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GREG RAYMER BEATS SCOTTY NGUYEN FOR WSOP CHAMPIONS INVITATIONAL TITLE

By Erik Fast

The *World Series of Poker Paradise* hosted a special event in the Bahamas in December. Tournament officials pitted 16 WSOP main event winners against each other in an event they dubbed the *Main Event Champions Invitational*.

The end of the tournament was a throwback to the early days of the poker boom as 2004 winner Greg Raymer topped 1998 champ Scotty Nguyen to secure the title. However, despite the victory, Raymer and Nguyen both left with the same prize, a \$25,000 seat into the \$60 million guaranteed super main event. (pg. 22)

The final four finishers all earned a seat with Ryan Riess (2013) and Scott Blumstein (2017) also punching their ticket. The field also included Phil Hellmuth (1989), Huck Seed (1996), Chris Moneymaker (2003), Jamie Gold (2006), Joe Cada (2009), Greg Merson (2012), Martin Jacobson (2014), Hossein Ensan (2019), Koray Aldemir (2021), Espen Jorstad (2022), Daniel Weinman (2023), and reigning world champion Michael Mizrachi (2025).

"Look at this group," Hellmuth said. "I'm the only one from the '80s. I used to be the young guy, now I'm the old guy."

Hellmuth then walked over to Moneymaker's table to thank him for sparking the poker boom.

"Thanks for that extra \$20 million you made me," he said in a video posted to Twitter/X.

Hellmuth was eventually eliminated in the middle of the pack, getting it all in preflop with K♦ Q♦ against Gold's pocket nines. Hellmuth would flop a straight and flush draw, but Gold would end up making quads to send the 17-time bracelet winner to the rail.

"You get to do a lot of laughing," Hellmuth told WSOP commentator Jeff Platt after busting from the event. "There's a real camaraderie



with the world champions. It's such a good group of people. No one here is in a bad mood. Everyone's happy to be here."

While no one was in a bad mood, one elimination stung more than the rest. Ensan was the final player to head to the rail empty-handed, busting the tournament in fifth.

In the end, Raymer's K♣ 4♣ held against Nguyen's 6♣ 5♣ on a board of J♦ 8♣ 2♦ 7♦ 2♦.

"It was a lot of fun. There was a lot of chatter, telling stories and jokes and all that," Raymer said. "It's always fun to win something, big or small. And it's fun to do it against a tough field like this." ♠

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WSOP REWORKS PLAYER OF THE YEAR RACE, ADDS \$1 MILLION PRIZE

By Erik Fast

The WSOP is shaking up its Player of the Year race in a big way for the upcoming season. 2026 will see several key changes, most notably the introduction of a \$1 million top prize and the inclusion of all three of the WSOP's tentpole festivals.

The next POY winner will have to top all others across the WSOP in Las Vegas, the WSOP Europe making its debut in Prague, and the WSOP Paradise next December.

In addition to revealing these changes, WSOP organizers also posted the full schedule for the WSOP Europe, which is being moved to the spring and runs March 31 through April 12. Among the details is a €10 million guarantee for the €5,300 main event, which will be held at the Hilton Prague in the Czech capital. The venue has also been the site of the European Poker Tour Prague series since 2007. (pg. 36)

"We are thrilled to kick off 2026 with a bold new vision for the *World Series of Poker*," said WSOP Chief Executive Officer Ty Stewart. "By uniting our three flagship live series under a unified, \$1 million Player of the Year competition, we're giving players a true global season to chase history.



Starting with a monster guarantee in Prague, continuing through our summer homecoming in Las Vegas, and culminating in Paradise, we are dedicated to offering the best value and the biggest stages in the world."

The press release revealing these POY changes also noted that the "...winner will claim an enhanced \$100,000 WSOP Paradise package, with a variety of other WSOP packages and/or tickets awarded to the top 100 players on the leaderboard at the conclusion of the season."

The full 15-bracelet schedule for WSOP Europe can be found on the *Card Player* website. The WSOP will run from May 26 to July 15 at Horseshoe and Paris Las Vegas, while the WSOP Paradise dates are set for Dec. 1 – 18. More details will follow in the coming months. ♠

PRESIDENT TRUMP SAYS HE'LL CONSIDER ELIMINATING GAMBLING TAXES

By Card Player News Team

With poker players concerned about the federal government's new tax provisions going into effect for 2026, President Donald Trump may be considering eliminating taxes on gambling winnings altogether.

The move would be a major shift in US policy and a complete reversal by Trump, who signed a controversial tax change into law earlier this year with his 'One Big Beautiful Bill.'

"No tax on gambling winnings? I don't know," he said aboard Air Force One in December. "We have no tax on tips. We have no tax on Social Security. And we have no tax on overtime. No tax on gambling winnings... I don't know about that. I'm going to have to think about that."

Eliminating all taxes on gambling winnings would be a stark change from a provision in the bill which threatens the livelihoods of numerous professional gamblers.

The tax code change allows gamblers to deduct only 90% of their losses instead of 100%. This means that if a poker player cashes for \$100,000 and then loses \$100,000 in subsequent buy-ins, they can only deduct \$90,000. The player would then owe taxes on "phantom profits," in this case \$10,000.

Gamblers would essentially have to pay taxes on money they didn't receive.

The issue has been a major source of concern among sports bettors and high-stakes poker players. Ten-time *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner and Poker Hall of Famer Erik Seidel said he'd have to cut back on his play if the change isn't reversed.

"Very concerned about the tax change," said Seidel on Twitter/X. "It'll put me in semi-retirement."

So far, bipartisan efforts to rescind the provision have been



met with roadblocks. The chances of a reversal appear slim, according to prediction market Kalshi. The possibility of a fix before April 2026 stood at just 32%, with just half of bettors thinking a change would take place before 2027.

If Trump somehow follows through and all taxes on gambling winnings are eliminated, it would bring the US in line with some other countries. The UK, Canada, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and several other nations don't levy taxes on winnings.

"Eliminating all taxes!" poker pro Patrick Leonard said. "Talk about one step back, two steps forward. He's obviously a Seidel fan!"

Many players, however, didn't feel there was much weight to Trump's comments, including Garry Gates.

"Complete nothing burger," he said. "He's not actively considering or working on this."

A number of comments pointed out that Trump has failed to keep the majority of his campaign promises since taking office, including zero taxes on tips, rebate checks from tariffs, the full un-redacted Epstein list, and a pledge to "drain the swamp" of corruption. The 79-year-old former casino owner also told Americans he would lower grocery prices, before claiming that "affordability" is just a liberal "hoax." ♠

SLOT Winnings TAX THRESHOLD RAISED TO \$2,000 FOR 2026

By Sean Chaffin

Slot machine players winning less than \$2,000 no longer have to worry about filling out paperwork for the IRS at the casino. The agency confirmed that the minimum threshold to trigger paperwork from the taxman will be raised to that amount beginning in 2026. Additionally, the new threshold will rise each year with inflation.

The increase, up from \$1,200, comes as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) passed in July. The move allows players a bit more in winnings before needing to instantly fill out IRS form W-2G.

"For calendar years after 2025, the minimum threshold amount for reporting certain payments and backup withholding on certain information returns, including the Form W-2G, will be adjusted yearly for inflation," the IRS reported in a note offering advice on the issue.

Prior to the increase, the \$1,200 threshold hadn't changed since 1977. After the bill passed, some tax professionals weren't even sure if the language in the new law actu-



ally changed that. However, the IRS has now confirmed the change. The new reporting amount will alleviate some paperwork requirements for casinos and winning players alike.

The increase comes up short of the Shifting Limits On Thresholds (SLOTS) Act proposed by some lawmakers earlier in 2025. That bill would have increased the reporting threshold to \$5,000.

Casinos and state gaming regulators now must adjust to the new law. Despite the change, gamblers are still expected to report all winnings from slot machine play as well as from other games, when they file their taxes. ♠

Kevin Hart Joins New Season Of High Stakes Poker

By Paul Oresteen

One of the most famous comedians on the planet pulled up a chair for the 15th season of PokerGO's *High Stakes Poker*.

The beloved show treats poker fans to the return of Kevin Hart, as well as the incomparable Antonio Esfandiari, Hollywood stalwart Jennifer Tilly, nosebleed-stakes veteran Andrew Robl, and several other high-profile players.

PokerGO released the entire season just before the holidays, allowing viewers to binge-watch all 17 episodes of the \$200-\$400 and \$500-\$1,000 no-limit hold'em action.

Like previous seasons, AJ Benza and recently anointed Poker Hall of Famer Nick Schulman will call the action.

"For nearly two decades, *High Stakes Poker* has defined what televised cash games should be, with real money, real stakes, real personalities, and real tension," PokerGO wrote in a press release. "Season 15 pushes the show's legacy forward with one of the most electric casts in *High Stakes Poker* history."

Hart first dipped his toes into the high-stakes poker scene back in 2017. The Philadelphia native appeared in the *Super High Roller Bowl* and *Poker Masters*. Later that year, Hart signed with PokerStars as an ambassador. As a result, he also played in events at the *PokerStars Caribbean Adventure* and



European Poker Tour Monte Carlo.

"Over the course of years, I've grown more in love with [poker] from having the opportunity to meet new people, to travel with it, and play with my peers consistently," Hart recently said on the Jeff Gross podcast. "It's a hobby like no other and I'm more in love with it, it's everything – my happy place is where I have a clear head. It's where I have fun and we all need that outlet."

Hart got off to a great start, doubling up through Andrew Robl in a \$900,000 pot with a set against a straight and flush draw. Sign up for PokerGO today and get access to all of *High Stakes Poker* as well as exclusive poker programming and an on-demand archive featuring more than 100 days of tournament and cash game action. ♠

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LAS VEGAS CASINO REOPENS POKER ROOM

By Sean Chaffin

The return of live poker rooms in the Las Vegas area continued in December with Green Valley Ranch Resort in Henderson unveiling a new cardroom.

The previous room closed in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and never reopened. Now, the property has brought back the room with 15 tables. The new poker room is part of the property's ongoing \$200 million renovation, which also includes refreshed rooms and suites, new high-limit spaces, updated dining experiences, and more.

"Poker's home in Henderson is back at Green Valley Ranch," GVR Vice President Ken Janssen said. "We took our guests' feedback loud and clear and are pleased to announce the return of poker, among the many exciting upgrades happening at the property."

The opening coincided with GVR's 24th anniversary. The property opened on Dec. 18, 2001. Janssen and GVR Director of Table Games Brian Stanton were part of the official ribbon-cutting and welcomed hundreds of guests lined up to be one of the first to grab a seat.

Located in its original space on the casino floor, the room features new leather-rail tables, new TVs, comfortable chairs complete with charging ports, and stone and steel side tables.

© The room is open 24/7 and spreads a variety of low-stakes



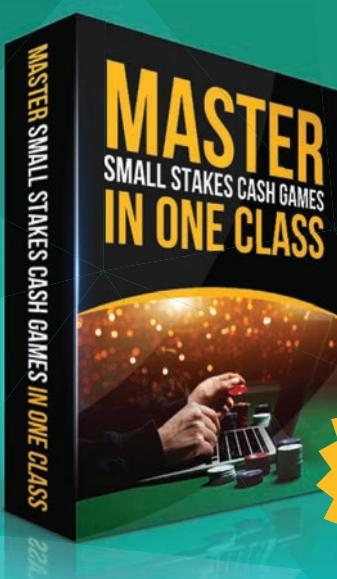
cash games and tournaments.

Planet Hollywood and Caesars Palace on the Las Vegas Strip each opened new poker rooms over the last seven months. Vegas now has 19 poker rooms overall.

Hard Rock Casino in Bristol, Virginia opened a 14-table room last February, and FireKeepers Casino in Michigan opened a 21-table poker room in May. In September, Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut opened a new 33-table room. ♠

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TYLER PATTERSON AND THE BACKING DEAL THAT'S LASTED 18 YEARS

By Justin Young and Art Parmann



Many poker players have made the transition from dealing to playing full time. Tyler Patterson navigated that transition and the move paid off with a long, successful career in the game.

After a year in college, the Seattle, Washington native left school to pitch cards. But he was soon making more cash on the other side of the table. He now has more than \$4.3 million in tournament winnings in a career dating back to 2005, with two *World Series of Poker* bracelets and a *World Poker Tour* title on his resumé.

The first big score came in 2012 when he took third in the *WPT Borgata Poker Open* for \$298,950. Patterson's first bracelet followed in 2014 in a \$1,500 pot-limit Omaha eight-or-better event for \$270,992. He added the *WPT* title a year later, banking \$375,270 at the *bestbet Bounty Scramble*. He also took fourth place the next year in the same event for \$100,643. Then there was the deep run at the *Bay 101*

Shooting Star in 2020 for \$113,860, which was interrupted by the COVID pandemic.

Once the poker world reopened, Patterson finished runner-up in the \$2,500 *RunGood Poker Series* main event at Thunder Valley Casino for \$156,845. Eight months later, he returned to the same venue and same tournament, and won it all for \$200,422. Patterson picked up another *RGPS* title there this November, along with \$60,185. Last summer, Patterson added his second bracelet and career best score in the \$3,000 six-max no-limit event, banking \$574,223.

The 42-year-old poker pro was recently a guest on the *Table 1* podcast and detailed his journey in the game. The conversation included how he got started from the dealer's box and his long-term backing relationship with a friend who has supported him for 18 years. Some of the discussion included his wins at the *WSOP* and *WPT*, the

strange scenario of making a delayed-final table right before lockdown, moving to Barbados to play online during the pandemic, and more.

Keep reading for highlights of the interview. You can also watch or listen to the entire episode on YouTube, Spotify, Apple, or any podcast app.

Tyler Patterson: I played beer league softball with this guy who ran a dealing





school, and he just raced me through it in a week. I got certified and got a job really quick, just in the summer dealing cards.

Everyone kind of played for fun around that. So I started playing, loved it right away, and was maybe accidentally winning right away. We're talking about \$100 tournaments or \$3-\$6 or \$4-\$8 limit hold'em. When I got good, I moved to \$5-\$10 or \$10-\$20 limit hold'em.

Justin Young: So, you got your first reps through watching people?

Tyler Patterson: Yeah, for sure.

Justin Young: Were you one of those dealers that would make comments after hands? It's crazy to me how many dealers make a comment to somebody afterwards like, 'Man, can't believe he got away with that bluff.'

Tyler Patterson: Yes, but I was dealing \$3-\$6 and \$4-\$8 limit hold'em, so it was acceptable. I definitely talked too much in the box. That's part of making poker fun, right? I couldn't have held myself back.

Justin Young: So how are your chops? Are you still keeping sharp (dealing) just in case things turn south? (Everyone laughs)

Tyler Patterson: Every once in a while, I get to play in a couple home games. If the dealer needs a break, I don't mind

stepping in.

I enjoyed dealing. I didn't have aspirations of being pro at first, so it was probably two or three years of dealing cards. We had to deal poker and in the pit, so I also dealt Pai Gow and Spanish 21, all that nonsense. But once I was winning, and then realized poker was on TV all the time, I thought maybe this could be real.

There were just books back then, so I read everything there was. I was better than all my friends, but the games were still pretty small to make a living. I was just having fun winning a little here and there.

On my 21st birthday, I took a trip to Commerce for the *L.A. Poker Classic*. I had my whole life bankroll of \$3,000 or \$4,000, and that became \$25,000 or \$30,000 by the end of the trip. The tribal casinos in the Seattle area started [spreading] no-limit games. I paid off some student loans and started transitioning into dealing less and playing more.

Patterson then discussed entering into a backing deal that remains active years later.

Tyler Patterson: My friend Steve [Garfinkle], who is still to this day my tournament backer, was friends with Gavin Smith. Gavin was staking Erick Lindgren, or maybe Lindgren was stak-

ing Gavin at the time. I don't remember, but they had discussed how they went about these things.

He is a history professor at Western Washington. He was a sharp legal mind. He wrote up a legal contract because we weren't that close yet. We did the whole *LAPC* series together and I did okay, and we've been doing this ever since.

Even with all the success that we've had, I've never wanted to even consider going on my own for tournaments. He's never had a piece of my cash [games], but in tournaments it's nice to have that safety net. We've both done really well.

Justin Young: So, he's been at least a partial backer or full backer for 18 years?

Tyler Patterson: Yeah, he's talking about writing a book about it because he's had (Matt) Affleck too for probably 15 years. Steve was the officiant at my wedding. We're super close family friends.

Justin Young: It's cool to see a backer relationship that has lasted that long because a lot of times one just gets fed up with the other.

Art Parmann: Does he even play poker?

Tyler Patterson: He does. He got 10th in the WSOP main event the year that Jerry Yang won. He actually got on the



TV coverage on the hand he busted in 10th. He was on camera a couple times, but they never introduced him. He does have some poker success, and definitely has poker chops. He plays in the same home games I used to play in Seattle, and he plays some tournaments here and there.

The conversation later shifted to discussing Patterson's win at the WSOP in 2014 followed by the WPT bestbet Bounty Scramble in 2015.

Tyler Patterson: We were playing PLO hi/lo all the time. My backer convinced me that I had to play the \$1,500 PLO [eight-or-better] at the *World Series*. I had never played a PLO8 tournament, but I played tons of hours of cash at it, so I felt comfortable.

But I wasn't going to pick that tournament. The way we operate is I make a big schedule of tournaments I think I should play, and he adjusts it a little bit. He put that one on there and I went on to win it.

There were like 990 players, and it was extremely soft in the beginning. It's not my specialty. I'm not one of the world's best at PLO8 at all. But the skill edge is still bigger versus the lower average players at PLO8 than it is in hold'em. I had chips and it just worked out.

That was a really fun final table because my friends were at the table and I got heads up with Scott Clements. Scott's also from the Seattle area, so we had the same rail. There's a picture of us having like 30 beers on the table because we each ordered as many as they could give us so we could go give them to the audience.

Justin Young: Did that change your life?

Tyler Patterson: It was \$270,000, which was not life-changing. But it was validating and made me more comfortable. Then the very next year I won a *WPT* [for \$375,270]. I felt like I was really on the map. I was really a tournament guy from then on.

Art Parmann: What was the *bestbet* [Bounty Scramble] in Jacksonville like?

Tyler Patterson: Being a bounty is a blast. I don't know if I really had the credentials so much, but I am Matt Savage's golf buddy, and he runs the tournament. If I lose enough money to this guy, he's going to give me some perks.

Patterson later talked about the unique situation of making a deep run right as COVID was breaking out.

Justin Young: Let's go back to COVID. I think it's interesting you were playing the *Shooting Star* when

all the shit was going down. You made a final table and it was a lot of money up top.

Tyler Patterson: That was actually pretty wild. COVID was on the radar. It was in Asia when we were at *LAPC*, so people started having hand sanitizer. A lot of the Asian dealers were wearing masks, but no one else was wearing masks yet. There was this weird racism, meanness to the dealers. But Savage is really good about protecting dealers so that was handled well.

