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SCOTUS LAWYER PLAYED LIKE A MANIAC, SAY HIGH-STAKES OPPONENTS

By Michael Kaplan



Thomas Goldstein was a brilliant Supreme Court attorney, avid high-stakes poker player, and a man that wowed even Dan Bilzerian with his blatant lack of respect for money. Now he's facing charges of tax fraud. Gambling author Michael Kaplan spoke to some of those who've played alongside him.

Goldstein is currently making headlines for being what the *New York Times* called “a secret high-stakes gambler, whose wild 10-year run may now land him in prison.”

In January he went on trial in the federal court of Greenbelt, Maryland. The complex proceedings are expected to last a month, although the prosecution has already dropped six of 22 charges in an attempt to streamline the process.

Back in 2024, a year before a federal indictment against him dropped, Goldstein turned up to play in Hustler Casino Live's *Million Dollar Game*.

The publisher of the SCOTUS blog was known mostly to poker cognoscenti and law nerds. The latter viewed him as a superstar. The former regarded him as an audacious player who liked to gamble sky-high.

At that point, the top-notch Supreme Court lawyer had dipped out of his prestigious practice and continued to play mega-stakes poker. Despite facing a federal indictment that includes charges of tax fraud, Goldstein has maintained his innocence.

As he told the *Times*, “I have never, ever believed that I did anything wrong.”

On the Hustler set, a source told *Card Player*, “He just decided he wanted to be in the game.” The source added that Goldstein wired more than \$1 million to the casino.

“[They] knew he was a whale... good for action and good for the mystique of people being, like, ‘Who is this guy?’ He agreed to play [but he had] demands. He wanted it to be short-handed – like six or seven players – and he wanted to

be anonymous, even though it was a stream.”

Goldstein also didn't want any pros in the game, however, Tom “durr” Dwan sat five seats away from Goldstein. How did he get in?

“Tom [Dwan] had a relationship with Goldstein for a long time,” said the source. “It was just some weird poker stuff between Dwan and Goldstein.”

As reported on *Air Mail*, Dwan referred Goldstein to Paul Phua back in 2014 when Phua, who would go on to co-found the *Triton Poker Series*, got busted in Las Vegas for allegedly running an illegal gambling operation. Phua denied doing anything criminal. With Goldstein representing Phua, a judge ruled that Phua's rights had been violated and all charges were dismissed.

So, Dwan got a seat at the table.

Goldstein, wearing a blue baseball hat and gray hoodie, was introduced as a European businessman named Thomas, with no last name. He had what appeared to be tattoos on his hand, wore a facemask, and he did not do a ton of talking.

But Goldstein's plan to stay anonymous was foiled by at least one unforgettable move. In a hand with an open-ended straight draw, Goldstein hit his river card. He made a bet with his jack-high straight that brought the pot to \$543,000. After being called, he mucked his hand despite holding the winner.

It's a mistake that stands out in hindsight, given what Goldstein now claims led him into his current situation. Making clear that he did not knowingly break any laws, Goldstein, as reported by *Reuters*, stated in court documents that his tax-return errors arose through sloppy work on the parts of bookkeepers and accountants.

Of course, unlike what he is being tried for, the poker sloppiness was his own. Nobody in the game knew what he

© Hustler Casino Live, and LegalEagle22



Rick Salomon



Bill Perkins

Others who have played poker with Goldstein see a method to his madness.

“He is always pleasant and puts the maximum amount of pressure on people,” Rick Salomon, who was a regular at the infamous Molly’s Game and is known for being reckless himself, told *Card Player*.

Salomon, who’s played a lot of ring games with Goldstein

and heads-up against him once (he remembers winning the latter and figures he won overall in the former), added a caveat to his pressuring.

“In poker, it’s just a chip, yeah. But maybe it’s a million-dollar chip. And I think that’s a balance that Tom may not take into consideration.”

Goldstein would probably agree, as he described himself having “both the benefit and the great disadvantage of not placing particular value on the money.”

As for why Goldstein played on the Hustler feed, despite wanting to apparently keep a low profile, Salomon had a theory.

“He loves poker more than anybody I’ve ever seen, and he just wanted to play. I guess he thought it was pretty comical – and it was.”

In terms of Goldstein’s playing style, which is routinely described as aggressive (even by people who tend to take such behavior in stride), Perkins said that he has seen it evolve.

Asked to elaborate, Perkins replied, “The evolution of Tom is that he has gone from a complete maniac to a disciplined maniac. And a disciplined maniac is dangerous.”

“It was also kind of unnerving,” Perkins added. “You don’t feel like losing 600 big blinds, and you’re kind of wondering, ‘Did this guy just play some random hand? Or does he have something?’ He puts you into awkward scenarios, but you learn that when guys over-bluff, it’s always correct to embrace the volatility and call.”

Nevertheless, the wild style might have made Goldstein easy to underestimate.

“Tom has beaten most rich guys he played,” said Salomon. “[And] I don’t think anyone plays someone for huge money unless they think they can win. So, I guess some people underestimated him.”

Beyond poker, Goldstein is now poised to play what might be the most consequential hand of his life – one unfolding in a courtroom at time of publishing.

Perkins, basing his opinion on Goldstein the man without knowing all the facts of his case, has an opinion on the outcome.

“Highly unlikely for guilty,” he said, enthusing about Goldstein’s intelligence. “I think it ends in a plea and a fine.”

As for Rick Salomon, he wasn’t interested in discussing the case, but he did give Goldstein major props.

“Him being a Supreme Court lawyer and retiring so he can play high-stakes poker,” mused Salomon, “that alone is legendary.” ♠

did at the time that it happened, but the guys working the control room were shocked having seen the cards.

“They were, like, ‘What the fuck just happened?’”

The source recalled that when Goldstein found out he misread his cards, he didn’t seem too disappointed.

“He was, like, ‘Oh, that sucks.’ I remember him being pretty cool about it and not freaking out.”

Bill Perkins, an energy-trading hedge fund manager who’s played in high-stakes games with Goldstein, takes it with the same sangfroid.

“It’s absurd,” Perkins told *Card Player*. “But people make absurd mistakes. I’ve done it before. I think everybody’s been, like, ‘Yeah, I wasn’t paying attention.’ It’s not the strangest thing in the world. It’s just unfortunate at those stakes.”

Goldstein reportedly lost more than \$1 million on the show, but don’t feel too bad for him. Against a California businessman, according to the *Times*, he won \$26.4 million, his all-time largest score.

He’s also been lucky in life. According to Perkins, “He had an NDE.”

Huh? “A near death experience,” Perkins clarified, estimating that it happened three- to five-years ago. “He had a life altering issue and could have died. I don’t know what it was, but he did have it. Indeed, he did. We talked about it.”

“He evolved as a human and as a poker player at the same time,” Perkins added. “Years ago, you played poker with him, but he wasn’t the nicest guy. Then he had the NDE and changed a lot. He evolved into a guy you want to hang out with.”

In fact, Perkins and Goldstein happened to be on an African safari together, in a group that totaled 50 or so.

“I hung out with him there,” said Perkins, though there was no gambling. “We were too busy doing life stuff to play poker.”

Goldstein’s Hustler appearance might have been forgotten – with most viewers unable to identify the masked man – had he not fallen into legal trouble and ended up with press like the *Air Mail* story and the big *New York Times* profile.

Both pieces refer to him gambling for life-changing high sums, being viewed as a maniac by other players, and racing his Ferrari against Dan Bilzerian’s Chevy Cobra for \$300,000. A bet Bilzerian won.

In his book, *The Setup*, Bilzerian wrote, “To this day, I have never met anyone with less respect for money proportionate to their net worth than Tom.”

CONGRESS TAKES AIM AT PREDICTION MARKETS AFTER INSIDER TRADING CONCERNS

By Sean Chaffin



In light of suspicious betting activity around the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, federal lawmakers are looking to limit government officials' use of prediction markets.

Rep. Ritchie Torres, D-NY, proposed the Public Integrity in Financial Prediction Markets Act of 2026. The bill prohibits federal elected officials, political appointees, executive branch employees, and congressional staff from buying, selling, or exchanging prediction market contracts tied to government policy when they possess “material nonpublic information or could reasonably obtain such information through their official duties,” according to a statement from Torres.

“The most corrupt corner of Washington, D.C. may well be the intersection of prediction markets and the federal government – where insider trading and self-dealing are no longer imagined risks but demonstrated dangers,” Torres said. “We ignore this plain-sight corruption at our own peril. No elected official is elected to profit from elected office. Government is not a for-profit enterprise; it is a public trust. It does not belong to the elected officials. It belongs to the people who elect them.”

The bill follows allegations of possible insider trading on Polymarket related to Maduro's capture. Reports surfaced that a new account on the platform placed a bet of more than \$30,000 that Maduro would be removed from office by the end of January. Maduro was taken into custody just a few hours later, and the user scored a \$400,000 payout.

Torres' bill has received support from 30 House Democrats as co-sponsors of the bill, including Rep. Dina Titus of Nevada. She released a letter to Polymarket in January demanding answers on the Maduro scenario.

“In light of recent betting activity surrounding the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, I have serious concerns about Polymarket's ability, and willingness, to comply with CFTC regulations,” she said. “I am demanding answers from Polymarket CEO Shayne Coplan regarding the safeguards his company has in place to prevent insider trading and ensure that its markets operate fairly and transparently.”

Melinda Roth, an associate professor at Washington and Lee University School of Law, says that “insider trading” could erode public confidence in prediction markets.

“Using material nonpublic information to buy, sell, or trade event contracts is wrong, just as it is wrong for any other financial investment,” she said. “Event contracts are an emerging asset class in the growing prediction markets, and these markets must be free of any insiders (including government officials or employees, whether elected or appointed) using material nonpublic information to gain an informational advantage in this marketplace.”

Yahoo Finance noted that Polymarket's terms of service don't cover insider trading. Prediction market operators have also faced increased scrutiny from state gaming regulators. Lawmakers in D.C. recently circulated a draft letter criticizing the industry and pointing to a lack of consumer protections. ♠

SPENDING BILL MOVES FORWARD WITHOUT GAMBLING TAX REVERSAL

By Sean Chaffin

Attempts to repeal the gambling tax provision in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act hit another roadblock in late January.

Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV) had hoped to attach her bipartisan FAIR BET Act to a spending bill, but the House Rules Committee rejected that move.

The Big Beautiful Bill, which went into effect Jan. 1, changed the law on gambling deductions. Gamblers can now deduct just 90% of their losses from taxes, which would result in some paying taxes despite a losing year.

The FAIR BET Act would fix that change, once again allowing gamblers to deduct 100% of their losses from taxes. Lawmakers will now have to find another way to advance the legislation.

Poker players, casino executives, and others have warned that the tax provision will have a major negative impact on the gaming industry. In December, Poker Hall of Famer and 10-time *WSOP* bracelet winner Erik Seidel announced that the provision may put him into semi-retirement.

Titus told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* that she was “disappointed that the House Rules Committee has decided not



to move forward with legislation to restore the full 100% deduction for gambling losses.”

Another effort to restore deductions, HR 6985, was recently filed by Rep. Steven Horsford (D-NV) and Rep. Max Miller (R-OH). Known as the FULL HOUSE Act, it has been lingering in the House Ways and Means Committee at time of publishing.

Optimism isn't high on prediction markets. Kalshi users gave passage before April just a 10% chance, and only 39% believed the issue would be resolved before 2027.

One study recently reported that the tax change could cause an \$18 billion hit to annual sports betting handle. ♠

MAINE LEGALIZES ONLINE POKER

By Sean Chaffin

Seven months after lawmakers in Maine approved a bill to legalize online poker and casinos, the measure has finally become law.

At the start of the 2026 legislative session, Maine Gov. Janet Mills (D) said she would allow LD1164 to become law through inaction. In other words, she declined to sign or veto the bill.

The Maine Legislature approved the legislation last June. The bill legalizes online casinos, including poker, through the state's four federally-recognized native tribes. Tribal casinos already have exclusive rights to mobile sports betting in the Pine Tree State.

Mills initially opposed the bill and even threatened a veto. Under state law, however, a bill becomes law on the third day of a new legislative session if it is not signed or vetoed.

“This fall, I met with the five elected chiefs of the Wabanaki Nations, who each spoke passionately about the importance of this bill in offering life-changing revenue for tribal communities, as well as providing a form of economic sovereignty for their nations,” Mills said in a statement.

“I considered this bill carefully, and while I have concerns about the impacts of gambling on public health, I believe that this new form of gambling should be regulated, and I am



confident that Maine's Gambling Control Unit will develop responsible rules and standards to hold providers of this new form of gambling accountable while ensuring that Maine's tribes benefit from its operations.”

Maine now joins Pennsylvania, Michigan, New Jersey, Nevada, Delaware, West Virginia, and Connecticut in legalizing online

poker. With a population of just 1.4 million people, Maine is not large enough to create a robust online poker market on its own. However, the state can join the Multi-State Internet Gaming Agreement (MSIGA) shared liquidity market to be part of larger prize and player pools. The MSIGA currently includes all legalized online poker states except Connecticut.

It seems likely that tribes will partner with larger third-party operators like PokerStars, *WSOP* Online, and BetMGM. Many operators now take an omni-channel approach to online gaming, offering online casino, sports betting, and poker to customers. That could be the case in Maine as well.

The proposal faced significant opposition from both the state's two commercial casinos and from residents. A poll found that 64% of Maine voters opposed legalizing iGaming, with 49% strongly opposed. ♠

88-Year-Old Grandmother Runs Deep In First-Ever Tournament

By Sean Chaffin

An 88-year-old grandmother at Mississippi's Beau Rivage Casino recently scored her first-ever poker tournament cash. And she was only playing because someone was parked at her favorite slot machine.

The \$500 event was part of the property's *Heater* series. Linda Hammons wandered away from the slot machines and ended up grabbing a seat in the tournament instead. It was a fortuitous decision, as she went on to finish 14th out of 2,628 entries in the \$1 million mystery bounty event.

Hammons, who is fairly new to the game, collected \$8,400 for the finish and another \$1,700 in bounties.

"I didn't realize it was so big," she told *Gulf Coast Poker*. She added that her opponents were all really nice to her.

Hammons said she has always had an interest in gaming, even as a child.

"After the adults got through playing dominoes, the kids would get to play," she said.

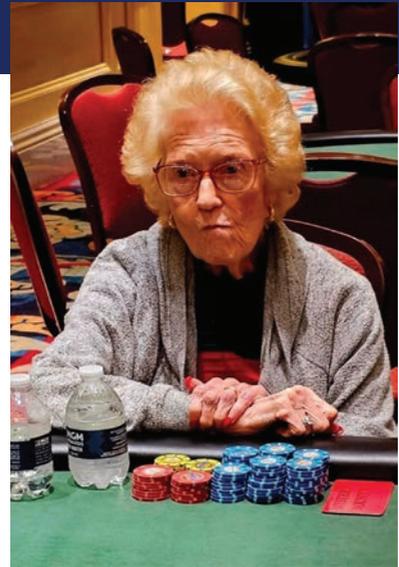
Hammons received a lot of support from those watching online. "Go get 'em grandma," one person wrote on Facebook. Players and onlookers applauded her play when she was finally eliminated, the *Sun Herald* reported.

Hammons said she tried to play her best and make a nice impression. She recommended that those who have dreamed of playing in a poker tournament to "do it before you get old like I am."

Tournament officials later awarded the casino's newest poker player with a free entry to the next event.

"Oh, my goodness," she said after opening the envelope with the \$400 entry. "I'll be over there at 4 (o'clock)."

Last summer, 63-year-old Lonny Weitzel outlasted a field of 3,338 play-



ers in the \$1,000 Super Seniors event at the *World Series of Poker*. The event is open to players 60 and older. The oldest person to enter a *WSOP* event was Eugene Calden, who was 100 when he played the 2023 main event. ♠

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BEN AFFLECK TELLS JIMMY KIMMEL THAT 14-YEAR-OLD SON ASKED FOR SPORTS BETTING MONEY

By Sean Chaffin

Ben Affleck's youngest son, Samuel, apparently has an eye for sports betting. His father recently detailed the young man's interest during an appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*.

Samuel has played sports and attended professional basketball and baseball games with his dad. The interest apparently evolved into wanting some cash to place some bets.

"My son asked me like a month ago, [he] was like, 'Hey, um, can I get like 100 bucks to bet on sports?'" Affleck told Kimmel.

Affleck shared that Samuel, who turned 14 years old in February, told him that boys his age were already placing wagers.

"He's like, 'My friends get \$100, but if they lose it, then that's it,'" Affleck said. "I'm like, 'Oh, that's a real standard, what discipline! So that you don't come twitching back going, 'I know that Green Bay is going to cover the over in the second half.'"

The younger Affleck's interest comes as betting has become a bigger part of the sports landscape, with ads



and wagering-related content featured in most broadcasts. Sports betting is now legal in 39 states and Washington D.C.

An interest in sports betting apparently runs in the family. Affleck said his father worked at a bar but ran a side business as a bookie.

"I remember our first washing machine, our first VCR, in fact, dad coming home like, 'You can thank

Steve Grogan for this,' the quarterback of the Patriots. 'Everybody keeps betting the Patriots to beat the spread.' So I really was grateful that the Patriots were terrible. Just thank Steve Grogan's knees for our VCR."

Affleck is also known to be one of Hollywood's biggest gamblers. Back in 2014, the two-time Academy Award winner was banned from the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas for allegedly card counting at the blackjack table. He is also a solid poker player. In 2019, he won a four-figure sum in a short, high-stakes session at Los Angeles' Commerce Casino. Affleck also won the *California State Poker Championship* back in 2004 for \$356,400. ♠



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POKER VLOGGER JEFF 'BOSKI' SLUZINSKI TALKS DEMONIC CARDS

By Art Parmann and Justin Young



Jeff 'Boski' Sluzinski has been involved in quite a few aspects of poker in a career dating back two decades – from the early days of the online game and the boom of the 2000s to vlogging and eventually becoming an ACR Poker ambassador.

The Michigan native found the game after a stint playing *Magic: The Gathering*, and has since racked up \$1.4 million in live tournament winnings. The biggest of that came in 2024 when he won the *Enjoy Poker Tour* high roller event in Uruguay for \$145,310.

Beyond live earnings, however, Sluzinski cut his teeth at the virtual tables even before the Moneymaker boom, finding he could earn a living playing online rather than taking

a regular job. After moving to Las Vegas, Sluzinski started vlogging his poker play and quickly found a dedicated following. He has more than 100,000 subscribers across various platforms and his videos have more than 20 million views on YouTube alone.

The 42-year-old recently joined the *Table 1* podcast to talk about his life in the game and beyond. Check out some of the highlights of the interview below. You can also watch or listen to the entire episode on YouTube, Spotify, Apple, or any podcast app.

Justin Young: Where'd you grow up?

Jeff Sluzinski: Michigan, just outside Detroit. Pretty normal upbringing

and eventually got into poker, and here we are. I was a *Magic: The Gathering* player, and those skills transmitted over a bit. Right around the year 2000 I quit *Magic*





and focused on poker and the rest was the [usual] poker story – home games, *Rounders*, the Moneymaker boom, *Harrington on Hold'em*, etc.

Justin Young: Were you playing *Magic: The Gathering* competitively or just among friends?

Jeff Sluzinski: No, I was traveling and playing in big tournaments.

Magic came out in '93 and I got into it in '94 or '95, at that point just playing at school. I still remember in fifth or sixth grade, our principal banned it because the parents complained it was demonic. They saw a few of the cards, and there were images that were scary demon creatures, and they're like, 'Oh, they're worshiping the devil. We can't have our kids playing this game,' so they banned it.

But that didn't stop me from playing. I definitely had the passion too, just the study, the play testing, and the meta game and the friend groups that you gained by being in this competitive environment to share the knowledge, kind of like poker groups now sharing solves or talking strategy. It's definitely a big advantage to be in a group.

It's a great hobby to meet other people and play competitively. The biggest thing was the arbitrage with trading cards and gambling at a young age where, 'You think your deck's better than mine, let's play for a card or for 20 bucks on the side?'

