continues on this board versus a small sizing.

Sandberg bet 240,000, and Trujillo called.

Turn: $Q\heartsuit$

ES: The turn is the sketchy part of this hand, which, in my opinion, I misplayed. I don't have access to any heads-up solvers, so I haven't run this hand. However, when I examine this spot on the turn, I think it makes sense to use two sizing options.

CT: What are your choices and why?

ES: Well, I can overbet, as I eventually did. I think it's slightly easier for my bluffs to connect with the queen than it is for my opponents' calls, and I think it's likely my opponent raises a lot of his strong hands on the flop.

But I don't think I only want to have an overbet sizing here. Because I don't think I need to be super polarized with my entire betting range. I think it makes sense to value bet a hand like $J-10$, and I wouldn't want to overbet that hand; I would want to bet around two-thirds of the pot.

I think I should be putting 8-4 off-suit into the two-thirds pot sizing pile, or checking it back is okay too. When overbet bluffing the turn, I would rather have a chance of rivering a really strong hand.

CT: Please share an example.

ES: Say I have a gutshot straight draw, such as 7-6 off-suit, for example. Having a nine percent chance at hitting a miracle might not seem that great, but as a theorist and long-term thinker, you can appreciate how big a difference it really is. To have a chance of rivering a straight and going all in and possibly getting called in such a massive pot.

Big pots are made for big hands, and so my bluffs should have a chance of becoming big hands on the river. A solver might disagree slightly and use my hand as an overbet at some frequency. In practice, I don't think it's necessary.

Trujillo called.

CT: When you saw his call, did you have a plan formulated for the river?

ES: As he grabbed calling chips, I was feeling very nervous. From my experience, I get nervous not because I'm bluffing, but because I feel what I'm doing might be a mistake.

I told myself I was probably going to give up on the river, as most cards don't feel natural to bluff on with my hand, and I didn't want to risk it all.

River: $6\heartsuit$

ES: But when I saw an offsuit six hit the river, I quickly realized that I needed to go for it. The reason is that a lot of my bluffs are going to be straight draws that are coordinated either around the queen and the ten or the five and the three.

My cards interact well with the low cards; having a four in my hand makes me comfortable representing hands like 7-4 and 4-2 for a rivered straight.

I wouldn't be nearly as comfortable trying to represent a straight on, say a nine river, where my cards don't interact with my value range in any way.

Trujillo checked, and Sandberg shoved all-in.

CT: Were there any other considerations before you bombed the river?

ES: I considered my future game. I felt like I had an advantage over my opponent. (I had to believe that, as I was defending my title.) However, I didn't think it was that significant an advantage to give up on this spot.

I had to take it, and I suddenly felt way more confident than I did on the turn. Because on the turn, I was kind of in no-man's land, just going crazy with a couple of napkins. But on the river, I knew my hand made sense to bluff with.

Trujillo folded, and Sandberg raked in the pot. ♠

PUNT OF THE DAY: CLICKBACK WAR OF FUTILITY

By Sam Greenwood

Henrik Hecklen



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.

The final stop of season 2 on the *Triton Poker* series was in Cyprus, and I found myself in the hunt for Player of the Year. Stephen Chidwick came into the stop with a commanding lead, but I and some others had an outside chance to catch him.

I was one of the chip leaders with five left in the opening tournament, but I could not close it out and came in fifth place. In the meantime, Jason Koon did close out some tournaments, winning a \$20,000 no-limit event and coming second in a \$25,000 pot-limit Omaha tournament. So, going into the final table of the main event, there were still three of us in contention.

I entered the final table as a big stack, and Jason and Stephen were two of the short stacks. With a fortunate finish, I could overtake the lead if I won and if Stevie and Jason exited early. Things were looking good when I doubled up early after Viacheslav Bulydgin bluffed into my full house, and then Stevie was knocked out by Jason.

But my POY dreams were ultimately dashed, as Jason proceeded to steamroll through the final table before beating me heads up in just one hand.

The final table is likely best remembered for a spat between Jason and Dan Smith, but there's another confrontation that loosely reminded me of a legendary poker hand: the clickback war between Phil Ivey and Paul Jackson in the 2005 *Monte Carlo Millions*.