We got to Thunder Valley. Now there was hand sanitizer everywhere. They were talking about those dividers [between the players]. I was thinking about not going to the next stop because this was going on, but we didn't really know if it was serious yet or not. We got to Bay 101 and it was now in the news that there's a new hotbed in the area, so they were a little scared. Bagging after day one, there was talk of, 'Hey, are we going to do this?'

At the end of day two, there were 11 people left. We all got together, and they asked, 'Do you guys want to just ICM chop this?' Many of us didn't. We didn't know if we were supposed to be scared of COVID yet or not. All the employees had to come the next day anyway, so we weren't saving



“I didn’t have aspirations of being pro at first, so it was probably two or three years of dealing cards. But once I was winning, and then realized poker was on TV all the time, I thought maybe this could be real.”

[Watch The Full Episode](#)





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anybody by not playing. So, we came back the third day, and the Swedish pro (Michael Tureniec), who's very good and had a medium stack, shows up visibly ill and wearing a mask.

He was definitely not faking it. It © didn't do him any benefit to get an

ICM chop. There was some fish left in the field and even some that had a lot of chips. I definitely wanted to play. Kristen Foxen wanted to play. We started talking to Anthony Zinno and Lexy Gavin, who were both sitting right next to Michael. Anthony is a germaphobe

by nature and Lexi was scared.

In the end, I really wanted to play but also I didn't know if I was holding people hostage for their lives. So, we decided to chop it.

The day before, in the middle of day two, we saw the PGA Tour canceled in the middle of a tournament. We saw March Madness canceled in the middle. It was the right thing for us to chop. I got just around \$100,000, which was really nice.

COVID actually sent me into a different world too. My wife and I were living in Vegas, renting at the time, and we were just at the end of our lease and we really liked our place. But she found this thing on Twitter, 'If you can prove you have your own income so you're not stealing a job, and you can work remotely, you can live in Barbados for a year as an American.' So, we took that opportunity.

It was perfect timing. When else were we going to do it? There was no [live] poker, so I had to play online anyway, and in the States, that's kind of hard. I think I got a lot better. We ended up staying for two years because we loved it so much, and made lifelong friends. ♠



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.



THE RETURN OF NO MERCY: ISABELLE MERCIER BACK AT THE TABLES AFTER 10 YEARS AWAY

By Tim Fiorvanti



Isabelle Mercier enjoyed a considerable amount of time in the poker spotlight in the earliest days of the poker boom. After earning her law degree in Montreal, she moved to Paris and managed one of the most famous poker rooms in the world, the Aviation Club.

Her experience at the Aviation Club made Mercier a familiar face in the booming poker scene. She made her first splash on the other side of the table in 2002, when she finished second in an event at the 2002 *Master Classics of Poker*.

Mercier eventually switched to poker full time, and made an immediate splash in her broadcast TV debut during season 2 of the *World Poker Tour*. She memorably won the second-ever *Ladies Night* show, filmed at The Bicycle Casino in Los Angeles.

It was during that broadcast that legendary commentator and Poker Hall of Famer Mike Sexton bestowed her with the nickname, 'No Mercy.'

In the ensuing years, Mercier made deep runs at the *EPT Grand Final*, *EPT Deauville*, and the *World Series of Poker*. There were online poker successes in the *PokerStars World Championship of Online Poker*, as well as the *Sunday Million*.

Her largest live poker result came in 2009, when she won an *Ante Up For Africa* event during the *EPT Monte Carlo* for

€260,000, besting a final table featuring Daniel Negreanu, Tony G, and former soccer star Teddy Sheringham.

Mercier's live poker play started to wane over the next few years, and she ultimately moved towards an almost exclusively online schedule. The CoinPoker ambassador became deeply entrenched in the high-stakes Open Face Chinese Poker scene and even took down the first ever progressive *World Championship of Open Face Chinese Poker* in Prague.

Over the last year, the 50-year-old Victoriaville, Quebec native has started to dip her toe back into the live poker world, returning to stops such as the *WSOP Circuit* series at Playground Poker in Montreal and the *WSOP* this summer in Las Vegas.

Card Player recently caught up with Mercier at the *WPT World Championship* at Wynn Las Vegas to talk about her return to the live streets and reminisce about her fondest memories of the poker boom.

Tim Fiorvanti: What has it been like to be back, playing these big field live events again after spending so much time away?

Isabelle Mercier: It's amazing at many levels. I haven't traveled for 10 years, and yet, so many of these people are still my friends somehow. I just saw John Hennigan, and he was like,



'Oh, No Mercy!' I saw Allen Kessler this summer at the *World Series*, I had dinner with Gus Hansen, and many drinks with my "Captain" Bruno Fitoussi. It was amazing to catch up on our lives, because we haven't spoken for a decade.

The second part is playing live again. I've always played online and never stopped, even while I was not traveling. But playing live just feels like I'm in my living room. I feel good here. I love this vibe. I love talking with people. And I'm that type of player who likes to talk and not just sit hidden behind my glasses.

Of course, the level of the game has gotten much better, especially from when I started. I'm not like these young kids with the solvers and ICM. I know the concepts, but I'm more about playing with the vibe. I'm not going to pretend I'm an expert there, but I still think players like myself can win, with all of the knowledge we have, the experience... the baggage.

It almost feels like I was in hibernation or something. I moved out of the city, I bought a house in the middle of the woods, with my garden and my chickens. I've just been in this bubble, almost cut off from the world. At one point I swore I would never travel again. I was very comfy in my little environment.

But now it feels like I'm back to life. I just turned 50. Getting back to traveling and seeing people... that's a gift from myself to myself.

TF: You've had several sponsorships over the years, but you've been with CoinPoker for quite a long time. I'm curious as to how your role as an ambassador came together.

IM: This is a story that all starts with Pineapple Open Face Chinese poker. I was in Monaco, and I had been playing Open Face Chinese poker for a minute. At first it was just Chinese Poker, back in the days of the Aviation Club, just one card at the time. I mean, how boring can that be, in retrospect? There's no fantasyland, or anything like that.

I remember playing with David Benyamine for hours at a time, sometimes all night long. Now that I look back, I've loved some version of this game for 20 years.

I lived in Monaco for 10 years, as a consultant for Casino Monte Carlo. I was having lunch with my friend Garou, the famous singer, and he showed me the Pineapple OFC app. I didn't know anything about it, but I downloaded the app.

I started playing with Garou, and then with everyone. From that point on, I was playing, playing, playing, going crazy. I felt the need to play cash games. I was looking for something, and I found out TonyBet poker was the place where you can play OFC.

So, I called Tony G, and I said, "Hey, my friend. We need to promote your game. I'm here for you. I can be your ambassador."

I signed with TonyBet as a pro, only for Pineapple Poker. Then I start to play crazy amounts of Pineapple OFC, like a degenerate. It was just like when I discovered online poker back in 2000. Just all day, every day, playing that game, going crazy with it. This was in September 2015.

TF: That was when OFC was really starting to blow up.

IM: In December 2015, TonyBet organized the first *World Championship of OFC Poker* in Prague, and there was a progressive version of the tournament, which I won. The timing was perfect. I had just become an ambassador, and then won the world championship. That win was actually a funny story.

It was one of the first events of its kind. There haven't been a lot of live OFC tournaments because you need one dealer for two or three people. The regular poker dealers don't know how to count the points very easily, so the players have to do it themselves. It's very complex.

So the structure was... I'm going to say, so-so, because the tournament started at 6 p.m., and I won it at 10 a.m. the day after. No dinner, no breakfast. I was with a friend of mine

Mercier Throughout The Years





there, playing at three or four in the morning, and we were joking about missing the window for breakfast at the hotel.

By the time we took the picture at 10 a.m., and went back to the hotel, sure enough, no more breakfast. The main event started at 2 p.m. that same day, which, of course, I was playing. I slept for 90 minutes, went back to the casino, and started playing the main event.

TF: Eventually you end up back home in Canada. How did things evolve from there?

IM: I continued to play for TonyBet. They started a lot of operations in Montreal through Playground Poker Club. We were working on opening a poker room with Guy Laliberte in Monaco, but there were a lot of complications. I was working on this for three years, for free, because I believed in the project. But at some point, you know it's not going to happen. I decided then that I was going back to Montreal.

I came back to Montreal, did a lot of operations for Playground, worked with TonyBet, and everything for Pineapple OFC. In 2017, Tony G called me, and said, 'We're going to stop Open Face Chinese on TonyBet. But we're going to have it on CoinPoker instead. It's going to be a site where you play in cryptocurrency. The RNG (random number generator) is going to be on the blockchain.'

I had heard the name 'Bitcoin' once. I got on the internet, YouTube, and I started my research, and I loved the idea. I called Tony back, and I signed with CoinPoker on day 1. So, it's been eight years now that I've been playing on CoinPoker.

I love the site design. It's very sleek. It reminds me of some of my favorite online poker platforms back in the day. Pure, simple, and clean. Sophisticated, fast-action games.

TF: How has your poker playing evolved over your time with CoinPoker?

IM: The first thing is, I went back to playing no-limit hold'em. I'm not much of a cash game player, especially online. I'm more of a tournament player. I started to watch some TV shows. I have a subscription to PokerGO. I watch the Triton events.

I also absolutely love the *Mind of the Pro* series that Winamax does. Adrian Mateos is just... that guy is a bible. I mean, watching this guy play... Sometimes I ask myself, 'What would Adrian do?' It helps me a lot. For many years, this guy has been winning big. He's my poker hero.

TF: I'm sure that being back in and around poker, and the players, helps some old memories resurface. When you think back to your early days in poker, what stands out the most?

IM: I think all of my favorite memories involve other poker players, mostly away from the tables. The times when we were having dinner. Going shopping with Evelyn Ng. Going to see a basketball game in Los Angeles with Erick Lindgren and Bob [Haralabos] Voulgaris.

Nightclubs with Daniel Negreanu. It's just about all of these bonds that I made with this crew in the 'good old days.'

I asked Daniel to coach me, and actually, this was before I won the *WPT*. He was laughing. I started to work on a book with Gus Hansen and Paul Magriel, and then I won the *WPT*. So then Daniel was like, "Maybe I should have..."

Writing books has been incredible. I released my second book in 2025, called *Chronique d'une Joueuse De Poker*. It's 36 chronicles, like short essays about all of these stories, really funny. The craziest things that happen in the life of a woman in the poker world. As of now, it's only in French, but we're working on translating it in English.

Of course, winning was always fun, too. One of my best memories was winning the Monte Carlo *Ante Up for Africa* event, and finishing fifth in a \$5,000 no-limit hold'em event at the *WSOP*.

Although I did make a super bad bluff against Phil Hellmuth at that table, who reads bad bluffs for a living. That's not my best memory, probably my worst. But then again, how many people have had the opportunity to even try to do something like that?

Find Isabelle at the CoinPoker tables and follow her on Twitter/X @IsabelleNoMercy. ♣

BERNHARD BINDER BANKS \$10 MILLION AS SUPER MAIN EVENT CHAMP

WSOP Paradise Tops \$200 Million In Prize Money

By Erik Fast



In a month crowded with world-class poker tournament action, the *World Series of Poker Paradise* stood out as the undisputed heavyweight. While competing for players' attention against rival festivals in Las Vegas and Prague, the Triton-partnered WSOPP leveraged its high-stakes focus to build over \$203 million in prize pools across 15 bracelet events.

The festival ran from Dec. 4-18 at Atlantis Paradise Island Bahamas. While there were a few lower buy-in options along the way, the majority firmly qualified as high roller events. All but one of the tournaments built prize pools of a million dollars or more, with six events surpassing the eight-figure mark.

The heaviest hitter of all was the record-setting \$60,000,000 guaranteed \$25,000 super main event. A total of 2,891 entries saw the largest guarantee ever attached to a poker tournament surpassed by nearly \$12.3 million.

The largest share of that \$72,275,000 was ultimately awarded to Bernhard Binder. The 27-year-old CoinPoker ambassador took home \$10,000,000 and his first WSOP gold bracelet as the champion.

"This has been on my bucket list, to be honest," he told

WSOP commentator Jeff Platt after coming out on top. "That it's the biggest one... it wasn't really necessary. I would have taken any other, but we got the biggest one. I can't complain."

It was the second major victory of 2025 for the Austrian online grinder, who also took down the online *GGMillion\$* main event in February for \$1.8 million.

Binder also earned plenty of rankings points with this triumph. The 4,200 *Card Player* Player of the Year points that came with the title catapulted him into 45th place in the overall POY standings presented by CoinPoker, despite no prior qualified scores. In fact, prior to this mammoth win, his top live score was a \$64,500 cash in a *Triton* high roller from just a few months earlier.

The 1,600 *PokerGO Tour* points he also earned saw Binder climb to 10th on that high-stakes-centric leaderboard, guaranteeing him a spot in the season-ending \$1,000,000 *PGT Championship*. (Results to follow in next issue of *Card Player*.)

The staggering turnout of nearly 3,000 entries was achieved in part by some of the biggest names in the game firing multiple bullets into the sizable event. Among the most

Bernhard Binder



Natasha Mercier



visible was Poker Hall of Famer and seven-time bracelet winner Daniel Negreanu, who bought into the tournament 10 times before registration officially closed, vlogging the entire experience on his YouTube channel.

‘Texas’ Mike Moncel reportedly led the field with 14 entries, while two-time Player of the Year Stephen Chidwick bought in 13 times. Fellow high rollers James Hopkins, Jesse Lonis, Mike Watson, and Shaun Deeb were in for a reported 13, 12, 11, and nine entries, respectively.

A total of 436 finishers made the money in this mammoth event, with plenty of big names among them. Notables who made it to the business end of the tournament included Martin Kabrhel (56th), Santhosh Suvarna (42nd), David Coleman (31st), Chad Eveslage (29th), Ren Lin (28th), Lautaro Guerra (25th), Felipe Ramos (23rd), Charles Hook (14th), and Faraz Jaka (13th).

Eight-time bracelet winner Benny Glaser was eliminated in 10th place via a controversial hand that saw Eric Wasserson take his time calling a preflop all-in with pocket aces. Glaser took exception to the slow roll and was in rough shape with A-Q. The board offered no help and the UK pro settled for \$665,875 after being knocked out on the final

table bubble. The 36-year-old, who won three bracelets this summer alone, now has more than \$10 million in career tournament earnings.

Glaser was soon joined by German high roller Leonard Maue, who ran pocket kings into the pocket aces of Jean-Noel Thorel to finish ninth for \$850,000. He now has \$8.5 million in total cashes.

Super Main Event Final Table Action

The final table began with eight remaining and Thorel in pole position. Short stack Franco Spitale ran A♦ J♦ into the pocket queens of Wasserson to be sent packing in eighth place. The Argentinian bracelet winner earned \$1,100,000 for his second career seven-figure score. He had previously taken home \$1,250,125 as the 2024 WSOP Millionaire Maker champion.

Peter Chien got his last 10 big blinds in a dominating position, but his A♥ K♥ was unable to hold against the A♦ Q♣ of Binder. The board brought four diamonds to end Chien’s run in seventh place for \$1,400,000. This was by far the largest score yet for the Canadian.

Last woman standing Natasha Mercier was left on fumes when her A-8 lost a big clash with Terrance Reid’s A-J. She



got the rest in on the following hand with A♥ Q♠ facing the K♦ 8♦ of Thorel, before a king on the river sent her to the rail. Natasha, the wife of six-time bracelet winner Jason Mercier, secured a career-best score of \$1,800,000 as the sixth-place finisher. She now boasts more than \$3.2 million in lifetime earnings after this result.

Mercier's finish marked the second consecutive year the WSOP *Paradise* main event featured a woman at the final table. In 2024, Liv Boeree finished fourth for \$2.8 million.

Five-handed play continued for multiple hours without any knockouts. There was plenty of jockeying for position along the way, including one of the wildest hands of the tournament. Belarmino De Souza min-raised from the hijack with J♦ 10♦ and Binder called out of the small blind with J♥ 10♥. Thorel came along with Q♥ 2♥ in the big blind and the flop came down K♥ 9♦ 2♦. It checked through and the Q♠ rolled off on the turn. Binder led out and Thorel folded his queens-up, prompting *WSOP* livestream commentator Henry Kilbane to question if he was even aware he'd made two pair. De Souza called with his nut straight and flush redraw.

The Q♣ river would have given Thorel a winning full house. Instead, Binder overbet, putting De Souza to a test for his remaining chips. De Souza, who had a single time bank remaining, eventually folded his straight, which would have been good for a chop.

Wasserson was the next to hit the rail. He three-bet shoved with A♥ J♠ over a Binder min-raise. Binder called with K♦ Q♠ and made a flush on a Q♦ 10♦ 6♦ J♦ A♣ runout to send the mixed games standout packing in fifth place for \$2,350,000. This narrowly set a new personal best for the bracelet winner, topping the \$2,287,000 he earned with a fourth-place finish in a \$200,000 *Triton Montenegro* event earlier this year. He now has nearly \$9 million in career earnings.

Reid, a poker media member and increasingly accomplished tournament player, secured \$3,000,000 as the fourth-place finisher. Reid made an ill-timed move with middle pair, running right into Binder's flopped flush. Prior to this, Reid's top payday had been the \$192,755 he picked up by winning the \$2,500 *RunGood Poker Series* event at

Thunder Valley in 2024.

The next big hand began with Thorel limping from the small blind with 8♥ 4♦. De Souza checked his option with 10♠ 6♥. The flop fell 10♦ 5♠ 4♥ to give both players a pair. Thorel check-called a bet from out of position and the 4♣ turn gave him trips and the lead. He checked again, and De Souza opted for the exact same bet. Thorel called and the river 4♣ gave him quads. He check-raised all in after De Souza bet. The Brazilian called with his fours full of tens and was shown the bad news. The \$4,000,000 third-place payout was a new high score, besting the \$261,249 he'd earned with a runner-up showing in a 2020 *WSOP Online* \$2,500 six-max event.

The final showdown for the bracelet and the eight-figure top prize began with Binder holding a nearly 2:1 lead over Thorel. The early action favored the 78-year-old Frenchman, however, and the two were virtually tied when the next break arrived.

The gloves came off after that, as both players were able to win big pots via aggression. Thorel bluffed with a missed straight draw in a big pot and was able to get a quick fold from Binder's missed low flush draw. Not too long after that, Binder jammed the river with a missed straight draw of his own that forced Thorel off second pair.

As the rising blinds made their impact felt, Binder began to pull away. He won a big pot value betting second pair to kick off his final push to the title. Thorel was down below 20 big blinds when the final hand of the tournament was dealt.

He opened the button holding K♦ Q♠. Binder three-bet jammed from the big blind with A♣ 8♣ and Thorel called all-in. The 9♦ 6♣ 2♥ 3♣ 8♣ runout gave Binder a pair of eights for the win.

Thorel earned \$6,000,000 as the runner-up. The biologist and entrepreneur's lifetime earnings now exceed \$27.8 million, extending his lead as France's top tournament earner. All five of his top scores have now come in second-place showings, with three additional multi-million-dollar paydays among them. He also cashed for an additional \$600,000 by final tabling the *Triton* main event just days earlier.

Speaking of *Triton*...