Then you could make a lot of money by selling cards to stores. This was really before the Internet. You didn't really have a good marketplace. 'You have a card that you want to buy for \$10, I know a guy that's selling it for \$5, so I'll buy it from him, sell it to you.' You could do that across all the stores within a 10-mile radius or through people. It was a great way to make money when I was

young. This was before I had a car. I had to rely on my parents to drive me to tournaments.

I won the 1999 world championships for juniors and got a \$10,000 scholarship, which I ended up using at the University of Michigan, Dearborn. That money ran out and fast forward, I dropped out.

Sluzinski then explained how he transitioned to poker.

Jeff Sluzinski: There's definitely a stereotype with *Magic* players. They're nerdy, outcasts of some sort, and I eventually found them annoying to be around. Not fun. Not a good time. Bad body odor.

Justin Young: Not a whole lot of chicks in there?

Jeff Sluzinski: Worse than a poker tournament, probably 1%. Nothing to get excited about.

I needed money for a car. I was working for \$5.50 an hour as a cashier. My parents weren't going to buy me a car, so poker was a good avenue. I started with home games and started playing online. I was making 10 bucks an hour playing \$0.25-\$0.50, playing four tables. That was guaranteed.

Art Parmann: At the time of the Moneymaker boom?

Jeff Sluzinski: It was about a year before, so right around there. Then I eventually turned 21 and could go to the casinos in Detroit. I still remember, on my 21st birthday, my license was expired, but I had a new one coming in the mail, so I went to the casino with it, and they're like, 'No, this isn't valid because there's a hole in it. It expired today.'

I said, 'Yeah, it expired today... my birthday. Let me fucking gamble. That's why it's expired, because I'm 21.' He was like, 'We need the official one.' I had to come back, but I actually had jury duty on that exact day in



downtown Detroit.

Art Parmann: Hole in your license? Not good for gambling, but perfectly okay for convicting people. (laughing)

Jeff Sluzinski: I had to spend a week in jury duty. One day I fell asleep after drinking during the dinner break. The judge started yelling at me for falling asleep in my chair. The next day, I brought a bag of Cheetos back from dinner break in the middle of a quiet court, and I started crunching and the bag was crinkling, and everybody just stopped.

I didn't care. I was missing my classes to get paid like 15 bucks a day. I was also losing so much money by not being able to work. I was working full time as a manager of a telemarketing company at that point. But telemarketing is not the most ethical line of work, which ultimately led me to quit. I just couldn't do it anymore.

Justin Young: What were you going to school for?

Jeff Sluzinski: Business administration, and it was the only college in Michigan that required calculus for business administration. I failed it three times and gave up.

Art Parmann: I assume you had spun up a little bankroll by then?

Jeff Sluzinski: It was enough to pay the bills, but for years I struggled. We're talking 99-cent menu every night.

Justin Young: How did your parents react to dropping out of college and choosing this career?

Jeff Sluzinski: They weren't very happy. I get it. There's definitely a low chance of survival in this industry. I just had so much passion... when you're young and eager to win those all-ins and sweat those pocket aces.

Justin Young: It's more like after getting punched in the face, being able to wake up the next morning and say,

'I can't wait to do that again.'

Jeff Sluzinski: Yeah, just the enjoyment of the process and the thrill and the love of the game. I played so much on PokerStars that I'd be on the top of the tournament leaderboard for the year, just grinding out all available tournaments. I loved it so much, and I was doing well.

2008 was my breakout year, where I just went on a sick heater online. That's when I moved to Vegas. I won the nightly \$162 [buy-in] for I think \$40,000 and then I won the nightly \$320 the next day for \$60,000. I ended up profiting like \$400,000 that year just on one site.

That gave me enough bankroll to be comfortable, to invest, and not worry about the swings and or sweat the buy-ins as much. That was the biggest hurdle for me, putting value on the tournament buy-in. You've got to care, but then also not care. '\$33 could be four dinners. I don't want to lose four dinners. Oh, wait, I have A-K. I just lost four dinners.'

Art Parmann: After Black Friday you had to move to Vancouver to keep playing.

Jeff Sluzinski: A \$2,500 a month furnished apartment. Good times. I did profit after a year, but not enough to make it really worthwhile.

It wasn't too bad. No snow, nice summers, beautiful women, good food. I had a great schedule. While I was playing, I was also on Match.com, so I'd have a date almost every night. I still remember my username, 'PoutineDream,' which I thought was pretty funny.

It was just a good balance of poker and getting to meet people. But I still had a house in Vegas. I was going to have to sell or I couldn't live in Vancouver. It was too expensive and I'd have to apply for some special visa

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“I didn’t really think people would watch. I originally made YouTube videos just to show my mom what it was like to see a day in the life of a live tournament poker player.”



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because you can only stay there for six months at a time. I'd have to go back and prove my residency, that I have a bank account, I have a house, etc. But in the end, it just didn't seem worth it.

I came back and had to figure out what I was going to do. I decided I was going to quit poker and get a real job.

Art Parmann: What was on your radar for real jobs?

Jeff Sluzinski: The two things I narrowed it down to were salesman of some sort – I had an in at a mattress sales place where I could make some decent money. People need beds.

I also was actually thinking about becoming a police officer, even at that age. I just had to pass the physical tests, and actually went on a ride along with a Las Vegas police officer. Anybody can do if you just express interest, which I highly recommend. They give you a bulletproof vest. You're with them for whatever they've got to do for eight hours. I've always been anti-cheaters and scumbags. If I could indirectly deliver some justice, I think that'd be satisfying.

Sluzinski then discussed becoming a vlogger and ACR Poker ambassador.

Jeff Sluzinski: Asking for things is actually how I got my ACR deal, which really changed my life. One of the people at ACR saw my vlog after I had it going for about a year, and they just hit me up on Twitter and said, 'Hey, if you retweet this, we're having a \$550 buy-in, \$1 million guaranteed tournament, and we'll give you a ticket.'

After I hit him up and said, 'Sorry I didn't cash, thanks for the opportunity.' He said, 'No problem, thanks for retweeting.' I then asked, 'Who are your site pros?' He said, 'We don't have any site pros.' This was eight years ago. I said, 'Well, I could be your site pro.' He said, 'Alright, let's do it.' And here we are.

I think that's just a good life lesson. Just never be afraid

to ask for what you want.

Art Parmann: What made you start your YouTube channel?

Jeff Sluzinski: I didn't really think people would watch. I originally made YouTube videos just to show my mom what it was like to see a day in the life of a live tournament poker player. My first vlog was a Venetian \$400 event, and I didn't know what I was doing. I used footage of me and my dog at the dog park as an intro. I thought it was so cool that I learned how to use iMovie.

This was the same month as Brad Owen started and a few months after Andrew Neeme started. I saw their videos, and I saw that I could just put it out there and [attract an audience].

I'm just happy people enjoyed it. There's always going to be trolls, but you can get a lot of genuine feedback just by seeing the [comment] trends, what people like, and learning from that.

This year at the *WSOP*, more than any other years, [there were] so many people who would come up and say, 'We appreciate the podcast,' or 'we appreciate the content on Twitch or whatever.' You can't really put a price on that. At least I'm giving something back in the form of entertainment and letting people live vicariously through me as I just lose tournament after tournament.

They see what it's really... it's not all first place with billion-dollar scores. People like the reality of it. I vlog pretty much every single tournament I play, so you know the most likely outcome there.

Justin Young: As long as they're passionate, it doesn't matter if they like your play or hate your play. But if they're passionate about either side, that's the important part. ♠



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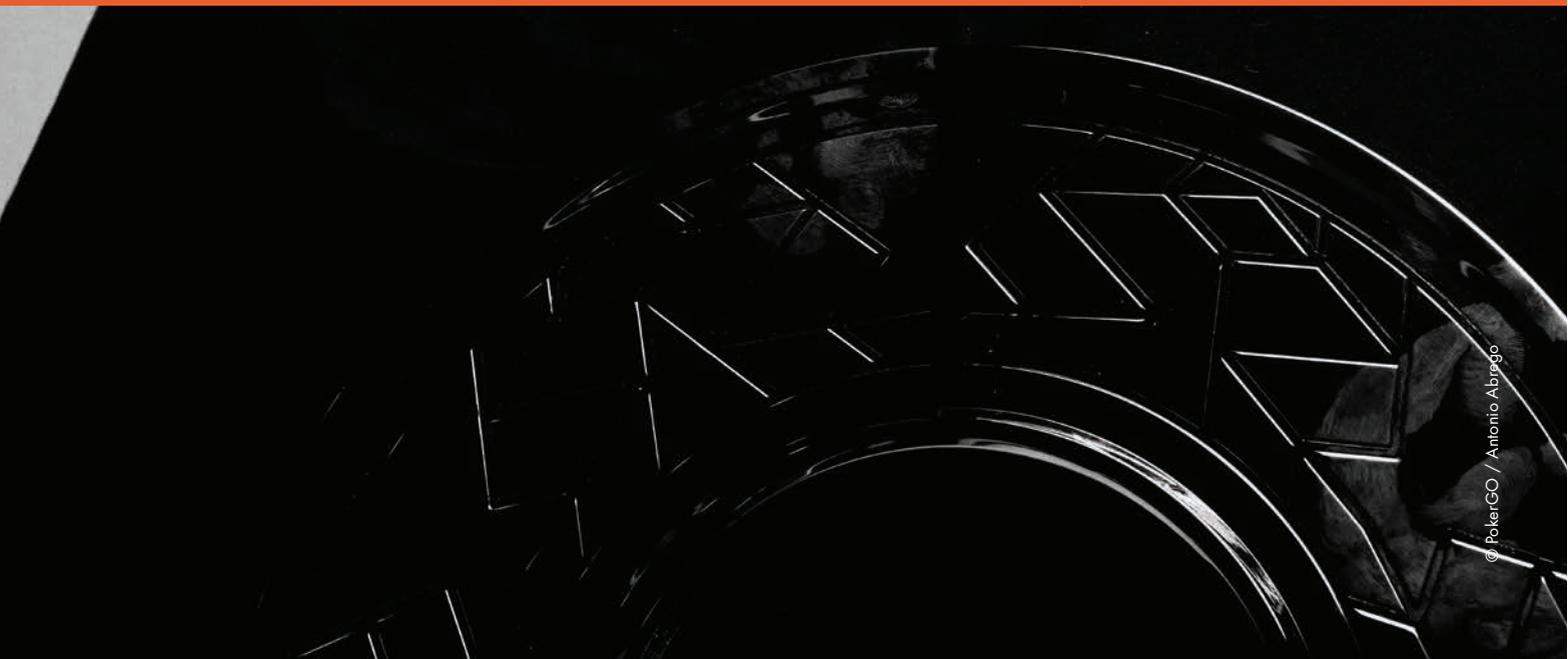




ALEX FOXEN WINS 2025 PGT PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Photo Finish: 34-Year-Old Crusher Climbs Atop Leaderboard With Last Chance Victory

By Erik Fast and Tim Fiorvanti





The *PokerGO Tour Last Chance* series was aptly named. The festival not only gave several players a final shot at qualifying for the season-ending *PGT \$1,000,000 Championship*, it also resulted in a buzzer beater in the *PGT* points race that locked up the tour's Player of the Year award for Alex Foxen.