In this hand, I tried to play the role of Phil Ivey to Henrik Hecklen's Paul Jackson, but unfortunately, Hecklen had the goods. Was this the right move at the wrong time, or the wrong move at the wrong time? Let's look back at a final table clickback war and you can judge for yourself.

Event: 2023 Triton Cyprus \$100,000 Main Event

The Hand

There were eight players remaining, with a stack of 7,200,000 and blinds at 75,000-150,000 with a 150,000 big blind ante. I raised in the hijack to 325,000 holding J♠ 8♠. Henrik Hecklen, who started the hand with 2,500,000, defended his big blind.

Flop: 10♠ 10♥ 2♣ (pot: 875,000)

Hecklen checked, and I bet 200,000. He check-raised to 525,000, and I reraised to 875,000. He raised to 1,200,000, and I folded.

What Was I Thinking?

I knew for chips, 10-10-2 rainbow was a pure continuation-bet from me, and the big blind would play raise or fold with all their continues. The board was so dry, and the out-of-position player has very few hands that would want to check-call. Especially under ICM pressure, where the big blind will fold a lot of 2-x preflop and will be even more aggressive with ace high.

So, while I was not sure if Henrik would play any check-calls on the flop, I knew his continuing range would be very aggressive. Once I got check-raised, I knew I needed to continue a lot and could not fold any hand with backdoor flush and straight draws. I also thought that for cEV (Chip Expected Value), Hecklen is supposed to fight back quite a bit vs my flop three-bets. But I was not sure if he'd have the same fight as a short stack at a final table.

I rolled an aggressive number, and I thought that if Hecklen was indeed playing raise or fold versus my c-bet, he would still need to make some pretty light floats vs. my flop three-bet to prevent my bluffs from winning a lot. I thought at a final table, he might just fold some pure continues with hands like A-9 with a backdoor flush draw, so I went for a reraise.

Once he four-bet, I figured at such a high-stakes final table, it was unlikely he was running a four-bet bluff on the flop. So I pitched it.

What Did I Get Wrong?

I am supposed to pure c-bet on the flop, and Hecklen pure

POKER STRATEGY

raises all his continues. My hand mixes a tiny amount of flop three-bet, but I got a theoretical concept wrong in the construction of my flop three-betting range.

If Hecklen is not playing any calls on the flop, that means his flop check-raising range is linear. I am not facing a split range of the top and bottom of his continuing range when he raises; I am facing his entire continuing range.

When you are facing a linear range, your response is usually to be more linear with your aggression, which means a lot more of my three-bets are hands like A-K offsuit or K-Q with a backdoor, hands which are ahead of hands like A-9 with a backdoor or Q-J offsuit which the BB will check-raise and call a small three-bet with.

If I don't think Hecklen is playing this node as loosely as the computer, it probably makes sense to be more polar in my three-bet bluffing range, but I should still have some stronger unpaired hands in my three-betting range. If I can three bet J-8 suited and fold out Q-J offsuit, it becomes a much more appealing class of hand to three-bet. (Yes, the board is 10-10-2 rainbow and I am talking about Q-J offsuit as if not putting seven big blinds in the pot on the flop is a crazy deviation. Paired-board computer poker can get bonkers.)

The other thing I got wrong is, once Hecklen clicks it back, I continue 76% of my range, including J-8 with a backdoor pure. My primary three-bet/folds are A-7 offsuit and worse, Q-9 offsuit, K-7/K-6, and Q-6, Q-5, Q-4 with a backdoor. I am not sure if Hecklen is bluffing often enough that I'd want to continue 76% vs. his flop four-bet, and it's likely that folding most of my marginal continues is the way to go.

However, it's unclear if J-8 suited *is* a marginal continue. I

am likely missing the flop aggression with my most common three-bet/folds. (I really doubt I'm three-betting Q-6 suited on the flop here.)

However, all things considered, J-8 suited is quite a high-EV continue for me. It's not as good a float as the hands that can have eight outs to turn an open ender, like 9-8 suited with a backdoor flush draw. But it's much better than random high-card hands like K-Q offsuit.