Kayhan Mokri Keeps Heater Going With First Bracelet

Six of the events at this stop were official collaborations between the WSOP and the high-stakes *Triton Poker Series*, with buy-ins ranging from \$75,000 up to \$250,000. The quarter-million-dollar price tag belonged to the *Triton Invitational*. This event featured the tour's unique invitational format which sees the day 1 field split evenly between amateurs and their invited pro counterparts. The prize pool swelled to \$33,250,000 thanks to 98 entries and 35 re-entries, bringing the total count to 133.

High-stakes cash game crusher **Kayhan Mokri** stood alone when the final card of the tournament hit the felt. The Norwegian pro earned a career-best \$7,725,000 along with his first WSOP bracelet.

"I don't know what's going on, to be honest," the 31-year-old said of winning his third *Triton* title in the last 13 months. "I'm very perplexed by the whole thing. I don't know, I keep showing up, and I keep turning it into a win somehow. I'm having the year of my life, and honestly, I'm very happy. I don't know what to say."

Mokri's tournament record for 2025 is particularly impressive, on a limited schedule. He cashed in 10 live tournaments, all high rollers, and won five of them. With this latest marquee triumph, his earnings on the year ballooned to more than \$13.2 million, while his career haul sits at over \$21.2 million.

This win doubled Mokri's previous career best, a \$3,835,059 *Triton* victory in Jeju back in September. It also saw Mokri surpass 2022 WSOP main event champ Espen Jorstad to claim the top spot on the Norwegian money list.

Mokri defeated Gabriel Andrade heads-up for the title. Andrade, who is from Ecuador, was one of five non-professionals at the final table. That group also included Albert Daher. Daher, who was the player who invited Mokri into the tournament, finished third, falling at Mokri's hand.

Notables Add To Their Bracelet Collections

Before making a final-table run in the *Super High Roller Bowl X* (pg. 42), **Sam Soverel** defeated a field of 103 entries in the \$100,000 *Triton* pot-limit Omaha main event to earn his fourth career WSOP bracelet and the top prize of \$2,594,000.

This was the largest score yet for Soverel, blowing away the \$1,024,364 he earned for a win in a \$100,000 no-limit high roller in 2016. Soverel won his third bracelet earlier this year, taking down the \$10,000 six-max no-limit hold'em championship in Las Vegas. The 35-year-old poker pro's previous wins at the series were the 2023 WSOP Online \$5,300 high roller and the 2016 \$1,000 pot-limit Omaha event.

Aleksējs Ponakovs had made the money more than 30 times in *Triton Poker* events, accumulating \$19.5 million in earnings. While he had four separate multi-million-dollar cashes on the tour in close calls, he'd never managed to capture a trident trophy.

That all changed when the Latvian poker pro defeated a field of 237 entries in the \$100,000 *Triton* no-limit hold'em main event. The 34-year-old Riga native secured his first title on the tour, his third career WSOP gold bracelet, and a career-best payday of \$4,750,000. He now has more than \$37.1 million in total tournament earnings, with \$24.3 million of that coming from his success in *Triton* events.

Joao Simao had a busy month, ultimately closing out the year by winning in the *Super High Roller Bowl X* for

Kayhan Mokri



Sam Soverel



Aleksējs Ponakovs



Joao Simao





\$1.1 million. Before that, he took down the \$150,000 buy-in no-limit hold'em event in the Bahamas, besting the field of 77 entries for a career-best score of \$3,067,000 and his third WSOP gold bracelet.

It was an all-Brazilian affair down the stretch, with Felipe Boianovsky (2nd - \$2,131,000) and five-time bracelet winner Yuri Dzivielevski (3rd - \$1,409,000) joining Simao on the podium. All three players sit in the top four of the Brazilian all-time money list. (pg. 49)

Koray Aldemir wrote his name in the poker history books when he took down the 2021 WSOP main event, topping 6,650 entries to earn \$8 million and his first gold bracelet. The German poker pro was one of the most accomplished players of the past decade to come out on top in the big dance, having already accumulated over \$12 million in prior live tournament earnings ahead of his career-defining victory in Las Vegas.

Aldemir added to his legacy with a victory in the \$10,000 eight-game mix event in the Bahamas this year. The 35-year-old defeated 115 entries to capture his second bracelet and the top prize of \$287,800. In doing so, he became just the eighth world champion since 2003's Chris Moneymaker to win again. With this latest triumph, he now has more than \$23.4 million in career earnings. This was his first live cash since finishing 598th in the 2024 main event for \$32,500.

Breakthrough Bracelets

Matthias Eibinger outlasted a field of 93 entrants in the \$75,000 buy-in pot-limit Omaha event to earn \$1,570,640, the first bracelet of his career, and the trident trophy. The Austrian pro now has more than \$28.7 million in lifetime cashes.

The win marked the fifth *Triton* title for Eibinger, and his first victory in a non-hold'em format. He won the title by defeating Michael Watson heads-up following an ICM deal. Watson walked away with just slightly less than Eibinger, taking home \$1,459,360 for second. It was the fifth-largest live result for Watson, in a career in which the Canadian triple crown winner has accumulated over \$37.2 million in total results.

Coming into 2025, **Daniel Rezaei** had never cashed for seven figures in a single event. Now the Austrian poker pro has three such tournament poker scores, with his latest being the largest yet. At this series, he raced through a field of 151 entries in the \$50,000 no-limit hold'em turbo event to earn a career-best \$1,900,000 and his first bracelet.

Rezaei's first seven-figure windfall came with a third-place showing in the massive *Wynn Summer Classic* main event for nearly \$1.2 million in July. Roughly six weeks later he took down a \$50,000 buy-in at the *Onyx Club Super High Roller Series* in Cyprus for another \$1,043,530. Rezaei climbed to just outside the top 20 in the POY standings thanks to his incredible year on the circuit.

Just a couple years ago, **David Coleman** had zero live titles to his name. He then rattled off five wins in 2024 on his way to a runner-up showing in in the POY race. With the title dam having firmly burst, Coleman added a few more big wins in 2025. None can compare to his latest triumph, though.

The New Jersey native was the last player standing in the \$125,000 no-limit hold'em event, besting 99 entries to earn \$3,113,000 and his first WSOP gold bracelet. This was the largest score by far for the former online grinder, now based out of Las Vegas. The 32-year-old poker pro cashed four times during this festival, including a sixth-place finish in the \$150,000 event won by Simao, moving up to 17th place in the POY race.

Tom Vogelsang beat out 284 entries in the \$10,000 *Super Plo*ssus, earning \$609,800 and his first bracelet. The Dutch pro now has nearly \$6.2 million in recorded scores. Vogelsang beat out a decorated final table on his way to victory, denying Viktor Blom heads-up. The man formerly known as 'Isildur1' had another runner-up finish at the series in the summer, as well as several other close calls in WSOP events.

Charles 'Chalie' Hook has been in the poker spotlight on a few different occasions. He final tabled the 2024 WSOP \$250,000 event, finishing fifth for \$1,237,296, frequently appears in high-stakes cash games, and was one of the 64 players in the field on the recently reborn *National Heads-Up Poker Championship*.

But to this point, Hook didn't have a signature tournament poker victory. That changed in The Bahamas, as Hook defeated 'Texas' Mike Moncek heads up to win the \$50,000 pot-limit Omaha high roller for \$1,456,000. Hook outlasted a stacked final table, with notables down the stretch including Stephen Chidwick (4th), Josh Arieh (5th), Jason Koon (7th), and all-time PLO money leader Lautaro Guerra (8th).

Johan 'YoH Viral' Guilbert, the French poker YouTube streamer and tournament pro, finally broke through in the \$25,000 GGMillion\$ turbo no-limit hold'em event, locking up a bracelet that had been tantalizingly close on numerous previous occasions.

He'd previously finished as the runner-up three times with a bracelet on the line, including in the 2021 WSOP Europe main event. This time around he topped a field of 287 entries to earn the hardware and a career-best score of \$1,534,645.

Darner, Love Shine In Lower Buy-In Offerings

There were only three events with buy-ins of \$5,000 or lower at this series. The lone \$5,000 buy-in, dubbed the *Super Colossus*, attracted a field of 527 entries to build a prize pool of \$2,555,950. The eventual champion, who earned \$504,950, asked not to have their tournament results tracked. *Card Player* contributor Jonathan Little (5th) joined Chino Rheem (4th) and Alex Keating (2nd) in making deep runs.

The first of two \$2,500 buy-ins that ran at the festival was the WSOP *Circuit Championship* mystery bounty event, which was built upon a foundation of WSOPC ring winners who qualified for their prize package and entry via those victories. Entry was also available to anyone who wanted to post the \$2,500 buy-in.

Mark Darner earned his way in via a WSOP *Circuit* title at Harrah's Cherokee over the summer. He'd also won his first bracelet earlier this year, taking down a \$2,500 no-limit hold'em event in Las Vegas. Six months later, Darner came out on top in this event to earn his second bracelet and \$350,000. The Colorado pro beat out 2,396 entrants on his way to hoisting the hardware yet again.

Imari Love was the last player standing in the final \$2,500 buy-in, which featured a turbo bounty format. He defeated a field of 509 entrants to earn \$145,725 and his first career bracelet. His heads-up opponent, Blaz Zerjav, was on the precipice of a three-bracelet year, having won twice already last summer in Las Vegas. His victories came in a \$25,000 six-max high roller and the \$1,500 stud eight-or-better event.

The WSOP *Paradise* is set to return in 2026, and will now be featured as part of the revamped year-long WSOP Player of the Year race, which will feature a \$1 million prize for the winner. The 2026 winner will be able to accrue points in the Bahamas next December, as well as at the new-look WSOP Europe when it debuts in Prague next spring and, of course, the classic Las Vegas version of the series. (pg. 8) ♠

WSOP Paradise – Atlantis – Paradise Island, Bahamas

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$2,500 WSOP Circuit Championship Dec. 4-8 \$5,000,000 GTD Entries: 2,396 Prizepool: \$5,990,000	1 Mark Darner	\$350,000	1,620
	2 Yayun Liu	\$265,000	1,350
	3 Bogdan Jontulovic	\$200,000	1,080
	4 Tomas Jozonis	\$140,000	810
	5 Matthew Klapstein	\$100,000	675
	6 Michael Nugent	\$75,000	540
	7 Christopher Nguyen	\$60,000	405
	8 Johnny Bromberg	\$46,000	270
	9 Vera Dong	\$33,000	135



Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$75,000 PLO 6-Max Dec. 4-5 Entries: 93 Prizepool: \$6,974,996	1 Matthias Eibinger	\$1,570,649	918
	2 Michael Watson	\$1,459,360	765
	3 Dylan Weisman	\$809,000	612
	4 Richard Gryko	\$655,500	459
	5 Stephen Chidwick	\$526,500	383
	6 Biao Ding	\$412,000	306

Event	Player	Payout
\$250,000 Invitational Dec. 7-9 Entries: 133 Prizepool: \$33,250,000	1 Kayhan Mokri	\$7,725,000
	2 Gabriel Andrade	\$5,240,000
	3 Albert Daher	\$3,490,000
	4 Jonathan Jaffe	\$2,860,000
	5 Thomas Boivin	\$2,290,000
	6 Tyler Stafman	\$1,780,000
	7 Sergio Aido	\$1,320,000
	8 Cong Pham	\$967,000
	9 Monika Hrabec	\$771,000

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$5,000 Super Colossus Dec. 7-8 Entries: 527 Prizepool: \$2,555,950	1 Anonymous	NA	
	2 Alex Keating	\$333,000	1,400
	3 Francois Billard	\$230,600	1,120
	4 Chino Rheem	\$162,500	840
	5 Jonathan Little	\$116,700	700
	6 Kevin Appleyard	\$85,400	560
	7 Krishna Madhariwar	\$63,700	420
	8 Armin Rezaei	\$48,400	280
	9 Leonard Maua	\$37,500	140

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$125,000 NLH Dec. 8-9 Entries: 99 Prizepool: \$12,375,000	1 David Coleman	\$3,113,000	1,080
	2 Dominykas Mikolaitis	\$2,104,000	900
	3 Martin Kabrhel	\$1,367,000	720
	4 Brandon Wilson	\$1,132,000	540
	5 Bryn Kenney	\$913,000	450
	6 Punnat Punsri	\$720,000	360
	7 Daniel Dvoress	\$551,000	270

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,000 Super PLOssus Dec. 8-9 Entries: 284 Prizepool: \$2,754,800	1 Tom Vogelsang	\$609,800	1,140
	2 Viktor Blom	\$406,000	950
	3 Thomas Eychenne	\$281,000	760
	4 Xixiang Luo	\$199,000	570
	5 Yuri Dzivielevski	\$143,000	475
	6 Sean Rafael	\$105,000	380
	7 Andreas Torbergson	\$79,000	285
	8 Tom-Aksel Bedell	\$61,000	190
	9 Dongwuk Moon	\$48,000	95



Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$100,000 NLH Dec. 9-11 Entries: 237 Prizepool: \$23,700,000	1 Aleksejs Ponakovs	\$4,750,000	1,920
	2 Pedro Padilha	\$3,160,000	1,600
	3 Manuel Fritz	\$2,311,000	1,280
	4 Ye Wang	\$1,865,000	960
	5 Klemens Roiter	\$1,462,000	800
	6 Eelis Parssinen	\$1,107,000	640
	7 Yang Wang	\$813,000	480
	8 Jean Noel Thorel	\$597,000	320
	9 Adrian Mateos	\$495,000	160

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,000 8-Game Dec. 12-13 Entries: 115 Prizepool: \$1,115,500	1 Koray Aldemir	\$287,800	600
	2 Felipe Ramos	\$188,900	500
	3 Philip Sternheimer	\$128,400	400
	4 Chris Klonicki	\$90,100	300
	5 Michael Watson	\$65,400	250
	6 Dan Shak	\$49,200	200

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$50,000 PLO Dec. 13-14 Entries: 115 Prizepool: \$5,537,000	1 Charles Hook	\$1,456,000	1,020
	2 Michael Moncek	\$966,000	850
	3 Andras Nemeth	\$673,000	680
	4 Stephen Chidwick	\$481,000	510
	5 Josh Arieh	\$352,000	425
	6 Laszlo Bujtas	\$264,000	340
	7 Jason Koon	\$203,000	255
	8 Lautaro Guerra	\$161,000	170
	9 Andrew Leathem	\$131,000	85

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$25,000 GGMillion\$ Dec. 16 Entries: 287 Prizepool: \$7,318,500	1 Johan Guibert	\$1,534,645	1,596
	2 Eelis Parssinen	\$1,043,400	1,330
	3 Ramiro Petrone	\$724,500	1,064
	4 Iago Sturzeneker	\$512,800	798
	5 Michael Moncek	\$370,200	665
	6 Andrija Robovic	\$272,600	532
	7 David Chen	\$205,000	399
	8 Eric Yanovsky	\$157,300	266
	9 Denys Chufarin	\$123,400	133

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$2,500 NLH KO Dec. 16-17 Entries: 509 Prizepool: \$725,325	1 Imari Love	\$145,725	1,260
	2 Blaz Zerjav	\$95,400	1,050
	3 Sergi Reixach	\$65,800	840
	4 Robert Pollmeier	\$46,200	630
	5 Daniel Neilson	\$33,100	525
	6 Theodore Doukas	\$24,100	420
	7 Agustin Naranja	\$18,000	315
	8 David Orlando	\$13,700	210
	9 Dean Hutchison	\$10,600	105

SCHUYLER THORNTON WINS WPT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP FOR \$2.3 MILLION

Wynn Las Vegas Series Draws Nearly 35,000 Entries Across 53 Events

By Erik Fast, Tim Fiorvanti



The *World Poker Tour*'s season is officially in the books with the conclusion of the *WPT World Championship at Wynn Las Vegas*.

All told, there were nearly 35,000 entries across the 53-event schedule that ran from Dec. 2-22 in Sin City. That made for more than \$59 million in total prize money, with nearly \$18.3 million paid out in the marquee championship event alone. The \$10,400 buy-in tournament finished with 1,865 entrants, making for a top prize of \$2,258,856.

The huge sum was ultimately captured by Schuyler Thornton, who surged down the stretch to close out the win for his first *WPT* title and the largest tournament payday of his career. In fact, the multi-million-dollar windfall more than doubled the lifetime tournament earnings of the 36-year-old poker pro from Corpus Christi, Texas. He now boasts nearly \$4.3 million in career cashes.

"I ran hotter than anyone could ever dream of running," Thornton admitted after closing it out. "I had it every single time. I think I made one bluff. It was fortunate, but you're allowed to run good. It's not against the rules."

Thornton doesn't usually travel far for live tournaments, but had plenty of experience in online MTTs and live cash game streets to draw on.

"The combination of being used to final tables and ICM, along with experience in high-stakes cash games... the money didn't bother me."

This event played out from Dec. 13-21, with the \$18,277,000 prize pool split amongst the top 233 finishers. Among the big names who ran deep were triple crown winner Mohsin Charania (70th), Asher Conniff (60th), Barry

Shulman (55th), Filipp Khavin (50th), Sean Yu (49th), Ian Matakis (48th), John Hennigan (46th), Eugene Katchalov (43rd), Zach Vankeuren (37th), Eshann 'Brown' Bhalla (33rd), Jim Gilbert (12th), and Jared Jaffee (11th).

The final six were set on Friday, Dec. 19. After a day off, play resumed on Sunday, Dec. 21 with bracelet winner and *WPT* champion Soheb Porbandarwala in the lead and Thornton in second chip position.

Two-time bracelet winner Maxx Coleman was the first to go, running A♣ 10♥ into the A♠ Q♦ of Thornton. Both players made trip aces by the river, but Thornton's superior kicker earned him the pot and the knockout. Coleman cashed for \$540,000 as the sixth-place finisher, the second-largest score of his career.

A similar scene spelled the end of rising tournament star Jeremy Becker. The former king of the Las Vegas daily tournament scene got the last of his stack in with A♦ 2♣ trailing A♥ 10♥ for Thornton. Once again the kicker played, and Becker was sent packing in fifth place for \$710,000. He now has more than \$4.1 million in lifetime cashes to his name.

Thornton's knockout streak continued when Chad Lipton check-shoved the turn on a board of Q♥ J♥ 4♦ 2♣ with J♣ 10♣. Thornton made the call with A♥ Q♦, and it held as the 9♣ hit the river. Lipton was eliminated in fourth place for \$940,000.

Porbandarwala was still out in front after Thornton's elimination onslaught, while Jeremy Brown was left as the clear short stack heading into three-handed action. He hung around for a bit before running top pair into Thornton's full house, exiting with a career-best \$1,250,000 for third place.

Thornton took a slight 3:2 lead into heads-up play with Porbandarwala, but the two only played a baker's dozen pots before a champion was decided. First, they hashed out a deal to redistribute the prize money a bit. The final agreement locked up \$2,098,456 for Thornton and \$1,969,344 for Porbandarwala. That left \$160,400 and the title to play for, along with a \$10,400 seat into next year's tournament.