The New York native took down the title in the very last event of the 2025 *PGT* season, earning 232 points for the win to beat out eventual runner-up Sam Soverel by a margin of 155 points.

The latest win saw the 34-year-old Foxen outlast a field of 83 entries in a \$10,000 buy-in single-day turbo no-limit hold'em affair that closed out the *PGT Last Chance* festival, earning \$232,400 and his fifth *PGT* title of the season. It was a back-and-forth affair down the stretch, as Soverel had only moved ahead in the race in late December thanks to a podium showing in *Super High Roller Bowl X*.

All told, Foxen accumulated almost \$6.3 million in earnings across 27 in-the-money finishes in *PGT*-qualified events, with 10 top-three showings. With seven titles during previous *PGT* seasons, his career count now sits at 12, which is the highest total of any player.

"It definitely means a lot to me," Foxen told *Card Player*. "I think that any of the long term leaderboards definitely carry more meaning to me. I think they're kind of a more accurate barometer of performance than any individual score, series long score, or anything like that. So, yeah, it definitely, definitely feels really good to get that one."

Consistency has been a pillar of Foxen's game, having finished in the top 10 of the *Card Player* POY race in eight of the last nine years. In addition to his success in *PGT* events in 2025, he also cashed for another \$5 million on other high-stakes tours. The three-time *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner now has over \$56.4 million in lifetime earnings to his

name, putting him just inside the top 10 on poker's all-time money list.

"I love poker, for one, and I like what they do at PokerGO," Foxen said. "I love supporting this endeavor. And, above all else, I just love the competition. It's always been my number one driver, to be able to compete with the best."

While Foxen and Soverel traded the lead in the final days, Chino Rheem also made an impressive push across the finish line. He recorded four cashes during the six-event *PGT Last Chance* series, bringing his total in-the-money finishes on the season to 35. (pg. 32)

Foxen Heats Up In The Spring

Foxen's *PGT* POY campaign got off to a bit of a slow start. He had no cashes in January and only two small in-the-money finishes during the *PokerGO Cup* in February totaling just over \$50,000.

Things picked up in the spring, however. He cashed five times during the first of two *PGT PLO Series* held in 2025, including winning a \$15,000 event for \$315,000. He also managed two second-place showings and a third-place finish. All told, he cashed for \$647,185 during the festival, and fell just short of securing series champion honors.

The former Boston College football player followed that up with his second win of the month, coming out on top in a *U.S. Poker Open* \$15,000 no-limit hold'em event for \$340,200. That win came one day removed from a fifth-place finish in another event at the same price point, which added another \$102,900 to his tally.

Foxen's most impactful result of the year came in the *WSOP* \$250,000 super high roller, an event he won back in 2022. This time he finished second from a field of 63 entries to earn \$3,060,314 and 600 *PGT* points. He cashed in eight *PGT*-qualified *WSOP* events overall during the summer



series, earning nearly \$4.1 million along the way.

Finishing Strong

Foxen maintained his momentum heading into the fall months. He earned his third title of the year in a *PGT Poker Masters* \$10,000 event in September, taking home \$272,000 and an eye-catching purple jacket trophy. Just a few days

after that triumph, he made it down to heads-up play in a \$15,000 event. He fell just short, earning \$196,000 as the runner-up.

Foxen's fourth win of the year came at the *PGT PLO Series II* in October. He kicked off the series with a cash in the \$5,000 opening event, then beat out 133 entries in a quattro bounty event the following day. That win came with \$87,000 in prize money and \$90,000 in bounties. He wound up cashing in half of the 10 PLO events offered, accumulating \$231,850 for the festival.

While he failed to log any *PGT* cashes in November, Foxen still had plenty of gas left in the tank for the sprint to the finish. His final push began with a 115th-place finish in the *WSOP Paradise* \$25,000 super main event.

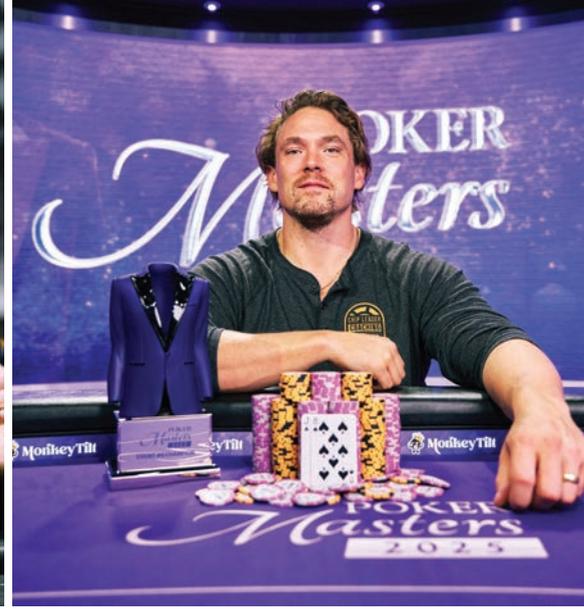
He closed out the season with two cashes during the *PGT Last Chance* series that ran in early January. After

an eighth-place finish in event no. 3, with POY honors hanging in the balance, Foxen finished strong. Needing fourth place or better in the last tournament of the festival to pass Soverel, Foxen came up clutch in the closing moments, winning the tournament outright to lock up the 2025 *PGT* Player of the Year award. (pg. 32) ♠

Foxen's 10 Best Scores From The PGT Season

Date	Event	Place	PGT Points	Prize
6/15	WSOP \$250,000 NLHE Super High Roller	2nd	600	\$3,060,314
7/1	WSOP \$100,000 PLO High Roller	6th	162	\$539,917
4/15	U.S. Poker Open \$15,100 NLHE	1st	272	\$340,200
4/1	PGT PLO Series \$15,100 PLO	1st	252	\$315,000
9/26	Poker Masters \$10,100 NLHE	1st	272	\$272,000
1/10	PGT Last Chance \$10,100 NLHE Turbo	1st	232	\$232,400
9/29	Poker Masters \$15,100 NLHE	2nd	157	\$196,000
6/28	WSOP \$10,000 PLO Championship	7th	183	\$182,983
4/3	PGT PLO Series \$15,100 PLO	3rd	115	\$143,775
3/29	PGT PLO Series \$10,100 PLO Bounty	2nd	173	\$123,200

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2025 POKERGO TOUR FINAL STANDINGS



Rank	Player	Points	Titles	Final Tables	Cashes	Earnings
1	Alex Foxen	3,134	5	13	27	\$6,277,148
2	Sam Soverel	2,979	4	14	31	\$4,160,568
3	Chino Rheem	2,803	5	20	35	\$3,225,992
4	Michael Mizrachi	2,286	2	2	3	\$1,391,322
5	Joao Simao	2,272	2	11	25	\$3,906,647
6	Nick Schulman	2,162	1	15	28	\$2,563,353
7	Jesse Lonis	1,979	3	13	24	\$2,423,342
8	Stephen Chidwick	1,688	2	7	14	\$3,122,284
9	Andrew Lichtenberger	1,676	1	12	18	\$2,677,932
10	Kristen Foxen	1,671	3	7	17	\$1,689,351

While Alex Foxen narrowly secured the *PokerGO Tour* Player of the Year honors, he was far from the only player to put together an incredible *PGT* performance. In fact, he wasn't even the only player from his family to have done so, as his wife Kristen finished 10th in the standings with 18 cashes across the season.

Sam Soverel took the lead in the standings with a final-table appearance in the *Super High Roller Bowl X* roughly a week before 2025 came to a close, finishing third for \$350,000. He was looking good for the title, until Foxen passed him during the *Last Chance* series. Soverel had 31 *PGT*-qualified cashes, the second-most of any of the more than 2,600 players that earned *PGT* points during the year. Along the way, the Florida native made 14 final tables and finished inside the top three eight times. His four outright victories included a pair of *ARIA* high roller triumphs, his fourth career *World Series of Poker* bracelet via a win in the \$10,000 six-max championship, and a *North American Poker Tour Las Vegas* title at Resorts World.

The only player to top Soverel in the *PGT* cashes column was **Chino Rheem** with 35. The *European Poker Tour* main event champion and three-time *World Poker Tour* winner showed off the versatility of his game, with *PGT* victories in

an eight-game event, two pot-limit Omaha tournaments, a \$5,100 progressive knockout event, and straight-up no-limit hold'em. Rheem was crowned the series champion in both the *PGT Mixed Games* series and the *PGT PLO Series II*, becoming the first to ever win three *PGT* series championships, having previously also taken down the 2023 *PGT Mixed Games II*.

Both Soverel and Rheem helped cement their spots in the top three with impressive runs at the *PGT Last Chance* festival, with Soverel cashing three times while Rheem made three final tables during the six-event series.

Michael Mizrachi was the next-closest contender on the list. He recorded just three qualified scores, but they included his incredible one-two punch of winning both the *WSOP* \$50,000 *Poker Players Championship* (for a record-extending fourth time) and the \$10,000 main event. Mizrachi was, understandably, inducted into the Poker Hall of Fame on the spot after becoming the world champion. The \$10,000,000 payday that came with his eighth bracelet pushed his lifetime earnings to over \$29 million.