Given Hecklen did have K♥ 10♣, I'm fine with my fold and with concluding he's not playing as wild as the computer. However, that I didn't even think about floating or playing back reflects a problem in my thought process.

Grade

My flop three-bet range construction was off. I should have picked hands that had a little more high-card equity to fight back against getting refloat, and I should have given a lot more thought to peeling against his four-bet.

They are two very minor mistakes, but if I'm going to be results-oriented and reward myself for folding to a four-bet from trips, I can also be results-oriented and give myself a little demerit for bluffing into trips in the first place.

Let's call it a B-. ♠



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.

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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TRIPLE DRAW: BREAKING NINES AND BLUFFING SEVENS

By Kevin Haney

Christopher Vitch



Erick Lindgren



While mixed game aficionados were understandably disappointed that PokerGO's televised schedule included fewer mixed games than previous years, we were still treated to three full days of coverage from the pinnacle of mixed game tournaments, the \$50,000 *Poker Player's Championship*. High-stakes player Jared Bleznik joined the announcer's booth for some of the broadcast and was a welcome addition with his genuine enthusiasm and insightful, but unfiltered commentary.

During the Deuce-to-Seven Triple Draw Lowball rounds there were a few instances where players opted to break dealt pat nines, where Jared believed they should have stood pat. The first instance was a button open by Albert Daher. Chris Vitch three-bet from the small blind with 9-5-4-3-2, the big blind folded, and Albert called.

Chris is a long-time top limit mixed games professional with three bracelets, so when he chose to break the smooth nine in this situation it was based off a ton of experience and undoubtedly large amount of work and consideration. As is the case with most poker plays, there are offsetting considerations, and it's best to list them out and attempt to place value on them.

Over the course of three draws we will improve to the nuts (7-5-4-3-2), the fifth best hand in the game (8-5-4-3-2), or get the nine back around 56% of the time.

In addition, patting a nine low out-of-position can be problematic as our opponent can leverage his position in a few different ways, and there are some reverse implied odds. They can test our possibly weaker pat range that would

attack a button open by raising on the turn with a pair of sevens or eights (cards we completely unblock) which creates a problem for us where we could make a mistake.

Or we could get "frozen" on the turn, for example our opponent just calls our bet and pats behind us with a holding such as 8-7-5-4-2 ensuring themselves the pot.

The times our opponent is destined to make a strong holding, breaking also unlocks the possibility of getting bets and raises in with some of the strongest holdings in the game.

A draw to a 2-3-4-5 is also a premium bluff catcher when both players take one on the final draw. Since we completely unblock sevens and eights, we can usually check-call any pair assuming most opponents will at a minimum, bluff when pairing their highest card.

There are a few drawbacks to breaking the nine, of course, the primary being a slightly reduced amount of fold equity on the turn. Had we chosen to pat, our opponent generally deems it necessary to have improved to at least a one-card draw to a decent eight to continue, but when we draw one on the second draw, they might play on with a one-card draw to nine, ten, or perhaps even a premium two-card draw. And when our opponent does continue on the turn with a one-card draw the 2-3-4-5 is usually a small underdog.

We could also make the dreaded six-high straight on the third draw where we should check the river and just resign to the loss. Now if your opponent bets, check-raising is an option targeting high pairs, but that's a high-variance maneuver.



Michael Mizrachi

Breaking the nine especially with a smooth draw out-of-position has been my default play over the years. When two decisions are reasonably close, it seems right to go down the road offering implied odds as opposed to hoping that our hand holds up.

Later in the same round, Esther Taylor opened from early position and Erick Lindgren three-bet from the hijack with the same exact holding of 9-5-4-3-2. He also chose to draw. This situation was closer since Erick has a stronger pat range and position, and can choose to break his hand if Esther pats.

Like the previous situation, it still might be best to break primarily due to it being a favorite to make the same hand or better, as well as the implied odds that accompany making a premium holding.