Porbandarwala got a walk in the first hand, but it was all Thornton from there. He then won 12 hands in a row, including a massive pot with a set of aces, to take down the tournament. On the final hand, Porbandarwala shoved with A♦ 6♦, only to run into Thornton's A♦ K♠. The king high flop ended any drama almost immediately.

This was Porbandarwala's largest payday yet, increasing his lifetime haul to more than \$5.1 million. He fell just short of earning his second WPT title, the first having come in December 2020 during an online series. The Connecticut pro also has 12 WSOP Circuit rings and a WSOP bracelet in his trophy case.

Aaron Johnson Scores Seven Figures With WPT Prime Win

There were nine events that finished with over a thousand entries during the series. The single largest field of the festival was the 9,876 turnout for the \$1,100 *WPT Prime Championship*. The \$5 million guarantee was very nearly doubled, with \$9,579,720 paid out across 1,233 places.

Aaron Johnson emerged victorious in the end, closing out the win after striking a heads-up deal with Fernando Del Campo that assured both players a life-changing windfall.

What makes this particular achievement so impressive is that it isn't Johnson's first time navigating a massive, high profile, mid-stakes no-limit hold'em event. In 2024, Johnson got heads up in the WSOP *Monster Stack* event, only to fall one spot short of the title. That \$732,329 cash stood head and shoulders above all of his other live tournament results, until this victory.

"I've had good runs, good years, and good results, but this one tops everything by far," Johnson said. "Being a WPT event, being a gigantic event, it's truly everything to me."

This event ran for nearly two full weeks, from the first card in the air on Dec. 7 through the final hand on Dec. 20. After four starting flights, and three additional days of poker to reach the final six, there was a five-day hiatus before those six players returned to play out the tournament on a televised stage.

Bracelet winner Will Givens fell just short of the final table in seventh place for \$191,000. 2021 *WPT Venetian* champion Qing Liu took fourth place for \$430,000 and bracelet winner Safiya Umerova finished third for \$575,000. Del Campo took home \$942,480 as the runner-up thanks to the deal.

Darren Elias And Brandon Wilson Shine In High Rollers

Four-time WPT main event champion **Darren Elias**, who is tied with Brian Altman as the tour's all-time title leader, emerged victorious from a field of 89 entries in the first of two \$25,000 high rollers at this series. He earned the largest share of the \$2,225,000 prize pool, walking away with \$631,800 as the champion.

Elias now boasts more than \$15.7 million in career tournament earnings after this latest triumph. 2025 was quite the year for him, as he also finally broke through to claim his first WSOP bracelet this summer with a victory in a \$888 online event during the summer, while finishing



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second in the \$10,000 no-limit 2-7 event.

Thailand's all-time money leader, Punnat Punsri, earned \$277,125 as the third-place finisher. Punsri cashed for more than \$11 million in 2025, with his largest payday being the \$2.6 million he earned as the champion of a \$125,000 high roller at the *Triton Jeju* in the spring. His lifetime earnings now sit at just shy of \$32 million.

With four titles and 27 final tables, Punsri grew his Player of the Year point total to 10,540. He trailed current leader Jesse Lonis by just 147 points going into the final days of the competition. Check back next issue for a full breakdown of the POY race.

Brandon Wilson was one of the hottest players on the live tournament circuit in 2025 with 15 final tables and five titles. He earned his latest victory by besting 39 entries in the second \$25,000 high roller for \$341,250.

The win increased Wilson's lifetime haul to more than \$9.8 million, while growing his POY total to 7,868. That was enough to move him into seventh place in the overall standings. Wilson captured 14 of his 20 top scores in 2025, including his first two seven-figure scores.

The 50-and-over crowd got a high roller event of their own, with 93 players showing up for the \$10,000 buy-in senior event. Russia's **Maksim Paniak** claimed the title and \$217,011 for first, following a heads-up deal with seven-time bracelet winner Josh Arieh. Despite his senior status, Paniak

is a newcomer to live tournaments, having recorded all of his cashes in the last two years.

The last big buy-in event was a \$10,000 no-limit hold'em event, which drew 94 players for a \$902,400 total prize pool. **Clemen Deng** found the winner's circle, taking home \$267,742. The win elevated Deng to 57th in the POY standings. The Portland, Oregon resident now has \$5.6 million in career earnings.

Cliff Josephy, Viet Vo, And Eric Baldwin Headline Side Events

Cliff Josephy secured the third-largest payout of the festival as the champion of the \$3 million guaranteed \$3,000 no-limit hold'em event. The two-time bracelet winner formerly known as 'JohnnyBax' beat out a field of 1,544 entries to earn \$700,157. That stands as the second-largest live result of Josephy's career, behind only his third-place finish in the WSOP main event for \$3,453,035.

With 3,284 entries, the \$2 million guaranteed \$1,100 no-limit hold'em event bested its target prize pool by nearly \$1.2 million. The largest chunk of the \$3,169,060 prize pool was ultimately awarded to **Viet Vo**. The four-time WPT final tablist walked away with \$374,230 and the trophy. This was the second-largest score of Vo's tournament career, trailing only the \$593,140 he earned as the third-place finisher in the 2021 WPT Seminole Hard Rock Poker Showdown main event.

A \$1 million guaranteed \$800 buy-in event drew nearly



Antonio Alvarado Vargas



Justin Arnwine



Lily Lotfy



Richard Ashby



Tyler Jamison



Maxx Coleman

as large of a field. With 2,941 total entries across five standard starting flights and one additional turbo option, the prize pool swelled to \$2,043,995. When the dust settled, it was two-time bracelet winner **Eric Baldwin** posing with the trophy. The former POY winner walked away with \$247,318. This was the sixth-largest score for the 43-year-old poker pro, who now boasts career earnings of more than \$9.8 million.

Kelly Becker defeated a field of 1,478 entrants in the \$1,600 mystery bounty event with a \$1 million guarantee, earning the \$239,688 first-place prize and \$7,000 worth of bounties. It well exceeded Becker's previous best live result of \$34,020.

Plenty of hefty bounties were handed out on the final day. Among the biggest beneficiaries was Luka Bojovic. The 2025 WSOP main event final tablist drew \$100,000.

Antonio Alvarado Vargas hit a new high score back in August, taking down the *MSPT Black Hawk* main event for six figures. He more than doubled that result at this series, coming out on top of a field of 1,300 entrants in a \$1,600 event with \$307,794. The \$1 million event bested its guarantee by almost \$860,000.

Justin Arnwine earned himself the nickname 'King of the Dailies' by absolutely crushing small buy-in tournaments in his home state of Maryland. Arnwine won well over 100 different daily tournaments across the Maryland card rooms from 2019 through 2025, and then leveled up with a *RunGood Grand Prix* main event victory at MGM National

Harbor in early November for \$80,646.

Arnwine took another major step forward in his tournament career when he took down a \$1,600 mystery bounty event for a career-best \$259,670 payday. With 1,253 entries, the final prize pool for the event swelled to nearly \$2.3 million.

This year's \$1,100 *WPT Ladies Championship* drew 445 entrants, smashing the \$250,000 guarantee with a final prize pool of \$429,425. **Lily Lotfy** came away with the title in the end, defeating Seina Asagiri heads-up for the win. Lotfy banked \$82,636 as the last player standing.

Other notables who ran deep included 2025 WSOP \$50,000 *Poker Players Championship* third-place finisher Esther Taylor (5th) and WSOPC ring winner Amanda Baker (3rd).

Richard Ashby Scores Two Wins

Richard Ashby built his bankroll online, but the English pro has live results dating back well over 20 years. He earned a unique distinction during this festival as the only player to win multiple titles.

Ashby showed off his mixed-game prowess, starting with an \$1,100 pot-limit Omaha event that drew 237 players. He earned \$47,728 and 264 POY points for that victory, in a tournament that spanned two days. The day after his PLO win, Ashby entered a \$1,600 T.O.R.S.E. event and proceeded to win that tournament, too. Ashby outlasted a field of 137 entries on his way to a \$52,896 payday. ♠

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WPT World Championship – Wynn – Las Vegas, NV

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$800 NLH Dec. 2-6 Entries: 2,941 Prizepool: \$2,043,995	1 Eric Baldwin	\$247,318	600
	2 Shundan Xiao	\$211,213	500
	3 Anthony Lewis	\$176,886	400
	4 Anonymous	N/A	N/A
	5 Taylor Black	\$96,248	250
	6 Brandon Sunshine	\$72,324	200
	7 Timothy Acker	\$54,498	150
	8 Anze Smajd	\$40,481	100
	9 Gheorghe Butuc	\$28,965	50

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$1,600 NLH KO Dec. 5-7 Entries: 1,253 Prizepool: \$2,261,190	1 Justin Arnwine	\$259,670	960
	2 Qun Dang	\$164,795	800
	3 Agharazi Babayev	\$125,223	640
	4 Mohamed Aissani	\$96,091	480
	5 Mearl Wisehart	\$74,033	400
	6 John Ypma	\$56,400	320
	7 Johnson Nguyen	\$42,381	240
	8 Hyundong Lee	\$31,139	160
	9 Stephen Nussrallah	\$22,574	80

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$1,100 WPT Prime Championship Dec. 7-20 Entries: 9,876 Prizepool: \$9,579,720	1 Aaron Johnson	\$1,010,400	1,320
	2 Fernando Del Campo	\$942,480	1,100
	3 Safiya Umerova	\$575,000	880
	4 Qing Liu	\$430,000	660
	5 Timothy Burden	\$325,000	550
	6 Uri Fook	\$250,000	440
	7 William Givens	\$191,000	330
	8 Patrick Truong	\$149,000	220
	9 Mitja Rudolf	\$117,970	110

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$3,000 5-Card PLO Dec. 9 Entries: 136 Prizepool: \$371,280	1 Maxx Coleman	\$100,245	396
	2 Jonathan Borenstein	\$61,892	330
	3 Brevin Andreadis	\$43,254	264
	4 Frederick Carbonneau	\$32,116	198
	5 Ezra Abugazal	\$23,762	165
	6 Justin Fawcett	\$17,821	132
	7 Shota Nakanishi	\$13,923	99
	8 Vu Dang	\$11,231	66
	9 Sascha Wilhelm	\$9,338	33

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,300 Prizepool: \$1,859,000	1 Antonio Vargas	\$307,794	960
	2 Tom Kunze	\$206,143	800
	3 Maksim Pisarenko	\$155,662	640
	4 Mayank Madan	\$119,894	480
	5 Joseph Liberta	\$92,416	400
	6 Jose Catela	\$70,893	320
	7 Jeffrey Chang	\$52,967	240
	8 Matt Davenport	\$41,030	160
	9 Paul Vang	\$30,157	80

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,400 World Championship Dec. 13-21 Entries: 1,865 Prizepool: \$18,277,000	1 Schuyler Thornton	\$2,258,856	2,700
	2 Soheb Porbandarwala	\$1,969,344	2,250
	3 Jeremy Brown	\$1,250,000	1,800
	4 Chad Lipton	\$940,000	1,350
	5 Jeremy Becker	\$710,000	1,125
	6 Maxx Coleman	\$540,000	900
	7 Graeme Newman	\$415,000	675
	8 David Pelosi	\$325,000	450
	9 Linglin Zeng	\$255,000	225

Event	Player	Payout
\$1,100 Ladies Dec. 13-14 Entries: 445 Prizepool: \$429,425	1 Lily Lotfy	\$82,636
	2 Seina Asagiri	\$55,284
	3 Amanda Baker	\$42,319
	4 Ayaka Muraishi	\$33,150
	5 Esther Taylor	\$25,652
	6 Kultida Berman	\$19,525
	7 Tracy Rasinski	\$14,655
	8 Lindsey Kludt	\$10,712
	9 Chiori Gannon	\$7,742

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$1,100 NLH Dec. 16-19 Entries: 3,284 Prizepool: \$3,169,060	1 Viet Vo	\$374,230	1,200
	2 Honghao Zhang	\$355,110	1,000
	3 Carter McMahon	\$317,430	800
	4 Paul Lozano Martin	\$189,313	600
	5 Michael Wilklow	\$145,551	500
	6 Paul Vang	\$111,407	400
	7 Diana Hong	\$83,465	300
	8 Timothy Rutherford	\$61,060	200
	9 Kuo Chang	\$42,275	100



Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$25,800 NLH Dec. 17-18 Entries: 89 Prizepool: \$2,225,000	1 Darren Elias	\$631,800	672
	2 Neil Warren	\$398,275	560
	3 Punnat Punsri	\$277,125	448
	4 Connor Rash	\$203,000	336
	5 David Chen	\$153,000	280
	6 Ben Tollerene	\$116,800	224
	7 Dinesh Alt	\$92,800	168
	8 Jason Koon	\$75,650	112
	9 Brock Wilson	\$63,400	56

Event	Player	Payout
\$1,100 Seniors Dec. 18-20 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 749 Prizepool: \$722,785	1 David Porter	\$130,888
	2 Kenneth Kim	\$85,666
	3 Matthew Glantz	\$65,888
	4 Patrick Martorella	\$51,636
	5 Tamas Lendvai	\$40,060
	6 Lejdin Fazlibegu	\$30,491
	7 Andy Frankenberger	\$22,752
	8 Frank Weigel	\$16,884
	9 Stephen Bierman	\$12,088

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$3,000 NLH Dec. 18-21 \$3,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,544 Prizepool: \$4,199,680	1 Cliff Josephy	\$700,157	1,620
	2 Ben Ramon	\$456,229	1,350
	3 Jack Duong	\$350,612	1,080
	4 Michael Lavenburg	\$209,042	810
	5 Shannon Shorr	\$161,536	675
	6 Yiannis Liperis	\$120,383	540
	7 Stephen Kehoe	\$88,184	405
	8 Samuel Bekerian	\$64,326	270
	9 Rajesh Mehta	\$49,156	135

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$25,800 NLH Dec. 18-19 Entries: 39 Prizepool: \$975,000	1 Brandon Wilson	\$341,250	336
	2 Umang Dattani	\$219,375	280
	3 Tsugunari Toma	\$156,000	224
	4 Ethan Yau	\$112,125	168
	5 Igor Yaroshevskyy	\$83,850	140
	6 Landon Tice	\$62,400	112

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$3,000 NLH 6-Max Dec. 20 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 314 Prizepool: \$857,220	1 Tyler Jamison	\$172,730	720
	2 Winston Djonli	\$115,682	600
	3 Frank Lagodich	\$86,151	480
	4 Nicolas Yunis	\$63,005	360
	5 Florian Pesce	\$46,718	300
	6 Jun Obara	\$36,175	240

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Dec. 21 Entries: 94 Prizepool: \$902,400	1 Clemen Deng	\$267,742	540
	2 Michael Gathy	\$166,944	450
	3 Najeem Ajez	\$116,861	360
	4 Taylor Wilson	\$85,728	270
	5 David McGowan	\$64,296	225
	6 Dylan Destefano	\$50,128	180
	7 Connor Rash	\$40,157	135
	8 David Ha	\$32,938	90

Event	Player	Payout
\$10,000 Seniors Dec. 20-22 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 93 Prizepool: \$883,498	1 Maksim Paniak	\$217,011
	2 Josh Arieh	\$192,010
	3 David Baker	\$109,995
	4 Rabah Abdelmalek	\$80,619
	5 Lee Markholt	\$60,740
	6 Raminder Singh	\$46,383
	7 Mike Gao	\$36,886
	8 Patrick White	\$30,039
	9 Matthew Salsberg	\$25,179

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$1,600 NLH KO Dec. 20-22 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,478 Prizepool: \$2,113,540	1 Kelly Becker	\$239,688	960
	2 Peter Kamaras	\$153,669	800
	3 Jeffrey Chen	\$116,718	640
	4 Peter Cross	\$90,878	480
	5 Kenneth Kim	\$69,419	400
	6 Yansong Kou	\$52,870	320
	7 Hyung Jung	\$39,728	240
	8 Jared Kawalsky	\$29,190	160
	9 Dusti Smith	\$21,381	80



MATAN KRAKOW TAKES DOWN EPT PRAGUE MAIN EVENT

By Tim Fiorvanti



The *PokerStars European Poker Tour* closed out its 2025 season with its traditional December finale in Prague. Hilton Hotel Prague has played host to the festival, which has been a cornerstone of the *EPT* schedule, since 2007. Despite the December window getting crowded, with parallel *World Series of Poker* and *World Poker Tour* events in other corners of the world, the *EPT Prague* festival once again delivered.

More than \$30.7 million in prize money was awarded over the course of 45 tournaments from Dec. 3-14. Six events built prize pools in excess of \$1 million, headlined by the €5,300 main event. A field of 1,224 players entered, pushing the prize pool to \$6,969,334.

After two starting flights, and a full week of tournament action, **Matan Krakow** was crowned as champion. The 44-year-old online poker manager from Israel, who largely transitioned away from playing professionally in recent years, won a first-place prize of \$910,558, dwarfing all of his previous individual live results by more than 10 times.

Krakow's career-best result came after a three-way deal, which also included Emin Bora Kurtulus of Turkey, who finished second, and

Dimitrios Gkatzas of Greece, who was third. None of the top three finishers had previously recorded a six-figure live score.

Krakow has been around the poker scene for a long time, with live tournament cashes dating all the way back to 2011. In recent years, he co-authored Eli Elezra's autobiography, *Pulling The Trigger*, and started a family.

A total of 184 players finished in the money. Notables including Leo Worthington-Leese (32nd), Jeff Sarwer (21st), Maria Lampropulos (14th), and Tobias Peters (11th) ran deep before ultimately finishing just shy of the final table.

The top nine finishers each walked away with more than \$100,000, though only the final seven players reached the official final day of action.

A three-way all-in resulted in the first knockout, with Vitezslav Cech's pocket jacks unable to come from behind against the pocket aces of Gkatzas and the pocket queens of Traian Stanciu. The nine-high runout with a pair of sevens on deck kept the aces best, ending Cech's run in seventh place for \$186,206.

Conor O'Driscoll was the next to fall, with K♦ Q♦ dominated by the A♣

Q♥ of Bora Kurtulus. The Irish player picked up \$242,073 for sixth place.

Paawan Bansal was left on fumes after running pocket kings into pocket aces earlier in the day. He put forth a valiant comeback effort and managed to ladder a couple of spots, but ultimately bowed out in fifth place for \$314,730. He became the first player residing in India to ever make an *EPT* main event final table.

Stanciu was the next to be sent home. He had been ground down to just a couple of big blinds before making his final stand against Krakow, settling for \$409,091 as the fourth-place finisher.

The final three soon hashed out a deal that redistributed the remaining prize money, leaving the trophy and \$87,000 to play for. Krakow overtook the lead during three-handed play and began to pull away a bit, but Kurtulus soon knocked out Gkatzas in third place for \$672,282 to close the gap.

Krakow held a slight lead going into heads-up play. The two traded chips back and forth before Krakow seized control of the match.

On the final hand, Krakow min-raised on the button with 7♦ 6♦ and Kurtulus three-bet with pocket eights.