Card Player POY winner Jesse Lonis finished seventh on this leaderboard, with \$2.4 million of his \$13.3 million in earnings for the year coming on the *PokerGO Tour*. He won three times on the *PGT*, and made 13 final tables overall. ♠



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CHAD EVESLAGE TRIUMPHS IN \$1,000,000 POKERGO TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

By Erik Fast



Chad Eveslage took advantage of the many mixed games events offered on the *PokerGO Tour's* schedule during the 2025 season, winning the inaugural \$100,000 *Super High Roller Bowl Mixed Games* event and the \$25,000 H.O.R.S.E. event at the *World Series of Poker* to secure his fourth career bracelet.

The two *PGT*-qualified victories helped propel him inside the top 20 in the final standings for the high-stakes-centric points race. As a result, he earned a seat in the \$1 million *PGT Championship* that capped off the season, and took full advantage of that opportunity.

Eveslage beat out a field of 54 in the seven-figure freeroll, comprised of the 40 highest point earners on the season-long leaderboard and 14 dream seat winners. The \$500,000 top prize that came with the massive trophy propelled his career earnings over \$12 million.

This win put a bow on a successful season for Eveslage. The Indiana native cashed for more than \$3.2 million across

eight *PGT* cashes, with three titles and four final-table finishes. His *SHRB Mixed Games* win came with \$1.2 million, while he took home another \$883,841 for his latest triumph at the *WSOP*.

The win further cements Eveslage's reputation as one of the top all-around players in both mixed games and no-limit hold'em. Two of his previous bracelets came in the dealer's choice format, having won both the \$1,500 and \$10,000 buy-in versions of the event in 2023. The previous year he took down a \$25,000 no-limit hold'em high roller. His two *World Poker Tour* main event titles came in the 2022 *WPT Five Diamond* and 2021 *WPT Venetian* main events.

Setting The Tournament Field

Eveslage had to outlast a stacked roster of *PGT* stars on his way to the title. One unique detail of this tournament is that the 40 players who won their way in via the standings began with different starting stacks depending on their placement on the leaderboard. (pg. 32)

© PokerGO / Antonio Abrego



Andrew Lichtenberger



Daniel Negreanu



Michael Wang



Aaron Kupin

PGT Leaderboard champion Alex Foxen started with the biggest stack at 350,000, while Ben Tollerene in 40th place started with 130,000. As the 20th-ranked player, Eveslage began with 245,000, which was good for 245 big blinds when play got underway.

In addition to *PGT* regulars in the mix, there were also several big names and some fresh faces among the 14 dream seat winners. Five players won their way in with stacks of 125,000 thanks to the *PGT Last Chance* leaderboard (pg. 32), while two-time bracelet winner Nick Petrangelo secured a spot thanks to his performance at the *NAPT Las Vegas* festival.

The other dream seat winners started with 100,000 in chips. Aaron Kupin joined thanks to his success at *WSOP Paradise*, and David Shaw did the same as the winner of a year-long leaderboard at Champions Club Texas. Ed Miller won the *RunGood Poker Series Dream Seat Invitational* after qualifying with a victory in an *RGPS* ring event.

There were also five seats awarded to PokerGO fans. Travis Hague, David Friedler, and Timothy Tuveson were drawn from a list of PokerGO annual subscribers. Daniel VanDyke won a social media promotion, while Matthew Petry took a seat thanks to a PokerGO Podcast promotion.

Blair Bubbles, Riordan Tripped Up

While some players were just happy to get an invite to the freeroll, and others used the event as an excuse to gamble on black-and-red props, the \$500,000 first-place prize had plenty of players in a serious mood. Although Foxen started with

a chip advantage and was able to build a stack to start the tournament, he ultimately went out with two tables remaining at the hands of Andrew Lichtenberger. Lichtenberger would be the only player from the top 10 of the leaderboard to make the final table.

Eveslage barely survived day 1 action, moving on to day 2 as the second-shortest stack among the remaining seven contenders.

Michael Wang was out in front when play resumed, with only one elimination needed to burst the bubble. It came via classic preflop coin flip, with Eric Blair's A♦ Q♣ unable to outrace the pocket nines of Aaron Kupin. Blair flopped a gutshot straight draw to go with his overcards, but blanks on the turn and river saw him sent to the rail empty-handed.

The first knockout inside the money saw two-time bracelet winner and reigning *SHRB Pot-Limit Omaha* champion John Riordan sent packing with trips thanks to kicker trouble. He defended his big blind with 5♠ 4♣ facing a button raise from Eveslage, who held K♥ 5♥. The flop came down A♣ 5♦ 5♦ and Riordan could not get away by the river. Eveslage's king kicker earned him the pot and the knockout, while Riordan settled for \$40,000.

Aaron Kupin finished fifth for \$60,000 when his A♥ 8♠ failed to hold against the 10♦ 9♦ of Lichtenberger, which was open-jammed from the small blind. Kupin called off the rest of his 15-big blind stack and the two saw a J♠ 10♣ 5♥ K♥ 9♥ runoff. Lichtenberger's two pair gave him the chip lead heading into the final four.

© PokerGO / Antonio Abrego



Seven-time bracelet winner Daniel Negreanu's run came to an end in fourth place. In his final hand he raised from under-the-gun with $A\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$. Eveslage looked down at pocket jacks and three-bet from the small blind. Negreanu called, leaving himself with two big blinds behind. The flop came down $5\spadesuit 4\diamondsuit 3\clubsuit$ and Eveslage put Negreanu all-in. After a quick call, the cards were on their backs.

The Poker Hall of Famer was looking for an ace, seven, or deuce. Instead the $10\clubsuit$ turn and $3\heartsuit$ river kept pocket jacks best. Negreanu earned \$80,000 for his efforts, surpassing \$57 million in career earnings in the process.

The next elimination hand saw Wang get all-in on a $10\diamondsuit 9\clubsuit 8\spadesuit$ flop with his $10\heartsuit 9\heartsuit$ leading the pocket

kings of Eveslage, who had three-bet Wang's preflop button open from the big blind. Wang was still ahead with two pair after the $2\clubsuit$ turn, but the $8\diamondsuit$ river gave Eveslage kings up to earn the pot. Wang, a *WPT* champion and three-time bracelet winner, secured \$120,000 for his latest deep run.

With that, Eveslage took a more than 4:1 lead into heads-up play with Lichtenberger, and it didn't take long for him to convert that advantage into the title. The final hand of the tournament gave Lichtenberger $8\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$ on the button. He jammed for just over 13 big blinds and Eveslage quickly called with pocket jacks. The board came down $Q\diamondsuit 4\spadesuit 2\diamondsuit J\heartsuit 3\clubsuit$ to bring the tournament to a close.

Lichtenberger was awarded \$200,000 as the runner-up. The bracelet winner now boasts over \$24.8 million in career

cashies, which puts him just inside the top 50 of the all-time money list. ♠

Final Table Results

1	Chad Eveslage	\$500,000
2	Andrew Lichtenberger	\$200,000
3	Michael Wang	\$120,000
4	Daniel Negreanu	\$80,000
5	Aaron Kupin	\$60,000
6	John Riordan	\$40,000

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PGT LAST CHANCE SERIES CLOSES OUT \$443 MILLION SEASON

Alex Foxen Steals POY Honors From Sam Soverel With Finale Victory

By Erik Fast



The 2025 *PokerGO Tour* season was massive, with more than \$443 million in total prize money awarded across 147 qualified events with approximately 31,700 total entries. The final half-dozen of those events were held inside the PokerGO Studio at ARIA Resort & Casino in Las Vegas from Jan. 5-10.

The *PGT Last Chance* series kept things simple: six \$10,000 buy-in no-limit hold'em events, with the only variation in format being a turbo structure for the final tournament. This final chance for glory and ranking points ahead of the season-ending *PGT \$1,000,000 Championship* (pg. 28) added nearly \$6.7 million to the tour's tally with an average turnout of 111 entries per event.

The first tournament on the agenda drew 109 contenders, with **Clemen Deng** emerging victorious as the first *PGT* winner of the calendar year. He took home \$277,950 after overcoming a stacked final table that included two-time *World Poker Tour* champion and *World Series of Poker* bracelet winner Jonathan Little (7th), recent *MSPT Venetian* main event champion Matthew Wantman (6th), bracelet winner Cary Katz (5th), all-time bracelet leader Phil Hellmuth (4th), and 2025 *Card Player* Player of the Year award winner Jesse Lonis (3rd).

David 'ODB' Baker, a *WPT* champion and four-time

bracelet winner, earned \$174,400 as the runner-up, the first of his two second-place showings in the series.

Just shy of a year after earning his first *PGT* title at the 2025 *PGT Kickoff* festival, **Patrick Leonard** earned his second, coming out on top of a field of 126 entries. The bracelet winner from the UK secured \$315,000 as the last player standing, defeating David Coleman heads-up for the win. Coleman banked \$195,300 for second place. Poker Hall of Famer Nick Schulman also recorded a podium showing in third, taking home \$138,600.

Leonard finished inside the top 30 in the *PGT* standings, earning a spot in the seven-figure freeroll thanks to his 17 cashes during the season.

Brandon Wilson was the player who ultimately came out on top of the *PGT Last Chance* leaderboard, with 446 points and \$446,850 accrued across three cashes. His largest payday of the week came in event no. 3, in which he outlasted 108 entries to lock up \$275,400. Wilson was so successful at this stop, however, that he avoided the need for a dream seat, finishing 40th in the final season standings to ensure a spot in the *PGT \$1,000,000 Championship*.

Bracelet winner Sergio Aido took second place for \$172,800, recording the first of three straight cashes that also helped cement his spot, while Jeremy Becker helped his



case with a third-place finish for \$124,200. Becker wound up earning his way in as the last dream seat winner thanks to being the fifth-ranked player in the series standings who hadn't already qualified via the seasonal ranks. He cashed three times for \$193,500 during the week.

Neil Warren also earned a dream seat thanks entirely to his performance in event no. 4. Warren beat out 126 entries to print his ticket, adding \$315,000 for the win. Coleman finished runner-up again, adding another \$195,300 while clinching his spot inside the top 25 in the season-long standings.