However, a hand such as 9-6-5-4-2 could be a pat in position since when broken it can “only” make the fourth (7-6-5-4-2) and eighth (8-6-5-4-2) best hands in the game, meaning we have less implied odds.

Both hands ended on the turn when their opponents didn’t improve in a sufficient enough manner to continue. We don’t always have to make our hand to win the pot, and should always bet the turn when a card ahead.

Mizrachi’s Sevens

Switching gears to a different topic and onto a hand from day 4 with eight players left, none of which were on a short stack. Joao Vieira opened the cutoff with 2-4-8-K-A, and Michael Mizrachi three-bet from the small blind. Bryn Kenney called in the big blind, and Joao called. Everyone took two on the first draw and the Grinder led the small betting street getting called in both spots.

On the second draw, Grinder drew one, and Bryn requested two. Joao, having picked up a king and a ten on the first draw, opted to take two once again.

On the turn Mizrachi fired again, Bryn mucked, and

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TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 WPT Prime Lodge Championship
\$1,100 No-Limit Hold’em Main Event



Harvey Castro
28,775,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 49%
After Flop: 91%
After Turn: 100%



Steve Hwang
15,325,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 51%
After Flop: 9%
After Turn: 0%



PREFLOP

With four players remaining and blinds of 200,000-400,000 with a big blind ante of 400,000, Harvey Castro limped from the small blind. Steve Hwang raised to 2,400,000 from the big blind. Castro called.

FLOP



Castro checked, and Hwang bet 800,000. Castro called.

TURN



Castro checked, and Hwang bet 1,000,000. Castro called.

RIVER



Both players checked.

COMMENTARY:

Harvey Castro was in a commanding chip position when this hand took place, holding just a little less than half of the chips in play four-handed. With a short stack on 16 blinds having folded, he was in an ideal position to pressure the medium stack of Steve Hwang. As a result, the solver favors raising 100% of hands in this spot, due to the fact that Hwang should be proceeding incredibly cautiously. Castro went with a limp, which was fine with a hand that plays well after the flop. However, he then faced a massive raise from Hwang, who got himself into a sticky situation. His best options were to either check to try to keep the pot small, or just jam for maximum fold equity. By instead raising nearly 20% of his stack, he wound up seeing a flop with a hand that doesn’t play that great on a lot of boards. Castro also had the option to jam it in preflop, but again went with the cautious route and called. On the all-Broadway texture, a small continuation-bet was fine from Hwang, but betting the turn for another small sizing made little sense. Castro was getting a great price to continue with anything that connected with the board, and all of those hands had pocket sevens crushed. On the river, Hwang finally waved the white flag, but he had frittered away about a third of his stack and cost himself the second chip position in the process.

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

Joao called with 2-4-8-8-10. While his decision to continue is somewhat unpleasant since he could be drawing dead, it's appropriate in this bloated pot as Mizrachi had an automatic turn bet being a card ahead of both his opponents and therefore may not have completed his hand.

Both players took one on the final draw, the Grinder led on the river, and after some deliberation Joao decided to lay down a made ten (10-8-4-5-2). This was a noteworthy fold as he was getting 9:1 on his money and some players will bet jack lows in this spot; thus, in addition to picking off bluffs he also beats thin value hands. It's not clear if the Grinder would have bet his jack lows, so let's toss that possibility aside for a moment and just assume his betting range only consisted of better holdings and bluffs.

Mizrachi three-bet a cutoff open from the small blind and drew two cards, so he almost always has a deuce and frequently a seven as well. Given Joao's specific holding and the cards he's seen, Grinder's most likely holding heading into the final draw was 2-3-6-7, and that's exactly what he held.

If we assume that our opponent will bet all ten lows or better, along with pairs of sevens as bluffs, he will lead the river with the following 17 cards:

Value (14): Fours (3), Fives (3), Eights (2), Nines (4), and Tens (2)

Bluffs (3): Sevens (3)

Since the pot is laying 9:1 and the odds of us having the best hand are around 18% (3/17) we have an easy call. Perhaps it was considered that Bryn's cold-calling range also contained a seven, and although Bryn held 2-4-5, he's often correct in that regard. However, even in that circumstance the value to bluff ratio would only reduce to 7:1 still provid-

ing more than enough overlay.