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Krakow called and the flop came down K♦ 5♥ 4♥. Kurtulus bet and Krakow jammed. Kurtulus called all-in, but failed to hold as the turn and river fell A♦ 4♦. Kurtulus run ended in second place, good for \$886,158. This was by far the largest score yet for the 54-year-old Turkish player.

Side Events Draw Large Turnouts

The first signature event of the festival, the €1,650 buy-in *PokerStars Open Prague* main event, drew an astounding 3,024 entries and generated a prize pool of over \$5 million. It was one of

four tournaments to draw more than 1,000 players, along with the main event, the *PokerStars Open Cup*, and the *PokerStars Open* high roller.

Julian Bogdanov captured the *PokerStars Open Prague* title and \$465,818 after a three-way deal. His countryman Ivan Poroliev claimed third, for \$431,443. Adiran Ziemichod of Poland took home the biggest prize from the runner-up position, banking \$514,929.

It was a strong week for Bogdanov, who won two *PokerStars* spade tro-

phy wins within that stretch. The Bulgarian also won the €10,200 mystery bounty event in the opening days of the festival for \$171,990. Those two wins in the Czech Republic increased Bogdanov's career tournament earnings to nearly \$3.6 million.

The €2,700 buy-in *PokerStars Open Prague* high roller similarly brought out big numbers. **Sho Homma** of Japan beat out a field of 1,115 entrants to win a career-changing \$531,630 first-place payout. Homma's best previous career result came back in February, when he finished 10th in the *WPT Cambodia* championship for \$38,500.

The €825 buy-in *PokerStars Cup* event at *EPT Prague* offered an opportunity for an incredible spin-up. Four players walked away from this tournament with more than 131 times their buy-in when all was said and done. **Kai Lehto** of Finland was the overall winner, taking home a \$189,540 payday. It was also a tremendous result for England's Paul Grummitt, finishing runner up for \$169,650. Switzerland's Salvatore Falco took third for \$159,120, and France's Jean-Baptiste Pano finished fourth for \$131,625.

Other Highlights From Prague

An astonishing five different players won two titles apiece. Bogdanov started the trend early on in the festival, and the repeat winners just kept piling up from there.

In fact, there was even a repeat runner-up. In a pair of no-limit hold'em high rollers, with buy-ins of €25,000 and €20,000, Italy's **Enrico Comosci** won twice, while Ottomar Ladva took second both times.

Comosci banked just shy of \$178,000 for his two victories, and also finished third in the high roller mystery bounty for another \$43,000. The bracelet winner had finished second four times, along with two third-place finishes and two fourth-place results in 2025 before finding the winner's circle in Prague.

Ladva picked up a combined \$139,000 for his two runner-up showings. That followed a strong showing in November's *Brazilian Series of Poker*, where he made four final tables and won a high roller event for a total of \$931,000.

Near the tail end of the series, **Mahersh Selvakumaran** added a €10,300 no-limit hold'em victory to another no-limit win in a €2,100 hyper turbo bounty freezeout. Selvakumaran had just eight live tournament cashes to

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his name coming into 2025, but closed the year off with two wins for a total of \$595,000.

A pair of mixed game players, **Tobias Leknes** and **Thor Morstoel**, showed off their versatility twice over, with two wins each in multiple disciplines. Leknes, who set a career high with a 13th place finish in the *EPT Barcelona* main event back in August, had a dream of a run in mixed game side events at *EPT Prague*.

First, the Norwegian won a €5,200 eight-game mix event, made all the more impressive by the fact that Leknes had won this exact same tournament in 2024. As if that wasn't enough, Leknes later went on to win a €2,200 10-game mix event, beating a field of 63 entrants to secure the double.

At the smaller buy-in levels, Morstoel took down a pair of €550 buy-in events, scoring victories in eight-game mix and deuce-to-seven single draw tournaments.

Dominik Panka, a previous *EPT* main event winner, got in under the wire with a significant win of his own. Panka's biggest claim to fame is his 2014 *PokerStars Caribbean Adventure* victory for \$1.4 million. At *EPT Prague*, the Polish pro secured his largest live result since, taking down a €3,250 mystery bounty event for \$368,060.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of the mystery bounty format was Aren Bezhanyan of Armenia. Bezhanyan took home \$214,578 for fourth place, more than half of which was bounties.

Youness Barakat, another in an increasingly common line of pot-limit Omaha tournament specialists, took down the €25,000 six-max high roller. The win was worth \$346,379 and represented Barakat's second *PokerStars* spade trophy. ♠

European Poker Tour Prague - Hilton Hotel Czech Republic

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€1,650 NLH Dec. 3-8	1 Yulian Bogdanov	\$465,818	1,200
	2 Adrian Ziemichod	\$514,929	1,000
	3 Ivan Poroliev	\$431,443	800
Entries: 3,024 Prizepool: \$5,068,708	4 Simon Lofberg	\$234,000	600
	5 Matthias Auer	\$180,180	500
	6 Ben Hurwitz	\$138,505	400
	7 Lulei Hu	\$106,470	300
	8 Amato Landi	\$81,877	200
	9 Rama Prema	\$62,969	100

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Event	Player	Payout	POY
€10,200 Mystery KO Dec. 3-4 Entries: 32 Prizepool: \$362,794	1 Yulian Bogdanov	\$171,990	240
	2 Anonymous	N/A	
	3 Enrico Camosci	\$43,173	160
	4 Aliaksei Boika	\$20,592	120
	5 Dimitar Danchev	\$16,708	100
	6 Anonymous	N/A	
	7 Lander Lijo Bereciartua	\$35,100	60
	8 Anonymous	N/A	
	9 Virgile Turchi	\$11,700	20

Event	Player	Payout
€20,000 NLH Dec. 5 Entries: 8 Prizepool: \$177,840	1 Enrico Camosci	\$100,257
	2 Ottomar Ladva	\$77,583

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€825 NLH Dec. 6-7 Entries: 2,140 Prizepool: \$1,793,491	1 Kai Lehto	\$189,540	540
	2 Paul Grummitt	\$169,650	450
	3 Salvatore Falco	\$159,120	360
	4 Jean Pano	\$131,625	270
	5 Onni Huttunen	\$70,925	225
	6 Georgios Skarparis	\$54,545	180
	7 Georgios Tsouloftas	\$41,968	135
	8 Gerald Karlic	\$32,292	90
	9 Daniel Wilson	\$24,804	45

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€5,200 PLO Dec. 6 Entries: 115 Prizepool: \$652,568	1 Alain Stia	\$144,916	480
	2 Sampo Rynnanen	\$127,109	400
	3 Youness Barakat	\$74,705	320
	4 Ludvig Sterner	\$57,506	240
	5 Clemens Roiter	\$44,226	200
	6 Carl Falk	\$33,989	160
	7 Joachim Haraldstad	\$26,910	120
	8 Tor Ivarsson	\$22,406	80
	9 Jerry Odeen	\$18,662	40

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€2,700 NLH Dec. 7-9 Entries: 1,115 Prizepool: \$3,144,066	1 Sho Homma	\$531,630	1,440
	2 Pasi Sormunen	\$332,432	1,200
	3 Vahe Martirosyan	\$237,452	960
	4 Murilo Pedroso	\$182,660	720
	5 Alan Ferraro	\$140,505	600
	6 Petar Kalev	\$108,073	480
	7 Tomas Bulksas	\$83,152	360
	8 Mario Navarro	\$63,952	240
	9 Luca Guglielmoni	\$49,210	120

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€10,200 PLO 6-Max Dec. 7 Entries: 49 Prizepool: \$556,101	1 Joachim Haraldstad	\$180,648	300
	2 Espen Myrmo	\$119,574	250
	3 Tomasz Krzesinski	\$80,613	200
	4 Anonymous	NA	
	5 Martin Dam	\$47,268	125
	6 Veselin Karakutukov	\$37,557	100

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Event	Player	Payout	POY
€5,300 Main Event Dec. 8-14 Entries: 1,224 Prizepool: \$6,969,334	1 Matan Krakow	\$910,558	1,920
	2 Emin Bora Kurtulus	\$886,158	1,600
	3 Dimitrios Gkatzas	\$672,282	1,280
	4 Traian Stanciu	\$409,091	960
	5 Paawan Bansal	\$314,730	800
	6 Conor O'Driscoll	\$242,073	640
	7 Vitezslav Cech	\$186,206	480
	8 Ding Fan	\$143,208	320

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€25,000 PLO 6-Max Dec. 8-9 Entries: 29 Prizepool: \$805,838	1 Youness Barakat	\$346,379	252
	2 Nino Pansier	\$217,620	210
	3 Martin Dam	\$145,080	168
	4 Tomasz Krzesinski	\$96,759	126

Event	Player	Payout
€25,000 NLH Dec. 9 Entries: 5 Prizepool: \$138,938	1 Enrico Camosci	\$77,710
	2 Ottomar Ladva	\$61,227

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€3,250 NLH Mystery KO Dec. 10-12 Entries: 636 Prizepool: \$2,172,792	1 Dominik Panka	\$368,060	1,260
	2 Nikolai Ogoltsov	\$214,951	1,050
	3 Daniele Sacchi	\$139,885	840
	4 Aren Bezhanyan	\$214,578	630
	5 Kasperi Ilkka	\$78,156	525
	6 Damian Rapanowicz	\$74,412	420
	7 Ludvig Sterner	\$80,262	315
	8 Matteo Cecchetti	\$36,387	210

Event	Player	Payout
€25,000 NLH Dec. 10-11 Entries: 6 Prizepool: \$166,725	1 Aliaksandr Shylko	\$83,918
	2 Ognyan Dimov	\$82,807

Event	Player	Payout
€5,200 8-Game Dec. 11 Entries: 20 Prizepool: \$113,490	1 Tobias Leknes	\$56,745
	2 Dario Alioto	\$34,047
	3 Imad Derwiche	\$22,698

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€1,100 NLH Dec. 11-12 Entries: 507 Prizepool: \$569,462	1 Georgios Skarparis	\$112,472	840
	2 Mehdi Violleau	\$70,294	700
	3 Fadian Ismailaj	\$50,205	560
	4 Yannick Gautschi	\$38,622	420
	5 Elhanan Cohen	\$29,718	350
	6 Simone Andrian	\$22,862	280
	7 Adrian Jerez	\$17,585	210
	8 Ersin Ical	\$13,525	140

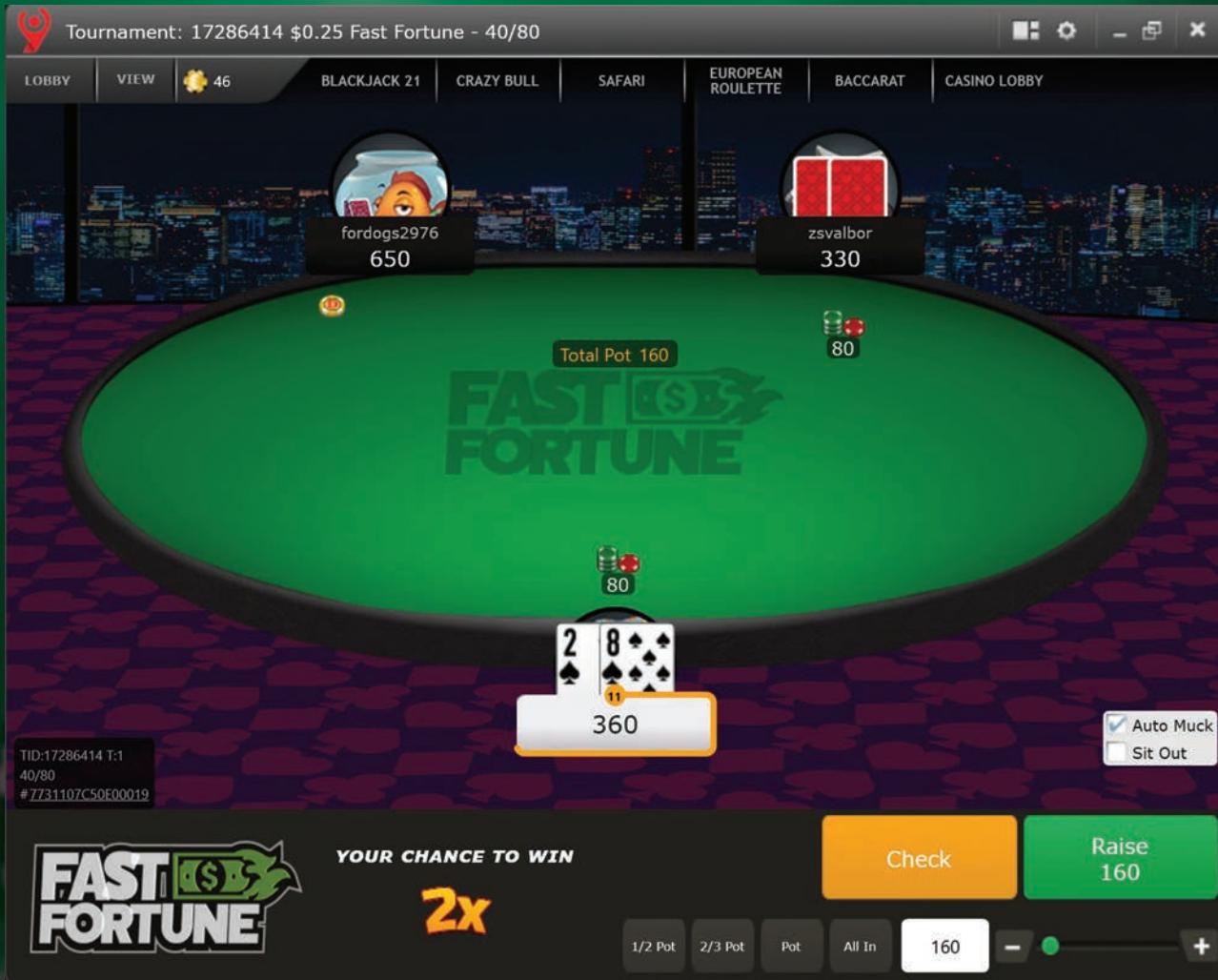
Event	Player	Payout	POY
€10,300 NLH Dec. 12-14 Entries: 233 Prizepool: \$2,644,317	1 Mahersh Selvakumaran	\$558,558	960
	2 Barak Wisbrod	\$349,128	800
	3 Nikita Kuznetcov	\$249,327	640
	4 Diego Montone	\$191,763	480
	5 Ole Schemion	\$147,537	400
	6 Juha Helppi	\$115,245	320
	7 Marius Gierse	\$96,057	240
	8 Enrico Camosci	\$80,028	160

Event	Player	Payout	POY
€2,200 NLH Dec. 13-14 Entries: 251 Prizepool: \$563,846	1 Viacheslav Sultanov	\$119,083	408
	2 Fabio Peluso	\$74,435	340
	3 Michael Allen	\$53,165	272
	4 Petar Kalev	\$40,903	204
	5 Vitor Abreu	\$31,473	170
	6 Lucas Schenck	\$24,570	136
	7 Scott Margereson	\$20,475	102
	8 Isabella Costa	\$17,059	68





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JOAO SIMAO WINS \$1.1M AT SUPER HIGH ROLLER BOWL X

By Tim Fiorvanti



Joao Simao ended 2025 on one of the hottest runs in tournament poker, capping off a tremendous few months by winning the *Super High Roller Bowl X* for \$1.1 million. Simao took down the \$100,000 buy-in event at the PokerGO Studio following a wild heads-up battle to close out the event and the year.

The Brazilian pro was all in and one card away from elimination very early on in his heads-up clash with Jason Koon, and came from behind on several occasions to stay in contention. He and Koon battled for more than five hours, with Simao ultimately coming out on top.

This victory comes on the heels of three other wins since early November. Most notably, Simao won his third career WSOP bracelet, first Triton title, and \$3,067,000 in a \$150,000 buy-in event at *World Series of Poker Paradise*. (pg. 22) He also took down a \$10,000 buy-in event at the *North American Poker Tour Las Vegas* festival, and a \$10,000 invitational during the *BSOP Super High Roller Series* in his home country.

For this latest win, Simao was awarded 360 *Card Player* Player of the Year points. That pushed him up to 16th in the POY standings presented by CoinPoker. He also secured 400 *PokerGO Tour* leaderboard points to climb to fifth in that high-stakes-centric race.

Simao now has more than \$17 million in lifetime earnings, extending his lead on Brazil's all-time money list. (pg. 49)

Over three days of poker, 23 total entries produced a prize pool of \$2.3 million in this latest *SHRB* showdown. The stakes were high when the final five players returned on day 3, with just four making the money.

Jun Obara started the day as the short stack, but then went on a heater and climbed all the way into the chip lead without a pure double-up. Sam Soverel had the opposite experience, going from chip leader to the bottom of the leaderboard. A cooler would soon change things again, however.

After losing some of his stack, Obara picked up pocket kings and ran into Soverel's pocket aces. There was no miracle from the board, and Obara then lost the remainder of his chips to Simao with Q♥ J♣ against A♣ 2♣.

The Japanese pro, in the midst of a breakout year including a *Triton* title in South Korea in September, went out on the \$200,000 bubble. With 17 final tables and two titles, he finished just outside the top 10 in the POY race.

Nick Schulman was soon out the door, as well. Schulman five-bet all in with A♦ Q♠, and Koon called with pocket jacks. There was a Q♥ in the window, but a J♣ followed just behind it. Schulman was drawing dead by the turn.

The New York native doubled his buy-in, earning \$200,000 for his fourth-place finish. The seven-time bracelet winner and 2025 Poker Hall of Fame inductee is now approaching \$25 million in career cashes.

Soverel picked up another double with a set of kings, and looked poised to pull back into contention when he got all-in with pocket tens leading Koon's A♣ 8♥. Koon turned a heart flush, though, to knock Soverel out in third, good for \$350,000.

The four-time bracelet winner's lifetime haul now sits at \$31.7 million after a great 2025. He had a pair of wins in \$10,000 PLO events at ARIA in June for nearly \$235,000 and added four more six-figure scores in July, including his



Jason Koon



Sam Soverel



Nick Schulman

third WSOP bracelet and \$986,337 in the \$10,000 six-max no-limit hold'em event. October brought four more final tables, including a runner-up finish in the \$100,000 *Super High Roller Bowl PLO* event for \$825,000.

Soverel then finished 1-2 at the *North American Poker Tour* at Resorts World in November for a combined \$314,000 before heading to the Bahamas for the *WSOP Paradise* series. There, he won bracelet no. 4 in the \$100,000 *Triton PLO* main event, along with a career best \$2,594,000.

As a result of his stellar run, he just cracked the top 10 in the POY race. He also entered the final days of the 2025 *PGT* season as the top-ranked player, with four qualified wins and 28 cashes overall. (More on that race in the next issue.)

Koon was on cruise control towards the title when he started running into trouble. He put a short-stacked Simao all in with K♣ 9♦, and Simao called it off with Q♣ 9♥. Koon remained ahead until the Q♦ river saved Simao's tournament. Simao soon doubled again, with kings and a superior kicker to Koon's, and it was suddenly a match.