Deng backed up his win in the opening event with an 11th-place finish in this event. It was ultimately enough for one of the five dream seats awarded at this stop.

Like Warren, **Chi-Jen Chu** also won his way in via a single event. He overcame 117 entries in event no. 5, cashing for \$263,850 and accruing enough points to capture the fourth dream seat.

The highest-ranked dream seat winner was ultimately Baker, whose second runner-up finish of the festival added another \$210,000 to his bankroll.

The final event of the series was the lone turbo offering, which wound up having an outsized influence on the final standings. **Alex Foxen**, who had been supplanted by Sam Soverel just a couple of weeks earlier at the very top of the *PGT* leaderboard, had one more shot to secure the tour's Player of the Year award. He did just that, topping 83 entrants to add \$232,400 and 232 key points to his count for the season. (pg. 22)

Foxen defeated event no. 3 champion Brandon Wilson heads-up to overtake the lead just as the clock expired. Chino Rheem finished eighth, lodging his fourth cash of the festival and 35th of the season. His impressive run included three final-table showings, with \$334,700 in total earnings accumulated during the series. That helped secure his spot inside the final top three on the tour's leaderboard. (pg. 26) ♠

TOURNAMENTS

PGT Last Chance Series - Aria PokerGO Studio - Las Vegas, NV

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Jan. 5-6 Entries: 109 Prizepool: \$1,090,000	1 Clemen Deng	\$277,950	600
	2 David Baker	\$174,400	500
	3 Jesse Lonis	\$125,350	400
	4 Phil Hellmuth	\$98,100	300
	5 Cary Katz	\$70,850	250
	6 Matthew Wantman	\$54,500	200
	7 Jonathan Little	\$43,600	150

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Jan. 8-9 Entries: 126 Prizepool: \$1,260,000	1 Neil Warren	\$315,000	660
	2 David Coleman	\$195,300	550
	3 Landon Tice	\$138,600	440
	4 Sergio Aido	\$107,100	330
	5 Chino Rheem	\$75,600	275
	6 Jim Collopy	\$63,000	220
	7 Matthew Wantman	\$50,400	165

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Jan. 6-7 Entries: 126 Prizepool: \$1,260,000	1 Patrick Leonard	\$315,000	660
	2 David Coleman	\$195,300	550
	3 Nick Schulman	\$138,600	440
	4 Jared Jaffee	\$107,100	330
	5 Brock Wilson	\$75,600	275
	6 Jeremy Ausmus	\$63,000	220
	7 Joao Simao	\$50,400	165

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Jan. 9-10 Entries: 117 Prizepool: \$1,170,000	1 Chi-Jen Chu	\$263,850	600
	2 David Baker	\$210,000	500
	3 Chino Rheem	\$128,700	400
	4 Kristen Foxen	\$99,450	300
	5 Matthew Mcewan	\$76,050	250
	6 Nicholas Seward	\$58,500	200
	7 Connor Rash	\$46,800	150

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Jan. 7-8 Entries: 108 Prizepool: \$1,080,000	1 Brandon Wilson	\$275,400	600
	2 Sergio Aido	\$172,800	500
	3 Jeremy Becker	\$124,200	400
	4 Chino Rheem	\$97,200	300
	5 Phil Hellmuth	\$70,200	250
	6 Joey Weissman	\$54,000	200
	7 Erik Seidel	\$43,200	150

Event	Player	Payout	POY
\$10,500 NLH Jan. 10 Entries: 83 Prizepool: \$830,000	1 Alex Foxen	\$232,400	480
	2 Brandon Wilson	\$149,400	400
	3 Andrew Lichtenberger	\$107,900	320
	4 Josh Arie	\$78,850	240
	5 Jonathan Little	\$58,100	200
	6 Aram Oganyan	\$41,500	160
	7 Mike Zulker	\$33,200	120



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BLAKE VOGDES WINS BORGATA WINTER POKER OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

By Erik Fast

Thanks to a big win in Atlantic City, Blake Vogdes jumped out to an early lead in the 2026 *Card Player* Player of the Year race. The New Jersey resident outlasted 895 entries in the *Borgata Winter Poker Open* \$3,500 buy-in \$3 million guaranteed no-limit hold'em championship event to earn \$457,980 and 1,368 POY points. He now has a 228-point lead over second-ranked Jack Kwon in the year-long rankings presented by CoinPoker.

Kwon was the runner-up in this event, earning his first six-figure score. The two cut a heads-up deal to redistribute the payouts a bit, bringing the event to an end with Kwon earning \$407,110 for his second-place showing.

This win was by far the largest score yet for Vogdes, easily surpassing the \$50,400 he secured with a fourth-place finish in a \$5,000 event at last year's *PokerGO Tour Kickoff* festival. He now has nearly \$725,000 in recorded cashes to his name.

Vogdes had plenty of tough competition to contend with down the stretch in this event, including bracelet winner and *WSOP* main event final tablist Thomas Cannuli (9th – \$42,970), 2013 *Borgata Fall Poker Open* champion Greg Himmelbrand (8th – \$54,995), and 2009 *World Poker Tour Borgata Poker Open* winner Olivier Busquet (6th – \$85,300). Busquet now has nearly \$9.2 million in lifetime earnings after this latest deep run.



Five-handed action began with Vogdes as the clear short stack, but he strung together several double-ups to overtake the lead. He then outlasted Benjamin Morgan and Duane Mitchell before eliminating Zachary Fischer with pocket aces against A♠ 5♥.

Player	Payout	POY
1 Blake Vogdes	\$457,980	1,368
2 Jack Kwon	\$407,110	1,140
3 Zachary Fischer	\$243,245	912
4 Duane Mitchell	\$159,570	684
5 Benjamin Morgan	\$109,925	570
6 Olivier Busquet	\$85,300	456
7 Kyle Grupp	\$67,655	342
8 Greg Himmelbrand	\$54,995	228
9 Thomas Cannuli	\$42,970	114

© WSOP / Poker.org

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2026 PGT \$1,000,000 Championship
No-Limit Hold'em Freeroll



Daniel Negreanu
450,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 59%
After Flop: 53%
After Turn: 100%



Michael Wang
1,416,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 41%
After Flop: 47%
After Turn: 0%



PREFLOP

With 17 players remaining, a six-handed table, and blinds of 6,000-12,000 with a big blind ante of 12,000, Daniel Negreanu raised to 25,000 from the hijack. Michael Wang called from the big blind.



Wang checked, and Negreanu bet 25,000. Wang check-raised to 82,000. Negreanu three-bet to 164,000. Wang four-bet all-in, and Negreanu called for 425,000 total.

COMMENTARY:

The *PokerGO Tour Championship* had 54 qualifiers overall, and the special \$1 million freeroll paid out only the top six. With 17 players left, they were still a ways from the money, meaning ICM (Independent Chip Model) pressure wasn't a major consideration. Playing about 40 blinds deep, Daniel Negreanu decided on a small continuation-bet on the eight-high flop after finding a pair and a flush draw. Larger sizes are generally better on these lower-textured flops at that stack depth, but Negreanu had a good hand to bet small, since he would keep all weaker draws and pairs in. Michael Wang had a big chip lead at the table with more than 100 blinds, and he correctly check-raised the flop. Top pair with one of the best kickers is usually a good hand to check-raise, especially facing a small-sized bet. The board texture made that especially true, since almost any turn card would devalue his hand. He faced an interesting three-bet from Negreanu, who could have also just called and played a turn since he was crushing every bluff. It wasn't very likely Negreanu would put in about 40% of his stack and fold, so Wang had to decide how often Negreanu had a hand that was flipping or behind a pair of eights. Since K-8 would only have about 20% equity against most overpairs, Wang had to feel like he was good reasonably often to call. He clearly thought that was the case, since he put all of the money in, but Negreanu drilled the turn to cost Wang about a third of his stack.

© PGT

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DARREN RABINOWITZ WINS CIRCUIT RING WHILE BLINDING OUT DOWN THE STREET

By Erik Fast

Darren Rabinowitz's empty chair earned him \$3,394 dollars at the *Wynn Signature Series*, while across town he was busy closing out the victory in the *World Series of Poker Circuit* \$1,700 no-limit hold'em main event.

Rabinowitz had to skip day 2 of a \$400,000 guaranteed \$1,100 buy-in at Wynn Las Vegas in order to focus his efforts on the event at Planet Hollywood. The decision ultimately paid dividends, as he secured his fifth gold ring and the top prize of \$175,430 as the champion.

This victory was the fourth-largest score of Rabinowitz's career. The bracelet winner now boasts nearly \$4.7 million in lifetime earnings across more than 500 recorded in-the-money finishes.

"How'd I finish?" Rabinowitz asked Wynn on social media. His unmanned stack ultimately outlasted 24 other players before blinding out just a couple of spots short of the final two tables in 20th place.

The turnout of 616 total entries saw the \$500,000 guarantee nearly doubled. The top 93 finishers earned a share of the \$933,240 prize pool, with Imari Love (13th), Sami Bechahed (12th), Stephen Song (10th), and Victoria Livschitz (8th) running deep.

The final heads-up showdown for the ring pitted Rabinowitz against David Dibernardi. Rabinowitz showed down a royal flush in clubs at one point in the clash, which



helped him regain control of the match after Dibernardi had come back from a healthy initial deficit. In the final hand, Rabinowitz's top pair of sevens held up against his opponent's second pair of fours. Dibernardi earned a career-best score of \$116,917 for his second-place showing.

Player	Payout	POY
1 Darren Rabinowitz	\$175,430	840
2 David Dibernardi	\$116,917	700
3 Kayla Clackum	\$81,321	560
4 Katsumoto Sakaguchi	\$57,545	420
5 Drake Kemper	\$41,439	350
6 Jacob Mendelsohn	\$30,378	280
7 Yuanzhi Cao	\$22,678	210
8 Victoria Livschitz	\$17,245	140
9 Alan Merdita	\$13,363	70

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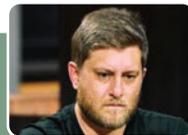
TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2026 PGT \$1,000,000 Championship
No-Limit Hold'em Freeroll



Aaron Kupin
1,725,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 64%
After Flop: 13%
After Turn: Folded



Eric Blair
1,530,000 Chips

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



Michael Wang
2,135,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 2%
After Flop: 5%
After Turn: 20%



PREFLOP

With seven players remaining and blinds of 15,000-30,000 with a big blind ante of 30,000, Aaron Kupin raised to 60,000 from under the gun. Michael Wang called from the hijack, and Eric Blair called from the big blind.