If instead Grinder had held 2-3-4-8 there are still two eights to bluff, with 2-3-4-6 he might bluff the straight or a pair of sixes, and with any holding we can't eliminate the possibility of value betting jack lows. All the jacks were live, so even just assuming he bets them a fraction of the time adds one or two cards to the number of hands we beat.

Sometimes against erratic opponents we can get into difficult spots with what may be theoretically correct bluff catchers, such as a pair of fours, because we will occasionally be shown ace high or a pair of deuces. But when we are sitting there with a ten low it doesn't seem possible to derive a set of assumptions where this isn't a call short of saying this individual never bluffs nor makes thin value bets. The number of players that can be put on this list is usually quite small, and Mizrachi is probably never on it.

As Joao was deliberating, the Grinder (who was holding a pair of sevens) said, "Big pot." Perhaps this influenced him to muck his hand. It was truly the Summer of the Grinder where he could do no wrong and if this little bit of reverse psychology won him this big pot, he earned it. ♠



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

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 WPT Prime Lodge Championship
\$1,100 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Harvey Castro
26,500,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 44%
After Flop: 80%
After Turn: 89%



Steve Hwang
26,600,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 56%
After Flop: 20%
After Turn: 11%

PREFLOP

With four players remaining and blinds of 300,000-500,000 with a big blind ante of 500,000, Harvey Castro limped in from the small blind. Steve Hwang checked from the big blind.

FLOP



Castro bet 600,000, and Hwang called.

TURN



Both players checked.

RIVER



Castro bet 500,000, and Hwang raised to 2,000,000. Castro three-bet to 7,200,000, and Hwang folded.

COMMENTARY:

ICM was once again heavily in play in this hand, as the last four players had a rather lopsided chip distribution. Short stacks Esther Taylor and Joshua Stewart both had stacks below 13 blinds, and they had folded, leaving Harvey Castro and Steve Hwang to battle again with stacks north of 50 blinds. That meant both players were heavily incentivized to keep pots small, and that's exactly what happened preflop. Castro had a good hand to bet on the flop, as top pair would garner some value from weaker hands, and Hwang had an easy call with second pair and a good kicker. The turn was a bit scary for both players, as each could plausibly have connected with the jack to make either straights or top pair. Following the preflop logic that neither player was motivated to play a huge pot, they both checked. On the river, a pair of nines was clearly worth a small bet from Castro since it could still get called by some worse holdings. Hwang had an obvious raise with trips and a good kicker, and Castro could have conceivably responded by calling, raising, or folding. He landed on raising, which was an interesting play. If he figured his opponent wasn't bluffing enough, then calling would become much worse than raising or folding. His hand had some nice properties for raising since it blocked a lot of the strongest value, hands like 9-8 and Q-10. In a setup where both players were incentivized to be careful, three-betting the river looked incredibly strong. Hwang was only beating bluffs at that point and decided to fold, but calling would have certainly been reasonable. He had to ask himself whether Castro would really lead the river small with a nutted hand in hopes of inducing a raise, which is a play not many players find. Calling would have put him in a commanding position to win the tournament, but since he folded, Castro was the one who retook control of the final table and ultimately collected the \$225,020.