Simao utilized his newfound chips to up the aggression and in short order took over the chip lead. He threatened to put Koon on the brink himself, shoving the river of a K♣ 2♥ 2♦ Q♣ J♥ board. Koon went into the tank and eventually found the call with Q♦ J♣. He was right, as Simao showed Q♥ 10♥ to once again flip the match in Koon's direction.

Simao shoved with K♦ 5♦, and Koon snapped him off with K♣ Q♥. For the second time on the night, Koon had Simao on the ropes and in bad shape.

"First time I said it was a nice night for more poker," Koon said. "I'm done with the poker now."

Koon was, in fact, not done. Simao got a golden 7♦ 6♦ 5♥ flop and proceeded to make quads by the river to add insult to injury.

Soon thereafter, Simao doubled and nearly evened the counts, turning a pair of aces with A♦ Q♣ and getting called all the way down by Koon's pocket eights.

The pace slowed, but Koon rivered trip deuces to double and pull back ahead. Koon had one final chance to eliminate Simao, and for a third time, he was well ahead. His pocket tens kept the advantage over Simao's A♣ 5♥, but the A♥ on the turn gave Simao the last double-up he'd need.

Simao then picked up pocket eights against Koon's pocket fives and held on to secure the victory.

Koon now has nearly \$70.7 million in career cashes to his name, good for third on poker's all-time money list. He trails only Bryn Kenney's \$81,063,539 and Stephen Chidwick's \$76,816,736. The West Virginia native also moved into 19th in the POY standings, with his 15th final table of 2025. ♠

Player	Payout	POY
1 Joao Simao	\$1,110,000	360
2 Jason Koon	\$650,000	300
3 Sam Soverel	\$350,000	240
4 Nick Schulman	\$200,000	180

KHARLIN SUED TRIUMPHS IN REBOOTED WPT BAY 101 SHOOTING STAR

By Erik Fast



The *World Poker Tour* returned to the Bay 101 Casino in San Jose in 2025 after a lengthy hiatus. The *WPT Bay 101 Shooting Star* had been a fixture on the tour from Season 2 in 2004 until the *WPT*'s 15th season in 2017, but had been shelved for nearly a decade before being added back to the schedule.

The reborn *WPT Bay 101 Shooting Star Championship* ran from Oct. 24-28 at the host casino, where it narrowed a field of 672 entries down to a televised final table to play out in Las Vegas nearly two months later.

The final six reconvened on Friday, Dec. 19 as part of the *WPT World Championship* (pg. 30) to play down to a champion, with Florida's **Kharlin Sued** emerging victorious in the end. He earned his first *WPT* title and \$480,700. This was his largest score yet, growing his lifetime earnings to more than \$2.7 million. Sued has 11 *WPT* main event cashes in total, including three of the last four *WPT Championships* at Wynn. Earlier this year, he also took 13th at the *WPT Hard Rock Poker Showdown*.

"There is nothing that I love more than a *WPT* main event. I literally live for this," Sued told *WPT* reporters. "I spend all my time playing poker, watching poker, and talking poker, so you can expect to see me all day every day at every main event possible."

The tournament has long featured a unique bounty format. Each table includes at least one 'Shooting Star' player and knocking them out is worth a \$2,500 bonus.

Four-time bracelet winner and 2022 *WPT Choctaw* champion Chance Kornuth was the last bounty remaining when the final table began. The poker coach and high-stakes crusher's \$2,500 bonus was ultimately captured by Sued, who jammed the river with top pair of jacks and received a call from Kornuth's pocket tens.

Kornuth earned \$101,000 as the sixth-place finisher, pushing his career earnings to nearly \$22 million. That knockout gave Sued more than twice as many chips as the next-largest stack.

Recent *PokerGO Tour True Classic Rags To Riches* champion Daniel Maor was the next to fall. He lost a big chunk of his stack with queens up against the rivered queen-high straight of Matthew Widdoes.

Maor, a bracelet winner who works as the director of business development and liquidity for online poker site ClubWPT Gold, was left on fumes after that and was soon eliminated by Sued. He earned \$132,000 as the fifth-place finisher, growing his lifetime haul to nearly \$2.1 million.

The final four battled for 45 hands before the next elimination arrived. Widdoes took a stand with top pair against the flush draw of Danny Wong on the flop, only for a third heart to hit the board on the turn. He was awarded \$175,000 for his fourth-place showing.

Just a few hands later, Alfie Poetra ran A♦ Q♦ into the A♥ K♥ of Wong. Poetra secured \$235,000 as the third-place finisher. This topped the \$114,000 that the Indonesian earned for a 10th-place showing in last year's *WPT Prime Championship* for a new personal best.

With that, Sued took a very slight lead into heads-up play with Wong.

Then, Sued won a massive pot to widen the gap even more. Wong raised on the button with A♠ 8♦, and Sued three-bet with A♦ J♦. Wong four-bet, and Sued called to see a flop of Q♦ Q♣ 10♥. Sued check-called another bet and the 6♦ appeared on the turn. Both players checked and the 10♦ river gave Sued a flush while double-pairing the board. Sued thought it over before moving all-in. Wong went into the tank before folding to fall below 25 big blinds.

Not long after that, he jammed from the button with Q♥ J♣ and Sued called with A♣ K♥. The runout of 3♠ 2♥ 2♣ 5♦ 4♦ gave Sued the wheel and the title.

Wong added \$315,000 with this runner-up showing. This was actually Wong's second time making the *Shooting Star* final table, having finished eighth back in 2013.

He has five *WPT* final-table appearances in total, including a runner-up and third-place showing at the *Bellagio Cup* in 2006 and 2007. He also finished runner-up in the *LA Poker Classic* in 2023. The *WSOP* bracelet winner now has nearly \$6.5 million in earnings. ♠

Player	Payout	POY
1 Kharlin Sued	\$480,700	1,680
2 Danny Wong	\$315,000	1,400
3 Alfie Poetra	\$235,000	1,120
4 Matt Widdoes	\$175,000	840
5 Daniel Maor	\$132,000	700
6 Chance Kornuth	\$101,000	560
7 Aobo Li	\$78,000	420
8 Yuefan Wang	\$60,000	280
9 Justin Young	\$47,000	140

DEREK SEIN-LWIN WINS WSOP CIRCUIT CHEROKEE

By Erik Fast

Derek Sein-Lwin is the latest *World Series of Poker Circuit* main event champion. The Atlanta resident outlasted a field of 1,190 entries in the \$1,700 no-limit hold'em tournament at *WSOPC Harrah's Cherokee* in early December, earning \$281,514 and his first gold ring for the win.

"It's surreal," he said. "When I woke up today, I was just telling myself to take good spots and not do anything dumb in front of my friends. They were watching every hand. It was very, very cool, especially because I felt like I was the only one with anybody there."

Prior to this win, Sein-Lwin's top payday was the \$11,072 he pocketed with a 21st-place finish in the summer version of this same event back in August.

The strong turnout for this tournament saw the \$1.5 million guarantee easily surpassed, with \$1,802,850 ultimately paid out amongst the top 131 finishers.

Sein-Lwin was the chip leader among the 10 contenders who made the final day. He navigated his way to the final three, and then cracked pocket kings with A♥ Q♥ to send Vladyslav Shovkovyi packing in third place for \$131,070.

That pot gave him a healthy lead heading into heads-up play with Patrick Plott, who had just improved upon his third-place finish in the *WSOP Circuit* main event at Cherokee back in February.

The final hand saw the chips go in with K♦ 8♣ for Plott and Q♣ 10♣ for Sein-Lwin. The board came down Q♣ 4♥ 2♣ J♦ 4♦ to give Sein-Lwin queens up and the title.



Plott earned \$187,676 for his second big finish at Cherokee in 2025. Almost all of his career \$465,000 in earnings have come in the last 12 months. ♠

Player	Payout	POY
1 Derek Sein Lwin	\$281,514	960
2 Patrick Plott	\$187,676	800
3 Vladyslav Shovkovyi	\$131,070	640
4 Rohit Kwatra	\$93,884	480
5 Jacob Ferro	\$68,001	400
6 Sanjay Gehi	\$50,059	320
7 Chico Pho	\$37,463	240
8 Eric Yanovsky	\$28,510	160
9 Ricardo Eyzaguirre	\$22,069	80

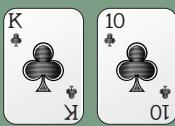
WSOP

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 PokerStars European Poker Tour Prague
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Chady Ojeil
392,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 42%
After Flop: 74%
After Turn: 84%



Diogo Moreira
297,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 58%
After Flop: 26%
After Turn: 16%

PREFLOP

With 99 players remaining, an eight-handed table, and blinds of 3,000-6,000 with a big blind ante of 6,000, Chady Ojeil raised to 12,000 from the cutoff.

Diogo Moreira three-bet to 48,000 from the small blind, and Ojeil called.

FLOP



Moreira bet 27,000,
and Ojeil called.

TURN



Both players
checked.

RIVER



Moreira bet
222,000, and
Ojeil folded.

COMMENTARY:

The *EPT Prague* €5,300 main event drew 1,224 entries to build a prize pool of €5,936,400. When this hand occurred, the players were already in the money and guaranteed at least €11,050, looking to build for a run at the €1,019,300 top prize. Chady Ojeil opened in the cutoff and faced a three-bet from Diogo Moreira, whom he covered, playing 50 big blinds effective. Despite the commentary team suggesting a fold would be reasonable, suited Broadway combos should be continued in this spot, according to the solver. Those hands play too well after the flop in position to be folded when there's considerable money behind. Moreira went with a small sizing, which is a natural default for many players, but the solver actually prefers a bigger bet on the flop. In any case, Ojeil had an easy call, and he turned a full house. Moreira could have kept betting to pressure small pairs and prevent himself from getting potentially bluffed by draws. He decided to check though, perhaps reasoning that A-Q had a chance to win at showdown. Ojeil was supposed to bet the turn more often than not with a ten, but he may have been looking to pot control as well. He found the best card in the deck on the river, but he later admitted he had misread the board. Facing the bluff shove from Moreira, he wound up folding, an obvious mental lapse in a spot where the opponent will hardly ever have quads and should shove hands like aces for value. Fortunately for Ojeil, he was able to mentally recover for a 35th-place finish worth €19,300.

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

CIRCUIT RESULTS

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Event
Deepstacks Challenge
Seminole Hard Rock Tampa, FL
\$400 NLH Dec. 2-7
\$100,000 GTD
Entries: 399
Prizepool: \$131,670



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Event	Player	Payout	POY
DeepStack	1 Michael Poeltier	\$24,054	240
	2 Julio Novo	\$18,173	200
Seminole Hard Rock Tampa, FL	3 Anonymous	N/A	
	4 Robert Melo	\$9,130	120
\$400 NLH Dec. 2-7	5 George Hortelano	\$6,800	100
\$100,000 GTD Entries: 399	6 Kevin Carnevale	\$5,150	80
Prizepool: \$131,670	7 Carlos Evangelista	\$3,960	60
	8 Brian Curtner	\$3,100	40
	9 Shawn Barnett	\$2,470	20



© Venetian Las Vegas

Event	Player	Payout	POY
DeepStack	1 Joseph Cheong	\$200,706	840
Venetian Las Vegas, NV	2 Iman Dan	\$143,554	700
\$2,200 NLH Dec. 10-13	3 Alexander Yen	\$104,125	560
\$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 615	4 Agharazi Babayev	\$76,591	420
Prizepool: \$1,214,625	5 Jason Hickey	\$57,143	350
	6 Robert Borick	\$43,252	280
	7 Alex Whitenstall	\$33,220	210
	8 Joshua Shore	\$25,896	140
	9 Jeffrey Wells	\$20,493	70



© Venetian Las Vegas

Event	Player	Payout	POY
DeepStack	1 Christopher Csik	\$88,533	840
Venetian Las Vegas, NV	2 Yoon Kim	\$81,515	700
\$1,100 NLH Dec. 18-21	3 Michael Estes	\$51,601	560
\$500,000 GTD Entries: 631	4 Simon Hong	\$38,015	420
Prizepool: \$605,760	5 Tristan Wade	\$28,395	350
	6 Ronald West	\$21,508	280
	7 Jonathan Stoeber	\$16,524	210
	8 Jose Fibla	\$12,879	140
	9 Roger Franco	\$10,186	70

All payouts in USD.

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Event	Player	Payout	POY
Gods of Poker	1 Tian Kong	\$127,357	720
LES A Casino Jeju, South Korea	2 Yin Li	\$75,664	600
	3 Meng Ling Lin	\$76,690	480
KRW 2,000,000 NLH Dec. 8-13	4 Kazuki Okamoto	\$41,160	360
KRW 1,000,000,000 GTD Entries: 481	5 Elmer Kalaquian	\$31,273	300
Prizepool: \$675,400	6 Peng Deng	\$24,643	240
	7 Czardy Rivera	\$19,972	180
	8 Jia Xing Wang	\$16,551	120
	9 Joshua Figerres	\$13,974	60



© Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Poker Open	1 Michael Behgam	\$65,541	840
Aria Las Vegas, NV	2 Antonio Ruelas	\$66,768	700
\$1,100 NLH KO Dec. 11	3 Stanislav Barshak	\$46,996	560
\$250,000 GTD Entries: 564	4 James McKinnon	\$35,650	420
Prizepool: \$547,080	5 Patrick Martorella	\$24,850	350
	6 Paul Lui	\$13,550	280
	7 Neil Benmardout	\$11,830	210
	8 Michael Mitrione	\$18,610	140
	9 Austin Alvarez	\$7,970	70

© MSPT



Event	Player	Payout	POY
Winter Poker Classic	1 Thomas Bjornstad	\$58,000	384
	2 Jason Coyle	\$35,821	320
Running Aces Columbus, MN	3 Tom Stambaugh	\$35,821	256
	4 Sriram Sitaraman	\$21,270	192
\$400 NLH Dec. 10-14	5 Mikeal Love	\$16,206	160
\$100,000 GTD Entries: 1,025	6 Craig Pohlmann	\$12,492	128
Prizepool: \$341,875	7 Gene Boyer	\$9,791	96
	8 Richard Lauterbach	\$7,428	64
	9 Robert Olson	\$6,077	32



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Event	Player	Payout	POY
Poker Open	1 Harrison Dobin	\$91,353	480
Aria Las Vegas, NV	2 Scott Weinstein	\$91,352	400
\$1,600 NLH Dec. 13-15	3 Anthony Marquez	\$48,410	320
\$500,000 GTD Entries: 331	4 Peter Yang	\$31,025	240
Prizepool: \$500,000	5 Michael Bohmerwald	\$23,925	200
	6 Sean Hoesing	\$19,800	160
	7 Michael Hong	\$16,625	120
	8 Daniel McClure	\$13,650	80
	9 Gonzalo Lopez	\$10,740	40

TOURNAMENTS

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Event	Player	Payout	POY
PokerStars Open	1 Clement Delacroix	\$85,857	312
Le Croisette Casino Cannes, France	2 Romain Mahiou	\$53,666	260
€2,200 NLH Dec. 16-17 Entries: 162 Prizepool: \$367,027	3 Manuel Ferrari	\$38,326	208
	4 Gabriele Lepore	\$29,476	156
	5 Jozef Cibicek	\$22,680	130
	6 Mikko Ylamaki	\$17,440	104
	7 Robbie Bull	\$14,184	78
	8 Christian Peukert	\$11,824	52
	9 Kamel Atoui	\$9,841	26

Event	Player	Payout	POY
PokerStars Open	1 Paul Tedeschi	\$230,926	960
Le Croisette Casino Cannes, France	2 Nikolai Mamut	\$144,444	800
€1,100 NLH Dec. 17-21 €1,000,000 GTD Entries: 1,202 Prizepool: \$1,356,664	3 Kamel Atoui	\$103,167	640
	4 Axel Bayout	\$79,355	480
	5 Julien Sitbon	\$61,041	400
	6 Adria Dalmau	\$46,952	320
	7 Michel Marcone	\$36,108	240
	8 Gianfranco Ironico	\$27,777	160
	9 Arthur Lacroix	\$21,370	80

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 PokerStars European Poker Tour Prague
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 2%
After Flop: 0%
After Turn: 0%

Mehdi Senhaji
1,640,000 Chips



Ding Fan
3,645,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 2%
After Flop: 0%
After Turn: 0%

PREFLOP

With 16 players remaining, an eight-handed table, and blinds of 25,000-50,000 with a big-blind ante of 50,000, Mehdi Senhaji raised to 100,000 from under the gun. Ding Fan three-bet to 375,000 from the small blind, and Senhaji called.

FLOP



Fan bet 210,000, and Senhaji called.

TURN



Fan moved all-in, and Senhaji folded.

COMMENTARY:

With 16 players left in the *EPT Prague* main event, everyone was in the money and guaranteed €41,900. Mehdi Senhaji opened and got three-bet by Ding Fan in the small blind, and Senhaji went off the grid with a call. Players have long understood that A-K generally does best if it sees all five community cards, and solvers have confirmed this reality, playing many shoves with big slick when given the opportunity. This spot was no exception, as Senhaji had a stack of a little more than 30 blinds. Once Fan three-bet the pot contained 575,000, which was about a third of the chips that Senhaji started the hand with. That's just too much to leave out there with a hand as good as A-K, and shoving would have given him a chance to win that money without showdown. Obviously, that wouldn't have happened in this case given they both held the same hand, but if Fan had any bluffs, then winning that many chips without having to actually make a hand would have been a dream. In the actual hand, the worst case scenario for Senhaji ensued, as both players missed the flop, but Fan had the initiative and the bigger stack. Senhaji correctly called against the small flop bet, but Fan decided to follow up with a very aggressive shove. Most turn bluffs in this situation are usually comprised of flush draws, but Fan earned himself a hefty pot after Senhaji put himself on the defensive by not following through with his hand.

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

BRAZIL ALL-TIME TOURNAMENT EARNINGS



Rank	Player	Earnings	Wins	Cashes
1	Joao Simao	\$17,078,496	14	219
2	Yuri Dzivielevski	\$11,029,560	8	195
3	Pedro Padilha	\$6,751,887	4	60
4	Felipe Boianovsky	\$5,971,309	3	87
5	Bruno Volkmann	\$5,742,393	0	81
6	Belarmino De Souza	\$4,971,096	2	55
7	Felipe Ramos	\$4,821,174	4	197
8	Marcelo Aziz	\$4,754,410	1	10
9	Pablo Brito Silva	\$4,198,306	3	92
10	Andre Akkari	\$3,756,169	4	109

Brazil has established itself as the poker powerhouse of South America, with some of the top online tournament grinders in the game and several emerging live stars to boot. The massive nation of over 212 million people has accumulated the eighth most *World Series of Poker* bracelets, with more than 30 wins at the series overall.

Three-time bracelet winner **Joao Simao** leads the way with more than \$17 million in career earnings. Six of his seven largest scores came in 2025, closing out the year on an absolute heater. In November, the 37-year-old won the \$10,000 no-limit hold'em/pot-limit Omaha split event at the *North American Poker Tour* stop at Resorts World, as well as the \$10,000 no-limit hold'em event at the *Brazilian Series of Poker* just a week later.