Blair and Kupin checked. Wang bet 110,000. Blair called. Kupin folded.



Both players checked.



Blair checked, and Wang bet 385,000. Blair called.

COMMENTARY:

The last seven players were at the final table of the *PGT Championship*, but they still needed to eliminate a player in order to reach the money. Since the minimum payout was \$40,000, that meant there was a ton of ICM pressure on the middle stacks. Aaron Kupin was one of those players, but he still had a clear open with pocket tens. He had to be cautious once he got action from two covering stacks, one in position. Checking the flop was prudent, and Michael Wang, sitting on one of the big stacks, had a clear bet for value with top pair, top kicker. He picked a sizing on the bigger side, considering it was a multi-way pot, and Eric Blair had an easy call in the big blind. Blair could have led out on the board-changing turn, but his hand played much better as a check, keeping the pot small. Wang had a good hand to check back, since he had a holding that could comfortably call most rivers, and betting might have chased away some worse pairs. Once the four-flush came in on the river, Blair had another obvious check with a hand that should win at showdown on occasion, meaning it was too strong to bluff. Wang had a clear value-bet with his flush, and Blair was in a tough spot against the larger, polarizing size. A-J without a club is indifferent between calling and folding in this spot according to the solver. So, Blair's best option was to use his read on Wang, as well as the tournament situation to make a decision. He decided to call, but tournament dynamics may have favored a fold, since calling and losing would place him essentially tied for the shortest stack. That's exactly what happened, and Blair wound up bubbling on a coinflip the next day.

© PGT

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WSOP CIRCUIT EVENT ENDS WITH WINNER-TAKE-ALL DEAL

By Steve Schult

When the finalists of a poker tournament decide to chop the prize pool, it's usually to reduce variance and flatten payouts. As a result, the eventual winner gets less than what the original payout structure dictated. However, that wasn't the case for Mehmet Siginc when he struck a deal en route to his second *WSOP Circuit* ring.

The Canadian won CAD\$40,545 (\$29,231) in the \$600 no-limit hold'em/pot-limit Omaha mixed event at the Deerfoot Inn & Casino in Calgary. But the winner was originally only supposed to leave with CA\$24,580. After Amir Khan busted in third for CA\$10,692, Siginc and Nicholas Lee agreed to a winner-take-all heads-up match. The CA\$15,965 allotted to the eventual second-place finisher was added to the winner's payout.

Siginc told *PokerNews* that he and Lee were already friends. Consequently, the two made a "gen-



tleman's agreement" to play for it all.

It's unclear when the agreement was made, but it seems unlikely the two agreed to it at the start of the match. According to the live updates, Siginc eliminated Khan and took a 3:1 chip lead into heads-up play. But Lee scored a couple timely doubles and evened the

stacks. Lee actually took a small lead very briefly before Siginc took it back and finished the job.

On the final hand, Lee shoved all in with K-10 and Siginc called with A-9. The dealer didn't bring any help for Lee, who fell just shy of his fifth *WSOP Circuit* title. On the other hand, Siginc scored his second piece of gold. ♠

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2026 PGT \$1,000,000 Championship
No-Limit Hold'em Freeroll



Michael Wang
2,790,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 31%
After Flop: 94%
After Turn: 98%



Andrew Lichtenberger
2,665,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 66%
After Flop: 4%
After Turn: 2%

PREFLOP

With six players remaining and blinds of 25,000-50,000 with a big blind ante of 50,000, Michael Wang raised to 100,000 from the hijack. Andrew Lichtenberger called from the small blind.



Both players checked.



Lichtenberger bet 225,000, and Wang folded.

COMMENTARY:

The tournament situation had vastly changed when this hand went down at the *PGT Championship*, as Eric Blair had busted to leave the remaining players in the money. However, the ICM pressure was quite minimal due to the payout structure. The next player to bust would earn \$40,000, and the winner would receive \$500,000, half of the prize money. Because so much of the money was concentrated in the top spot, players were actually heavily incentivized to play for the win instead of focusing on ladder up. Under normal circumstances, Michael Wang wouldn't want to open A-5 offsuit from the hijack into two big stacks in the blinds. However, getting after it a bit was going to be a good strategy given the payout structure. Andrew Lichtenberger had an easy call in the small blind with his pocket pair. Wang elected to check back the flop, a fine play with his worst top pair hands on a board that would connect with Lichtenberger's range fairly often. Lichtenberger came out betting with an odd turn bluff, one that didn't make a ton of sense from a theory standpoint. The solver favors bluffing big with hands that can improve, like combo draws. Low pairs have poor river playability, and they block some hijack opens like 6-5 and pocket fives that would fold the turn immediately. Wang was actually supposed to mix in some folds with his worst top pairs, but that was facing a solver-approved bluffing range. Had he known how wide Lichtenberger was attacking his turn check back, he would have called all such hands and seen the river. As it was, perhaps Lichtenberger was playing to the payout structure, and his overly-aggressive bluff paid off.

CIRCUIT RESULTS



© MSPT

Event	Player	Payout	POV
DeepStack Venetian Las Vegas, NV \$1,600 NLH Jan. 1-4 \$500,000 GTD Entries: 349 Prizepool: \$500,000	1 Matthew Wantman	\$96,284	480
	2 Daniel Olsen	\$69,804	400
	3 Ron West	\$51,322	320
	4 Nicholas Rogers	\$38,274	240
	5 Michael Walsh	\$28,958	200
	6 Miquel Maimes	\$22,233	160
	7 Dan Stavila	\$17,325	120
	8 Kiat Lee	\$13,706	80
	9 John Riordan	\$11,010	40



© Hollywood Casino

Event	Player	Payout	POV
Hollywood Poker Open Hollywood Casino Kansas City, KS \$800 NLH Jan. 2-4 Entries: 281 Prizepool: \$185,310	1 Blair Hinkle	\$38,997	228
	2 Drake Bowers	\$31,000	190
	3 Jordan Pemberton	\$19,087	152
	4 Jon Stanfield	\$14,084	114
	5 Kevin Nachbar	\$10,563	95
	6 Douglas Glasscock	\$8,154	76
	7 Jacob Carter	\$6,301	57
	8 Wayne Nichol森	\$4,999	38
	9 Michael Tyler	\$3,873	19



© Planet Hollywood

Event	Player	Payout	POV
WSOP Circuit Planet Hollywood Las Vegas, NV \$400 NLH Jan. 1-4 \$250,000 GTD Entries: 1,349 Prizepool: \$475,522	1 Michal Nahum	\$60,000	384
	2 Kyle Grosshanten	\$42,000	320
	3 Ulysses Quintana	\$30,000	256
	4 Salvatore Dicarolo	\$22,000	192
	5 Dylan Weiss	\$16,300	160
	6 Tara Dunn	\$12,270	128
	7 Yansong Kou	\$9,300	96
	8 Loyal Sprague	\$7,200	64
	9 Alexander Holmes	\$5,600	32



© Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	POV
Winter Poker Open Borgata Atlantic City, NJ \$400 NLH Jan. 3-7 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 4,082 Prizepool: \$1,306,240	1 Michael Renna	\$190,740	528
	2 Thomas Cullis	\$129,145	440
	3 Jonathan Kim	\$87,900	352
	4 Tin Chan	\$58,220	264
	5 Brendan Wiley	\$39,505	220
	6 Daniel Weaver	\$29,395	176
	7 Andrew Nauth	\$22,800	132
	8 Nicholas Palma	\$18,315	88
	9 Daniel McGinnis	\$14,205	44

All payouts in USD.

TOURNAMENTS



© Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Winter Poker Open	1 Akash Hotwani	\$323,775	660
	2 Andrew Porter	\$219,160	550
Borgata Atlantic City, NJ	3 Bryan Leskowitz	\$148,180	440
	4 Stephen Press	\$98,775	330
	5 Taylor Wilson	\$66,970	275
\$600 NLH Jan. 7-11 \$2,000,000 GTD Entries: 4,280 Prizepool: \$2,225,695	6 Joseph Comisi	\$49,830	220
	7 Duane Mitchell	\$38,630	165
	8 Kevin Grabel	\$31,020	110
	9 Jason Nguyen	\$24,040	55



© Kings Resort

Event	Player	Payout	POY
WSOP Circuit	1 Cosmin-Ionut Nica	\$78,996	324
	2 Ersin Sancak	\$51,156	270
Kings Casino Rozvadov, Czech Republic	3 Christopher Campisano	\$34,452	216
	4 Anonymous	NA	
€3,000 NLH Jan. 8-9 €150,000 GTD Entries: 97 Prizepool: \$284,803	5 Fabio Giamberardini	\$17,632	135
	6 Anonymous	NA	
	7 Daniele Trippi	\$10,788	81
	8 Daniele Sacchi	\$9,048	54
	9 Mateusz Sikora	\$8,027	27



© Irish Poker Tour

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Galway Poker Festival	1 David Mulvany	\$82,179	456
	2 Davide Raschella	\$78,132	380
Galmont Hotel Galway, Ireland	3 Kevin Lynch	\$44,776	304
	4 Jude Ainsworth	\$33,640	228
	5 Barry Devlin	\$26,680	190
€700 NLH Jan. 8-11 €300,000 GTD Entries: 706 Prizepool: \$489,424	6 Damien Collins	\$20,880	152
	7 Liam McVeigh	\$16,240	114
	8 Ciaran Cooney	\$12,760	76
	9 Elizabeth Kelly	\$10,440	38



© Kings Resort

Event	Player	Payout	POY
WSOP Circuit	1 Georgios Vrakas	\$190,240	840
	2 Jose Casillas	\$127,020	700
Kings Casino Rozvadov, Czech Republic	3 Yannick Jobin	\$86,652	560
	4 Roman Papcek	\$60,436	420
	5 Artiom Poddubnii	\$43,036	350
€1,500 NLH Jan. 9-13 €1,000,000 GTD Entries: 692 Prizepool: \$1,047,369	6 Andreas Staschewski	\$31,204	280
	7 Anonymous	NA	
	8 Andrei Birgaoanu	\$17,400	140
	9 Rostyslav Sabishchenko	\$13,456	70