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

SCHEDULES

FOR COMPLETE TOURNAMENT RESULTS AND LISTINGS, VISIT CARDPLAYER.COM

NOVEMBER	Nov. 24-Dec. 23	DeepStack Extravaganza IV	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Nov. 28-Dec. 21	Orleans Winter Open	Orleans Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
DECEMBER	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. 24-Jan. 19	DeepStack Extravaganza NYE	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Dec. 26-Jan. 6	Trailblazer Poker Tour	Texas Card House - Rio Grande Valley ■ Edinburg, TX
	Jan. 5-12	PGT Last Chance Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 5-19	Signature Series	Wynn ■ Las Vegas, NV
JANUARY	Jan. 6-20	WPT Lucky Hearts Poker Open	Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino ■ Hollywood, FL
	Jan. 7-18	WSOP Circuit Oklahoma	Choctaw Casino & Resort ■ Durant, OK
	Jan. 7-19	Beau Rivage Heater	Beau Rivage Resort & Casino ■ Biloxi, MS
	Jan. 8-19	100 Grand Stack Series San Diego	Sycuan Resort & Casino ■ El Cajon, CA
	Jan. 14-Feb. 2	Trailblazer Poker Tour	Texas Card House ■ Houston, TX
	Jan. 15-26	WSOP Circuit Northern California	Thunder Valley Casino & Resort ■ Lincoln, CA
	Jan. 25-31	PGT Kickoff Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 29-Feb. 1	Diamond Poker Championship	Talking Stick Resort ■ Scottsdale, AZ
	Feb. 3-10	PGT Mixed Games Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Feb. 10-16	Ohio Poker State Championship	Jack Casino ■ Cleveland, OH
FEBRUARY	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 11-15	MSPT Festival Larchwood	Grand Falls Casino ■ Larchwood, IA
	March 17-22	MSPT Festival Riverside	Riverside Casino & Resort ■ Riverside, IA
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.

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

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

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

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

Gutshot - An inside straight draw.

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

Hollywood - Exaggerating and overacting to sell strength or weakness.

Horse - A player financially backed by someone else.

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

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

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

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

LAG - A loose, aggressive player.

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

Muck - To fold.

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

Nuts - The best possible hand on a given board.

Open - To bet first.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rainbow - Three or four cards of different suits.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TAG - A tight, aggressive player.

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

Tilt - Frustration or anger that leads to poor play.

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

VPIP - The percentage of hands voluntarily played preflop.

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

Wheel - A five-high straight.



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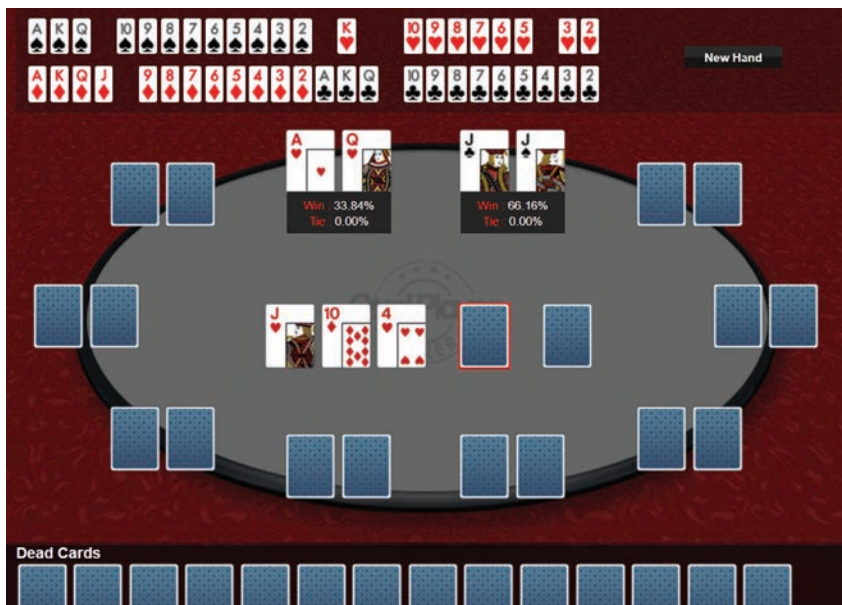
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POKER ODDS



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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		38%	22%
9	Flush Draw	35%	20%
8	Straight Draw	32%	17%
7		28%	15%
6	Two 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%