Simao logged two seven-figure paydays in December, including a win at *WSOP Paradise* that saw him lead an all-Brazilian trio down the stretch of the \$150,000 *Triton* high roller. That victory came with his third bracelet and nearly \$3.1 million. (pg. 30) He then flew back to Las Vegas, where he took down the \$100,000 *Super High Roller Bowl X* for another \$1.1 million. (pg. 42)

Yuri Dzivielevski is next on the list, and also Brazil's top bracelet winner. The 34-year-old pro from Curitiba has five wins at the series, with three live victories and two online

triumphs. He's accumulated more than \$11 million overall across 195 recorded cashes, including a third-place showing in the aforementioned high roller in The Bahamas. He earned \$1.4 million for his recent podium showing at the *WSOPP*. He also finished as the runner-up in the 2022 *WSOP \$50,000 Poker Players Championship* for a hefty \$895,614 payout. Dzivielevski's brother Vito is also no slouch on the felt, with about \$500,000 in career earnings and a bracelet of his own.

Pedro Padilha surged into the top three thanks to a strong year on the circuit that concluded with a runner-up finish in the \$100,000 *WSOP Paradise Triton* no-limit hold'em main event for nearly \$3.2 million. This was the online crusher's second seven-figure windfall of 2025, having also pocketed \$1.3 million for a win in a €25,000 high roller at the *European Poker Tour Monte Carlo* series.

Felipe Boianovsky, who finished second to Simao in the \$150,000 event for \$2.1 million, has been on a tear of late as well. He won a \$50,000 event at the recent *Brazilian Series of Poker* high roller festival for \$640,000, and also finished second in the \$100,000 main event there for another \$760,000. The former cash game grinder has cashed for more than \$3.7 million since the middle of November, giving him a total of almost \$6 million in live earnings. ♠

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Final Table Takedown: Newcomer Kevin Nee Captures WPT Rock 'N' Roll Poker Open

By Craig Tapscott



Like a lot of poker players, Kevin Nee discovered the game after the Moneymaker boom. He was just a teenager at the time, but he would gather with his friends for casual cash games or sit-n-go's.

Poker was fun, but it wasn't serious. The Lincoln, Nebraska native instead was focused on hooping. Kevin would spend his days playing the game and his nights watching his father Danny Nee become the winningest coach in University of Nebraska basketball history.

Nee would go on to play one year of Division I ball at Hofstra before transferring to Columbia University and then dropping out. He then moved to New York City, taking jobs in the hospitality sector while becoming a partner in several nightclubs and restaurants. Nee also worked as a model while simultaneously pursuing acting roles.

One day, Nee found himself seated in an underground, high-stakes cash game. He sat down with just \$3,000, but after five hours, he cashed out for \$87,000. Eventually, he decided to try his hand at tournaments.

There was a relatively deep run in the WSOP main event, but Nee made headlines in late November when he took down the *World Poker Tour Rock 'N' Roll Poker Open* in south Florida for \$605,100. *Card Player* caught up with Nee to break down a couple of key hands he played en route to the title.

Craig Tapscott: Looking over your results, it seems as

though you've just started your journey in tournament poker over the last couple of years.

Kevin Nee: I started playing tournaments in 2023. I had been doing well in my local cash games, so I decided to see how well I could do in the *World Series of Poker* that summer.

My first time there, I only played a few events and had a run to 94th out of 6,000 in a \$800 bracelet event. After that run, I was hooked.

CT: What do you love most about MTTs?

KN: The competition of tournaments and the prestige of winning them. I believe MTTs are the purest form of poker. You can't reload all the time like a cash game. There are consequences for busting out. It's as even a playing field as you can get in a monetary game.

CT: What do you think you still need to work on the most?

KN: I feel my most significant issues are emotional and mental. I have yet to feel out of my league or outplayed. Almost every time [something goes wrong], it's me shooting myself in the foot.

I did some internal work and realized that confrontations in poker are just like those in life; they trigger a fight-or-flight response. I have always been a fighter in my life, and it carried over to poker, which can be helpful, but also catastrophic.

Often in poker and in life, surrendering (or folding) is the



most optimal play. I need to keep working on my mindset and understand that you can't win the tourney in the early or middle stages. Poker is a never-ending journey. I'm excited to continue to be a student of the game.

Event: WPT Rock 'N' Roll Poker Open
Buy-In: \$3,500
Entrants: 1,224
Prize Pool: \$3,916,800
First-Place Prize: \$605,100

**HAND
NO. 1**

Stacks: Kevin Nee – 9,000,000 (72 BB) Chad Eveslage – 12,500,000 (100 BB) Rob Wazwaz – 3,300,000 (26 BB)

Blinds: 75,000-125,000 with a 125,000 big blind ante

Players remaining: 10

CT: Set this hand up for us, which featured two-time *WPT* champ and four-time *WSOP* bracelet winner Chad Eveslage.

KN: I looked down at queens in the big blind, which is an amazing spot to be in, because at this point, I haven't had

many real premium hands in a while.

Eveslage raised to 250,000 in the cutoff with A♥ Q♦.

KN: He's obviously a very talented player, as well as the only person who covers me. So, I'm going to be cautious anytime he's in the hand.

Wazwaz called in the small blind with K♦ J♣.

KN: Now I had to decide whether to three-bet or call. For most of the tournament and usually with this hand, it's an automatic three-bet for me. However, I was out of position, and Chad covered me. I decided just to call and evaluate the flop.

Nee called from the big blind holding Q♣ Q♥.

Flop: Q♣ 10♣ 6♦

CT: Great flop for you.

KN: Huge flop! I'm ecstatic flopping the nuts. However, the board is very dynamic, with flush and straight draws present.

Wazwaz checked, and Nee checked. Eveslage bet 275,000.

CT: Did you have any read on Wazwaz from past experience?

KN: He had been playing smart and was on the tighter side.

Wazwaz called, and Nee raised to 1,000,000.

KN: Reflecting on it now, I wish my bet sizing had been larger. Perhaps I could have made it closer to a full-pot size bet of 1,500,000.

Eveslage called, and Wazwaz called.

Turn: 8♦

CT: What was going through your mind at this point in the hand after both players called?

KN: Well, once both of them called, this turn became huge. I was not very excited that both of them called. I would have much preferred to isolate and be up against one player.

But the turn was very clean, where I was only losing to the 9-7 or the J-9 straight. So, it felt like I still had the best hand.

Wazwaz checked, and Nee bet 3,000,000.

CT: How did you decide on that bet sizing?

KN: I wanted a very big sizing, as the board kept getting uglier for straights, and the flush draw was already there. I wanted something close to pot. I wanted to make sure that if we were to continue, they were not getting a very good price.

Eveslage folded and Wazwaz folded. Nee won the pot of 3,800,000.

KN: I was comfortable just taking the pot down on the turn. I was then the chip leader with 10 left, and it started to feel like I had a real shot at a *World Poker Tour* title!

CT: Looking back, do you think you could have chosen a different bet sizing for value on the turn to get heads-up with one of them?

KN: Obviously, knowing their hands post-stream, it feels like I could have kept them in with something smaller. It was still a big pot, but I was content ending the hand. I would rather win more pots and deny equity than try to milk for



value, especially at that stage in the tourney.

HAND NO.2

Stacks: Kevin Nee – 21,000,000 (52.5 BB) Joel Gola – 29,000,000 (72.5 BB)

Blinds: 200,000-400,000 with a 400,000 big blind ante

Players remaining: 3

Gola raised to 800,000 from the small blind with 10♣ 6♣.
Nee called from the big blind with 9♦ 4♦.

KN: At this juncture, being three-handed and feeling like Joel had really opened up, I knew his range would be very wide.

CT: So, you would play practically any two cards in the big blind?

KN: Yes. I knew I was going to defend almost anything at that point. I felt very comfortable taking all of my opponents in position to the “streets.”

Obviously, my hand wasn’t that great, but with position and the discount from already being in the big blind, it was a no-brainer to defend.

CT: How were you approaching three-handed play overall?

KN: I still had to be super cautious. I was very concerned about maintaining a chip lead over Aram Zobian on my left, as I knew he is a very talented, capable player.

The last thing I wanted to do is punt off some chips and let him catch up, which is exactly what I did to myself the previous day.

Flop: Q♦ 9♣ 4♦

Gola bet 900,000.

KN: I wanted him to think I was pondering a call, but all I was thinking about was Vegas and the fuckin Mirage. Boom!

With bottom two, I knew that I was most likely ahead of almost anything Joel could have. I could sense that this was my chance to really take control of the game if he remained aggressive. So, I called in hopes that he would keep blasting.

Nee called.

Turn: 5♥

KN: The turn eliminated any flush possibilities, so it was

a very good card for me. Again, this was short-handed play. I felt my hand was very strong and just wanted him to keep betting.

Gola bet 3,500,000.

Nee called.

KN: I wasn’t scared of too many river cards. In fact, the only river cards I did not want to see were a five or a queen.

River: 5♦

Gola bet 9,000,000.

CT: That’s not good.

KN: Nope. It was the worst possible card in the entire deck. It counterfeited my two pair, leaving me with just a second pair. And I was facing a huge bet.

This was by far the biggest decision of my poker career. If I lost, I would be against the wall fighting for second. My initial thought was to let it go, as I would still be very deep.

If I won the hand, however, I felt the tournament would be mine with more than half of the chips in play.

I counted out my stack to see what I would have left. Then I started to dissect his hand, as my time banks ticked down.

The triple barrel was so aggressive, and he had to have any Q-x or any pocket pair above a nine. I thought to myself that his sizing was suspicious.

CT: Please explain.

KN: If he actually wanted a call, I felt he wouldn’t have bet so big.

Then I had a flashback to the day before when I was in a hand with Joel. I tried to bluff him preflop and on the flop. I gave up on the turn, and he bet 7,000,000 on the river. I folded. He had K-J for just king high in that particular hand.

This scenario was very similar. He got me once, but he wasn’t getting me twice.

Nee called, and Gola mucked. Nee won the pot of 28,800,000.

KN: He immediately said, ‘good call,’ and we took it down! I stood up, pumped. At that point, I definitely felt that the tourney was mine and I was in the driver’s seat!

Nee eliminated Zobian just six hands later, giving him a 2:1 lead over Gola entering heads-up play, which lasted just one hand. ♠

LIMITING THE POTENTIAL DAMAGE WITH AN OVERPAIR

By Jonathan Little

I was sitting in a \$1,500 buy-in re-entry tournament with blinds of 75-150 with a 150 big blind ante. A splashy player raised to 300 out of his 10,000 effective stack from first position at our seven-handed table.

I looked down at K♣ K♣ and three-bet to 900 from the hijack seat. An unknown, but seemingly competent player cold called from the cutoff. The action folded around to the initial raiser, who also called.

This is a great spot for me! The cutoff's range should be quite strong (but still crushed by K-K).

While some players will make the mistake of calling with the implied odds hands, such as 2-2, A♣ 5♣, and 10♥ 9♥, most reasonable players call in this spot with strong hands they do not think are premium enough to get all-in. That includes mainly Q-Q, J-J, 10-10, 9-9, A-K, and A-Q.

The initial UTG raiser likely has a decent hand, given he raised from first position, but it is tough to say exactly how wide he is raising or if he will fold any of his range to my three-bet.

The flop came down Q♣ 10♥ 4♦ and UTG checked.

Since the cutoff could easily have Q-Q or 10-10, I should check and see what develops. While I am not planning to fold kings to one bet, if significant action takes place (such as a



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cutoff bet and a call or raise from UTG), I will consider getting out of the way because it is so easy for me to be crushed.

I checked and the cutoff checked as well.

Once the cutoff checks behind, I feel great about my hand and now only realistically have to worry about the splashy player UTG. Notice that checking the flop does not open me

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up to being outdrawn too often, yet may also induce someone with a queen or ten to pay me off incorrectly on the turn and river. If an ace comes on the turn, I will fold to any reasonable bet.

The turn was the 3♦. UTG bet 1,200 into the 3,050 pot.

I almost certainly have the best hand at the moment, but if I raise, I will probably only get called by strong queens (which will likely bet again on the river) and better made hands, such as three-of-a-kind and Q-10. As on the flop, I am not too concerned about being outdrawn.

I called and the cutoff folded. The river was the 7♣ and my opponent bet 4,200 into the 5,450 pot.

As on the turn, this is an easy river call. Many players will value bet any top pair because they assume I will always bet the flop or raise the turn with my better made hands. My splashy opponent could even be bluffing with a hand like A-J or J-9.

One thing worth noting is that some players who see lots of flops and turns may not actually be aggressive. Meaning when they put significant money in the pot in an aggressive

manner, they often have the strong hand they are representing. This concept could certainly apply in this case, but even then, most players think A-Q and Q-J are strong enough value bet.

If my opponent bet especially small, perhaps 1,200, raising for thin value would gain merit.

I called and lost to Q♥ 10♦ for two pair. Although I lost this hand, it certainly could have gone worse if I overplayed my normally strong overpair.

If you want more resources to help you improve your game, I put together a course called *Five-Day Preflop Challenge*. This course is completely free inside *Card Player* Poker School!

When you join the *Card Player* Poker School (it's free to join), you'll also get downloadable GTO preflop charts, video classes, interactive hand quizzes, and in-depth courses. ♠



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

FIVE REASONS YOUR BLUFFS GET CALLED TOO OFTEN

By Alex Fitzgerald

Bluffing is one of the most exciting weapons in your poker arsenal—but when you get called too often, it quickly turns into a costly habit. If your opponents always seem to sniff out your bluffs, chances are you're making one of a few common mistakes.

You Don't Bet The River

A lot of your opponents call the turn with the plan to "re-evaluate the river." Which is another way of saying they have no idea what they're going to do on the river, but no one wants to say that out loud.

If you don't follow through on the river, these tentative players without a plan are going to win every single time. You can't let that happen!

If the board comes 9♥ 8♥ 5♦ and you raised preflop on the button with 10♣ 7♠, you have a case for barreling. You have a draw. If your opponent called out of the big blind and just called on the flop, it's likely they would have check-raised the flop with many sets or two pairs. They likely would have three-bet preflop with overpairs. You're blocking the nut straight. You have a lot going for you here.

However, if you fire the flop, most people will call you with any pair or draw. If the turn is an offsuit king, for example, that's good for you, but most of your opponents will still call your turn barrel. They're curious if you're bluffing the scare card or if you actually have it. You will have to follow through on the river to get anything done.

There's only three bets that get your opponent to think. Those are triple barrels, all-ins, and overbets. If you're not doing one of them, most of your opponents will call too much, which is disastrous for your bluffs.

You Bluff Multi-Way

You see players do this all of the time, and it costs them chips. They raise from early position with Q-Q, and get called by the lojack, button, small blind, and big blind.

They get frustrated by this, which is an odd way of denying reality. Every pot has been multi-way in live poker for



years. Acting like this is a new development almost seems like a brand of insanity.

No matter. The denial of reality has not finished.

The board comes A♠ 6♦ 2♥. It's checked to our hero in early position. They go ahead and fire a large bet.

Why? No ace is going to fold. They're not going to keep firing once they "find out where they're at" as they put it. What is the point of this bluff?

Why do we have to put so many chips into the middle here to find out someone has an ace? It's a five-way raised pot. Of course, someone has an ace!

You Don't Overbet

This is another useful bet that people do not use enough. Let's go back to the other situation we were discussing.

The board comes 9♥ 8♥ 5♦ and you raised pre flop on the button with 10♣ 7♠. The big blind called you. You continuation-bet on the flop and they call. You know they likely would have three-bet preflop with an overpair. They would

have likely check-raised on the flop with a set or two pair. Their range is likely capped at one mediocre pair right now.

Let's say the turn is an offsuit king. You have a couple of options at this point. You can bet the turn and set up a triple barrel. That is a fine play.

You can also overbet. If you bet 1.5X the pot, the bet as a total bluff needs to succeed 60% of the time.

Your opponent will need to defend with four hands out of 10 to make sure you do not immediately profit with any two cards. That is going to be exceedingly difficult for them to do. They have primarily mediocre pairs that match the board. That turn was not good for them. They still have no idea what to do on the river.

However, most people will not overbet on this turn. They bet 75% pot, which is fine, but they need to follow up with something on the river.

If you're not triple barreling or overbetting, you can't expect folds.

You Don't Go All In

This is another play people hesitate to do. If they do bet something like 75% of the pot on that turn, they need to be willing to fire the river.

If the river bet is going to be an all-in shove, they have to be prepared to commit to that move.

However, many players will bet the turn, get called, and on the river, they will chicken out from the jam.

No! This is your moment! Many recreational players believe all-ins are sacred. They think you're not allowed to do them without a great hand. Apply max pressure!

You Don't Identify When Your Opponent Is Weak

Most recreational players bluff when they're frustrated

and they want their hand to be good. See the previous example with pocket queens. They do not bluff when it's likely their opponent doesn't have much of anything.

How can you know your opponent doesn't have much? Always ask the question, "what does he not have?" Once you can rule out the best hands, you can keep applying pressure.

If you reraise someone and they just call, ask yourself, "would this player have raised again with aces or kings?" If the answer is yes, then you can reasonably rule out those hands.

If you now continuation bet versus that person on a board with a flush draw like 9♦ 5♦ 4♠ and they just call, you now need to ask yourself, "would my opponent likely have check-raised with a set here?"

If the answer is yes, then you can remove those hands as well. Keep this process up until you can remove many of the best hands. These are the occasions to apply pressure on your opponents, not when you're frustrated your hand missed.

Conclusion

Getting your bluffs through isn't about being unpredictable, it's about being believable. Fix these five leaks, and you'll start forcing more folds, saving more chips, and winning more pots without ever turning over your cards. ♠



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

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PUNT OF THE DAY: CANNON FODDER FOR GAMBLEDORE

By Sam Greenwood

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

My 2019 *World Series of Poker* main event bustout might be the most watched hand I've ever played. There are a lot of airport bars that have *ESPN* on a 24/7 loop, and over time that adds up to a lot of eyeballs watching Timothy Su crack my aces.

With all due respect to Timothy Su, I believe that I am the main character of that hand. After all, I'm the guy whose main event hopes were dashed and whose aces got cracked. Whenever there is a viral hand involving aces, the audience tends to identify with the player who has aces. These factors make that hand the most-viewed hand I played where I am the hero.

In this column, however, we are going to talk about a hand where Vladimir "Gambledore" Korzinin was the hero, and I was just cannon fodder.

I've never won a *Triton* event, but I've had many close calls. I've finished second three times, and, not to complain too much, but I've had many other final tables where I had a big stack, only to lose some key all-ins and finish off the podium.

Before this particular final table began, I was interviewed about the *Triton* monkey on my back, and thought to myself

that a \$150,000 event with over 100 runners would be a pretty damn good way to end the streak.

Finishing eighth was simply not on my radar, even though deep down I knew it was a possibility. Well, sometimes the cards get dealt in such a way where you're forced to play a really big pot, even if you don't want to. That's what happened to me in Monaco, and it's why I'm still hunting for that first *Triton* title.

Event: 2024 Triton Monte Carlo \$150,000 No-Limit Hold'em

The Hand

There are eight players remaining from a field of 121 and we are in the money. The blinds are 50,000-100,000 with a 100,000 big blind ante. I am sitting on a stack of 4,590,000, which is good for second place.

Chip leader Vladimir Korzinin (5,555,000) raises to 200,000 from middle position and it folds to me in the big blind. I look down at A♣ 5♣ and make the call.

Flop: 10♣ 4♣ 2♦ (pot: 550,000)

I check, and Vladimir bets 750,000. I move all in for 4,390,000, and he calls with Q♣ Q♣.

Turn: 8♥ (pot: 9,330,000)

River: K♥ (pot: 9,330,000)

I miss everything, and bust in eighth place for \$562,000.

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.

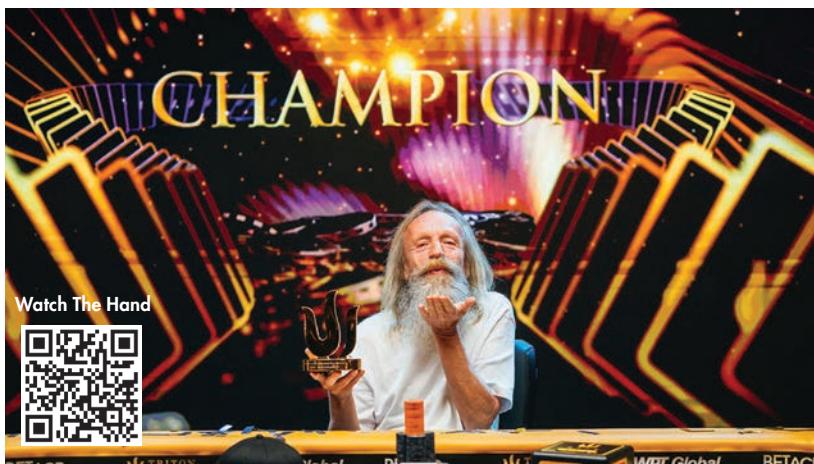
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Watch The Hand



Vladimir would go on to win for \$4,350,000, and kick start the legend of 'Gambledore.'

What Was I Thinking?

I was unsure what the bottom of my value range would be preflop in this situation, but I think I would probably call Q-Q and A-K vs. Vladimir, a recreational player who plays poorly post-flop, will have linear preflop aggression, and is more likely to four-bet shove A-Q suited than A-2 suited.

I would still have some bluffs here, just so my entire range isn't K-K+, but they would be polar, and a suited ace is not a hand I'd want to three-bet bluff.

On the flop, I checked and faced a large overbet. Two notable hands from earlier in the tournament had stuck with me.

The previous night, Thomas Boivin raised the cutoff with 28 big blinds (bbs). Vladimir had 55 bbs and three-bet to 8.5 bbs on the button. He then folded to a shove with 8-8. I'd seen many of these types of plays from him, where he made an oversized bet with a linear, middle-of-range type hand, and then folded to aggression.

The other hand on my mind occurred minutes earlier, when Vladimir busted Thomas. He raised the hijack with Q♠ 10♠, and Thomas called in the big blind. The flop was A♠ 9♦ 5♣ and it checked through. The turn was the 5♣, and Thomas bet two-thirds pot. Vladimir shoved for around 1.5x pot with his bare flush draw and cracked Thomas's trips, which is how Vladimir found himself with the chip lead eight-handed.

Vladimir is an unpredictable player whose play style often depends on his mood. The previous night, I saw him make a big fold when facing a shove for a large proportion of this stack. Then at the final table, I saw him miss a pure continuation bet and then make a big shove with a draw.

Does that mean he was more willing to gamble? It's unclear, and I have at times struggled to get a read on him.

In the moment, I thought his overall betting strategy would be too linear, his average bet size too large, and that he would be capable of making some relatively large folds. In this hand, I was not sure if he'd fold top pair, but thought he'd certainly fold smaller pairs and better ace highs. And I thought

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TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 PokerStars European Poker Tour Prague
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Matan Krakow
9,700,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 45%
After Flop: 45%
After Turn: 100%



Traian Stanciu
5,250,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 55%
After Flop: 55%
After Turn: 0%

PREFLOP

With seven players remaining and blinds of 75,000-150,000 with a big blind ante of 150,000, Matan Krakow raised to 350,000 from the cutoff. Traian Stanciu three-bet to 850,000 from the button, and Krakow called.

FLOP



Krakow checked, and Stanciu bet 550,000. Krakow called.

TURN



Krakow bet 725,000, and Stanciu folded.

COMMENTARY:

Down to seven players at *EPT Prague*, everyone had locked up €159,150, but there were several short stacks below 20 big blinds. That meant Traian Stanciu was in a bit of a bind ICM-wise, since his stack of around 35 blinds had a ton of laddering potential. Nonetheless, he opted to three-bet with a small suited ace on the button against the cutoff open of the bigger stack, Matan Krakow. Indeed, the small suited aces and kings are the best hands to bluff with in that setup, so Stanciu's hand selection was on point. Facing the three-bet, Krakow had a hand that performed best with deeper stacks, so it was a marginal continue. At final tables, having more chips than your opponent allows a player to realize more equity in general, so Krakow had that going for him. He called, and he used a time bank before checking the flop. Perhaps he was considering leading with his straight draw but thought better of it. Stanciu could have taken a free card with a hand that had a gutshot, overcard, and backdoor flush potential, but a small bet had the potential to clear out some stronger ace-high hands and some holdings like 9-8 that had equity. Krakow called, and on the turn, he decided to lead after making his hand. As the commentary team noted, he would have been better off checking his entire range, because there was no urgency to get chips in. Stanciu's stack wasn't much bigger than the pot, and there was no river that would make Krakow unhappy to get stacks in. Checking would have given Stanciu the chance to either bluff or improve his hand on the river if he wasn't strong. Instead, he got away relatively cheaply when Stanciu gave him the chance to fold.

"A good rule of thumb in solver poker is, the more linear your opponent's range is, the more linear your range needs to be."

I'd be facing a lot of turn aggression and didn't want to risk check-folding my hand on the turn, so I shoved the flop.

At the time, I remember thinking my shove was akin to four-bet shoving A-K offsuit preflop. 170% is a large shove post-flop, but a normal sized one preflop. Also, I'll always have around 50% equity when called, which is usually not the case when you have A-K offsuit.

I also considered some sort of dream scenario, where he calls a shove with Q♣ J♣ and occasionally folds top pair. I thought I'd have enough fold equity to shove and went for it.

What Did I Get Wrong?

I can start with a key piece of information that I missed, which Fedor Holz kindly informed me of during the *Triton Jeju* series. Fedor told me that he had a live read that Vladimir was strong from the moment he opened preflop. No alarm bells went off for me, however, and I've generally found it tough to read Vladimir. It's also possible he'd give off strength with a less strong hand like K-Q suited. Fedor's live reads aren't flawless, but they are strong, and armed with that knowledge I would have just called the flop.

The solver prefers min check-raising to shoving with range, but playing that strategy would be the wrong exploit vs. Vladimir. The solver likes occasionally minraise/folding and getting extra value when it has a set or two pair.

This is a unique enough spot that I want to pick the highest-expected value (EV) play and am not interested in

maximizing the EV with my range if I had a set. I want to find the best play with A♣ 5♣. In this case, shoving to make sure Vladimir folds a hand like A-K or 8-8 is what I should be aiming for if I pick an aggressive action.

The main thing I got wrong was comparing my hand to A-K offsuit. My hand is similar in that it has some good blocker value and has good but not great equity when all-in and called. However, like I've written about previously, I have a hand that runs very hot and cold.

When I make my hand, I will have the nuts or close to it. When I miss my hand, I will rarely have the best hand. A reason to shove A-K offsuit preflop is because there will be a lot of boards where A-K high is the best hand, but it will be tough to play future streets. A-5 high will rarely be the best hand, but a flush, a straight, or a pair with flush and straight draws will almost always be hands I can stack off.

A good rule of thumb in solver poker is, the more linear your opponent's range is, the more linear your range needs to be. A-5 suited becomes a much less attractive bluff-shove vs. someone who is always three-bet/calling A-J suited than against someone who is always three-bet/folding A-10 offsuit. Similarly, A-Q suited becomes a much more attractive four-bet shove vs. someone stacking off A-J suited preflop.

However, in this hand we're in an unusual spot, facing a player who might be too linear but is doing the equivalent of three-bet/folding A-J suited. Which means if I want to play a

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2025 PokerStars European Poker Tour Prague
€5,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Matan Krakow
13,850,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 64%
After Flop: 74%
After Turn: 80%



Dimitrios Gkatzas
5,680,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 36%
After Flop: 26%
After Turn: 20%

PREFLOP

With three players remaining and blinds of 100,000-200,000 with a big blind ante of 200,000, Matan Krakow limped from the small blind.

Dimitrios Gkatzas checked from the big blind.

FLOP



Krakow bet 300,000, and Gkatzas called.

TURN



Krakow bet 700,000, and Gkatzas called.

RIVER



Krakow bet 1,900,000, and Gkatzas called.

COMMENTARY:

The last three players had just made a deal at *EPT Prague*, with everyone securing at least €574,600 and playing for an additional €74,655, so there was no ICM pressure three-handed. At 28 big blinds effective, Martin Krakow was right on the border of where he should start shoving a lot of his offsuit ace-high hands in the small blind. Many players lean on a limp-heavy strategy in this position, however. Dimitrios Gkatzas had a hand that he could have bluff-raised sometimes, but he also decided to see the flop for the minimum. After flopping top pair, Krakow wanted to get a ton of money in the pot, so starting with a medium-sized bet was reasonable. Gkatzas had an easy call, but the turn brought one of the most dynamic cards in the deck, as there were now multiple flush draws, as well as a possible straight. Pot-limit Omaha players will recognize a mechanic here where the solver prefers to bet big or check on these sorts of boards. Krakow should have used closer to pot-sized bet to set up a geometric river shove on favorable runouts. He used more of a merged size. The solver likes raising some 10-8 combos, but not the specific one Gkatzas had, since the 8♥ blocks some of the bluffs from the small blind. Krakow got the best river in the deck, and he could have overbet jammed, as A-J is plenty worth it. He again tried to siphon some value with a smaller bet, and Gkatzas had a hand that was borderline as far as bluff catching on the river. The player and situation can be good tiebreakers in these spots. The fact that there was no ICM pressure meant risking some chips with a thin call was probably best, so long as the opponent was capable of running a bluff. Krakow ascended to the chip lead and won the tournament less than two hours later.

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more balanced strategy against an unbalanced opponent, my most frequent bluff-shoves will be draws that are lower-EV calls.

In theory, that might include some king- and queen-high flush draws, but I want to avoid those shoves against someone like Vladimir, who could bet-call ace-high flush draws. That's not a concern when I have the nut flush draw myself, but A♣ 5♣ is robust enough that it doesn't need to bluff shove and I can bluff slightly more polar with lower EV nut flush draws that have trouble playing turns, like A♣ 6♣.

For this shove to be break-even, ICM says I need to get Vladimir to fold 80% of the time when I have around 50% equity when called. I think given how he fast-plays draws, I'd probably have more than 50% equity when called, but I don't think I'd get 80% folds.

I am also supposed to have about 70% vs. his betting range, but I don't think his overbet range is nearly as polar as the solver, and I don't think I'd have that much equity vs. his betting range which lowers the EV of just calling.

However, I also think my EV in calling and seeing a turn is much higher against Vladimir than the solver. Vladimir is *much* more likely to make a six-figure mistake on the turn or the river than the solver is.

The two exploits that point in favor of my shove are that I have worse equity vs. his betting range and I have better equity when called, which seems counter-intuitive, but I think I laid out the case for.

The two exploits that point against me are that I don't think I am generating folds as often as the solver, and I'm gaining a lot more EV on the turn and on the river.

Types Of Errors I Made

Too Much Money ICM Is For Rich People Grade

The preflop spot I compared this to was four-bet shoving A-K offsuit, but conceptually, it also has a lot in common with four-bet shoving Q-Q. I don't have great blocker value, I have a very strong hand, and I'm doing okay if I get all in preflop. But it is usually very clear which boards are good for my hand, and instead of playing a big pot right away, I'd rather wait for a favorable runout.

I mentioned that my preflop value range was K-K+, and then post-flop I ended up getting all in with a hand that shared qualities with Q-Q and A-K.

I've had almost a year to stew over this hand, and I still believe that a shove is better than a minraise. I've been convinced that my hand is a little too strong to shove over the flop raise, but I do believe Vladimir is the right opponent to do it against, and doing so cannot lose a substantial amount of EV.

Despite the disaster of busting in eighth, this hand I'm giving myself 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.

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	Jan. 15-26	WSOP Circuit Northern California	Thunder Valley Casino & Resort ■ Lincoln, CA
	Jan. 19-Feb. 2	Mid-Atlantic Poker Open	Live! Casino & Hotel ■ Hanover, MD
	Jan. 19-Feb. 8	DeepStack Showdown	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 22-Feb. 2	WSOP Circuit Tunica	Horseshoe Casino & Hotel ■ Robinsonville, MS
	Jan. 24- Feb. 1	Diamond Poker Championship	Talking Stick Resort ■ Scottsdale, AZ
	Jan. 26-31	PGT Kickoff Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Jan. 29-Feb. 9	WSOP Circuit Florida	Harrah's ■ Pompano Beach, FL
FEBRUARY	Feb. 3-10	PGT Mixed Games Series	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Feb. 10-16	Ohio Poker State Championship	Jack Casino ■ Cleveland, OH
	Feb. 11-23	Potomac Winter Poker Open	MGM National Harbor ■ Oxon Hill, MD
	Feb. 12-14	Mixed Games Super High Roller Bowl	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
	Feb. 12-23	WSOP Circuit North Carolina	Harrah's ■ Cherokee, NC
	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
	Feb. 19-March 2	WSOP Circuit Baltimore	Horseshoe Casino ■ Baltimore, MD
	Feb. 26-March 9	WSOP Circuit Indiana	Horseshoe Casino ■ Hammond, IN
MARCH	March 5-16	WSOP Circuit Oklahoma	Hard Rock Hotel & Casino ■ Catoosa, OK
	March 11-15	MSPT Festival Larchwood	Grand Falls Casino ■ Larchwood, IA
	March 12-23	WSOP Circuit New York	Turning Stone Casino & Resort ■ Verona, NY
	March 17-22	MSPT Festival Riverside	Riverside Casino & Resort ■ Riverside, IA
	March 19-30	WSOP Circuit Las Vegas	Horseshoe Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV
	March 24-29	Missouri Poker State Championship	Ameristar Casino Resort & Spa ■ St. Charles, MO
	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
	April 2-12	Spring Poker Round Up	Wildhorse Resort & Casino ■ Pendleton, OR
APRIL	April 2-13	WSOP Circuit Illinois	Grand Victoria Casino ■ Elgin, IL
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POKER GLOSSARY



Action Card - A card that causes an increase in betting.
Air - A bad hand with little to no value.
Angle (Shooting) - An unethical play used to gain information or an advantage.
Backdoor - A draw needing two streets to complete.
Balance - Playing different hands in the same way so opponents can't read you.
Bankroll - The amount of money you have to play poker with.
Barrel - A continuation bet followed by a bet on the turn and/or river.
Blocker - Holding one of your opponent's outs.
Bluff Catcher - A weak hand that can only beat a bluff.
Bounty - A prize earned for a knockout in a tournament.
Brick - A blank card that is unlikely to have helped.
Broadway - A straight to the ace.
Bubble - The time period right before a tournament reaches the money.
Burn - A card that is removed by the dealer to prevent cheating.
Calling Station - A loose, passive player who rarely folds.
Chip Race - Coloring up the smallest chips in circulation during a tournament.
Chop - A split of the pot.
Coin Flip - A situation where the odds for each player are roughly 50/50.
Collusion - Working with another player to cheat.
Continuation Bet - When the preflop aggressor makes another bet on the flop.
Crying Call - A call from a player who does not believe his hand is best.
Dead Money - A player with no chance of winning. Also, extra money in the pot.
Donk Bet - An early position bet by a player who was not the aggressor in the previous betting round.
Drawing Dead - When your hand can no longer win.
Drawing Live - When your hand is behind but can still draw out.
Effective Stack - The smallest stack among two players in a heads-up pot.
Eight-Or-Better - A qualifier common in high-low split games.
Equity - The mathematical expected value of your hand.
Expected Value - The weighted average of what you should profit in the long run.
Family Pot - When every player at the table sees the flop or fourth street.
Felte - 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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CALCULATING OUTS

Outs	Situation	After The Flop	After The Turn
21	Straight And Flush Draw, With Two Overcards	70%	45%
20		68%	43%
19		65%	41%
18	Straight And Flush Draw, With One Overcard	62%	39%
17		60%	37%
16		57%	35%
15	Straight And Flush Draw	54%	33%
14		51%	30%
13		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%

*Approximate Percentages



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200-400 (400 BBA)

In a \$1,000 buy-in event, you have 6,000 at blinds of 200-400. Everyone folds to you in the small blind and you look down at Q♦ 7♥. The big blind also has a stack of 6,000.

Question 1: Should you fold, call, raise to 1,200, or go all-in?

Answer: Assuming you are trying to play a game theory optimal (GTO) strategy, the only play Q-7 offsuit ever makes from the small blind is to call.

The only hands you can fold are the absolute worst ones like 9-4 offsuit, 7-3 offsuit, and 4-3 offsuit. You should not raise to 1,200 with any hands, opting instead to just call with a lot of your best hands. This is to protect the weaker portion of your calling range, such as 9-5 offsuit and 10-3 offsuit.

Some hands that prefer to go all-in include 6-6, A-K offsuit, A-2 offsuit, K-7 offsuit, Q-6 suited, and 8-7 suited.

You call and the big blind checks his option. The flop comes J♦ 8♠ 7♣.

Question 2: Should you check, bet 400, bet 800, or bet 1,200?

Answer: Even though you flopped a pair, you should check pretty much every time. While it may be tempting to bet for value and protection, when you are behind, betting ensures you lose all or most of your stack.

For the most part, when you flop a clear marginal made hand, check and see what develops.

You check and the big blind bets 800.

Question 3: Should you fold, call, raise to 2,000, or go all-in?

Answer: When you check from out of position with a marginal pair, the plan is usually to call a bet.

Raising should be reserved for your best made hands, such as overpairs and top pairs, as well as some bigger draws like 9♣ 2♠.

You call, and the turn is the 2♦. You check and your opponent goes all-in for 4,800.

Question 4: Should you fold or call?

Answer: Unless you have a strong read that your opponent would only go all-in with a draw, you must fold.

On this coordinated board, many players will feel inclined to go all-in with their made hands they are somewhat certain are ahead as well as with high-equity draws. Since most of these hands beat yours or will improve a large portion of the time, you should let your third pair go. There are better spots to get it in.

You fold and your opponent collects the pot. ♠



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