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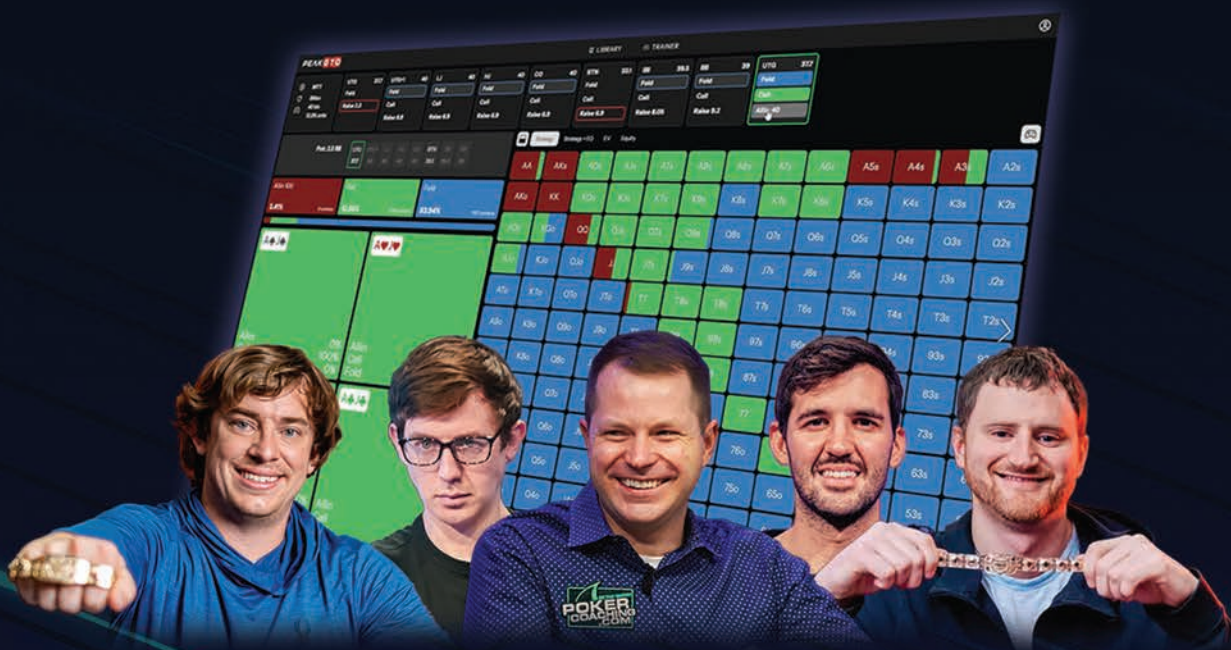
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GETTING VALUE FROM A MADE HAND

By Jonathan Little

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



You are eight-handed in a \$1,000 buy-in live tournament, and are sitting on a stack of 171,500 chips. The blinds are 750-1,500 with a 1,500 big blind ante. You make it 3,500 from UTG+1 with K♣ J♣ and both blinds call. The flop comes 5♣ 4♣ 2♦ and both blinds check.

Question 1: Should you check, bet 4,000, bet 8,000, or bet 12,000?

Answer: Your king-high flush draw lacks show-down value, but has a lot of equity and can reasonably call a check-raise. When that is the case, you should be inclined to bet, especially if you think your opponents don't love their hands.

Multi-way, you should usually use a small bet size due to not having a big range or nut advantage, plus you want to be able to keep the pot manageable in case you get raised.

You bet 4,000 and both opponents call. The turn is the K♦.

Question 2: Should you check, bet 10,000, bet 20,000, or bet 30,000?

Answer: With top pair and a flush draw, always consider if a turn bet will likely get check-raised. If you expect to rarely get raised, you can certainly bet for value to get called by many worse hands. If you expect your opponents to check-raise more often, you should consider checking behind so you don't find yourself facing a lot of pressure.

In this spot, there are many hands worse than yours that can call a bet, so betting is best. Since the made hands you are trying to get called by are somewhat marginal, it is best to use a small size.

You bet 10,000 and only the small blind calls. The river is the K♥.

Question 3: Should you check, bet 15,000, bet 35,000, or bet 60,000?

Answer: When you river trips, betting is certainly best. Always take a moment to consider the type of hands you are trying to get called by. Most likely, the small blind either has a busted draw (which will fold to any bet), or a marginal made hand like a pocket pair (which might only call a medium-sized bet).

When you think your opponent's range is mostly trash or marginal hands, you should not use a large bet size for value unless your opponent is exceptionally prone to calling on the river.

You bet 35,000, and the small blind thinks a while before calling and losing. ♠



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