TOURNAMENTS



Qing Liu

© Wynn Poker Room

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Signature Series Wynn Las Vegas, NV \$1,100 NLH Jan. 9-12 \$400,000 GTD Entries: 370 Prizepool: \$400,000	1 Qing Liu	\$71,230	600
	2 Alexandru Tibulca	\$64,369	500
	3 Francis Anderson	\$41,571	400
	4 Evan Sandberg	\$32,638	300
	5 Fred Li	\$25,046	250
	6 Stephen Sola	\$18,870	200
	7 Rick Mechammil	\$13,941	150
	8 Yang Li	\$10,168	100
	9 Eric Baldwin	\$7,285	50



Michael Beckman

© Commerce Casino

Event	Player	Payout	POY
LAPC Commerce Casino Commerce, CA \$400 NLH Jan. 12-18 \$250,000 GTD Entries: 1,197 Prizepool: \$395,010	1 Michael Beckman	\$47,920	384
	2 Rick Mechammil	\$37,210	320
	3 Hovhannes Balayan	\$26,840	256
	4 Thanh Le	\$21,080	192
	5 Zhe Sun	\$13,660	160
	6 Robert Peppe	\$10,300	128
	7 Leopoldo Araneta	\$6,050	96
	8 John Ruff	\$9,310	64
	9 Gabriel Bertal	\$3,600	32



Alexey Laptev

© Thunder Valley

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Uncork Series Thunder Valley Lincoln, CA \$600 NLH Jan. 10-11 \$200,000 GTD Entries: 522 Prizepool: \$271,440	1 Alexey Laptev	\$52,320	420
	2 Robert Grossglauser	\$36,670	350
	3 Art Tanimoto	\$23,575	280
	4 Michael Hong	\$15,745	210
	5 Min Han	\$12,115	175
	6 Farzad Abbaszadeh	\$10,040	140
	7 Phillip Chiero	\$8,430	105
	8 Franklin Chavez	\$6,830	70
	9 Daniel Evans	\$5,235	35



Danny Gonzales

© MSPT

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Colorado Showdown Bally's Black Hawk, CO \$400 NLH Jan. 14-18 \$100,000 GTD Entries: 853 Prizepool: \$284,255	1 Danny Gonzales	\$54,578	365
	2 Jonathan McCray	\$33,565	304
	3 Daniel Brewer	\$24,910	243
	4 Marco Wiederaenders	\$18,473	182
	5 Roger Lim	\$13,994	152
	6 Phillip Gibbs	\$10,636	122
	7 Anthony Quattrocchi	\$8,117	91
	8 Jeremy Wood	\$6,437	61
	9 Cory Vince	\$5,038	30

TOURNAMENTS



© PokerNews

Event	Player	Payout	POY
888Live	1 Gorka Akerreta	\$58,000	300
	2 Raul Gordo	\$41,760	250
Casino Gran Via Madrid, Spain	3 Daniel Wu	\$29,000	200
	4 Martin Pardo	\$22,388	150
€888 NLH Jan. 14-18 Entries: 360 Prizepool: \$318,662	5 Julien Loire	\$18,328	125
	6 Turlough Mchugh	\$15,080	100
	7 Jake Collins	\$11,948	75
	8 Jorge Diego	\$9,164	50
	9 Nima Jenabi	\$6,844	25



© Merit Poker

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Montenegro Championship	1 Nazar Buhaiov	\$87,000	396
	2 Andrey Golubev	\$60,900	330
Splendid Resort Budva, Montenegro	3 Seref Anar	\$42,920	264
	4 Davor Pistalo	\$32,016	198
€2,750 NLH Jan. 17-19 Entries: 128 Prizepool: \$341,504	5 Nemanja Tatar	\$24,476	165
	6 Giorgiy Skhulukhiya	\$18,908	132
	7 Bojan Berberovic	\$14,384	99
	8 Nikolai Ivanov	\$10,904	66
	9 Illia Petrytsia	\$7,308	33



© Merit Poker

Event	Player	Payout	POY
Montenegro Championship	1 Vladimir Lappo	\$70,760	360
	2 Nikolay Fal	\$49,300	300
Splendid Resort Budva, Montenegro	3 Fausto Tantillo	\$33,640	240
	4 Bojan Berberovic	\$23,200	180
€880 NLH Jan. 14-18 €250,000 GTD Entries: 415 Prizepool: \$354,310	5 Mikhail Zavoloka	\$17,400	150
	6 Genrik Alekian	\$13,920	120
	7 Ali Moein	\$11,020	90
	8 Rashad Iskandarov	\$8,584	60
	9 Oleksii Shchukin	\$6,716	30



© MSPT

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
Golden State Championship	1 Zilong Zhang	\$54,334	432
	2 John Terrill	\$49,571	360
Sycuan El Cajon, CA	3 Robert Fortuno	\$42,817	288
	4 Samuel Weisman	\$23,220	216
\$1,110 NLH Jan. 15-18 \$300,000 GTD Entries: 265 Prizepool: \$297,562	5 Matthew Salsberg	\$17,415	180
	6 Michael Bailund	\$13,351	144
	7 Cody Blades	\$10,159	108
	8 David Bashel	\$8,127	72
	9 Clint Wolcyn	\$6,385	36

TOURNAMENTS



© GUKPT



© WSOP / Poker.org

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
GUKPT	1 Brandon Sheils	\$118,938	600
	2 Mehdi Chaoui	\$79,462	500
The Poker Room London, United Kingdom	3 Giorgos Onisiforou	\$52,300	400
	4 Peter Stewart	\$34,545	300
	5 Vikrum Mehta	\$23,517	250
£1,250 NLH Jan. 15-18 £250,000 GTD Entries: 368 Prizepool: \$513,952	6 Vitalie Crecul	\$17,031	200
	7 Paul Vasnunes	\$13,199	150
	8 Joseph Field	\$10,680	100
	9 Jacob Mulhearn	\$8,871	50

Event	Player	Payout	(POY)
WSOP Circuit	1 Winston Djonli	\$232,680	912
	2 Matthew Barnett	\$155,010	760
Choctaw Durant, OK	3 Venkat Nagabhairava	\$107,360	608
	4 Chris Vickery	\$75,700	456
\$1,700 NLH Jan. 16-19 \$1,000,000 GTD Entries: 992 Prizepool: \$1,396,830	5 Kenneth Lemer	\$54,360	380
	6 Dustin Schoonover	\$39,770	304
	7 Jeremy Kennon	\$29,650	228
	8 Todd Tucker	\$22,540	152
	9 Alejandro Jauregui-Reynoso	\$17,470	76

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Final Table Takedown: Tyler Phillips Caps Off Stellar Year With Third Ring

By Craig Tapscott



Tyler Phillips caught the poker bug at a very early age, along with his older brother Carter. While Carter made a name for himself on the circuit during the height of the poker boom, taking down a *European Poker Tour* main event and two *World Series of Poker* bracelets, 33-year-old Tyler has caught fire as of late, putting together a career year in 2025.

The Charlotte, North Carolina native has been particularly successful at nearby Harrah's Cherokee Casino, where he is among the top 10 on the venue's all-time money list. His run there started in 2019, when he took down the \$400 no-limit hold'em event at the *WSOP Circuit* stop for his first ring and \$123,216.

More deep runs and final tables followed after the pandemic, and in December of 2022, he finished runner-up in the \$1,700 *WSOP Circuit* main event for \$220,613. The next year, he returned to the same final table, this time taking fourth for another \$123,261.

Phillips' 2025 campaign included two final table appearances at the *WSOP* in Las Vegas, taking third in the \$1,500 stud event, and sixth in the \$1,500 2-7 single draw lowball event. He then went on to outlast 2,541 players in a *Wynn Summer Classic* mystery bounty event for \$241,001.

Of course, the year also included more wins at Cherokee, including a second *Circuit* ring in May in a \$400 pot-limit

Omaha eight-or-better event. He would close the year with ring no. 3, taking down the \$400 Monster Stack event for \$127,911. He now has career earnings of more than \$1.8 million.

Craig Tapscott: To what do you attribute your amazing year?

Tyler Phillips: Drinking way less and losing 40 lbs. was probably a big help for my mental focus last year. Also, getting glasses. I highly recommend getting your eyes checked if you ever struggle to see the community cards. It was a game-changer.

CT: Being able actually to see the flop is always a good thing. How do you plan to follow up your performance in 2025?

TP: My wife and I are expecting a second child in February, so I'm not sure what 2026 has in store for me in poker. I would love to increase my online volume and really get a lot better across all forms of tournament poker. I know I have some big ICM (Independent Chip Model) leaks and am probably a bit too aggressive in every spot. I'm hoping to spend more time on focused studying and enjoying the learning aspect of the game again.

The new tax laws also have me wary of playing anything live bigger than a \$3,500 *World Poker Tour* event (except for *World Series of Poker* and *WPT* \$10,000 main events).



Event: WSOP Circuit Cherokee Monster Stack
Buy-In: \$400
Entrants: 3,241
Prize Pool: \$1,069,530
First-Place Prize: \$127,911

Craig Tapscott: Let's talk about your latest win and six-figure score.

Tyler Phillips: Despite winning the tournament, I can't really recall the huge hands I lost. Early on day 2, after building a stack, I did bluff off half of it on the river. But I can't remember the details of the hand, because I was just so locked in on not letting anything affect my play.

The two hands I'm going to focus on instead were the two that I won.

HAND NO. 1

Stacks: Tyler Phillips – 4,000,000 (50 BB)
 Villain - 1,600,000 (20 BB)
Blinds: 40,000-80,000 with an 80,000 big blind ante
Players Remaining: 24
Players: 8

CT: What do you know about this opponent?

TP: My read on this player was that he was a good mid-stakes reg. He was smart and aggressive. I played with him most of day 1, and believed he was a solid, aggressive, live pro.

He won the opening event at Cherokee a week earlier as well, so his confidence was already sky high.

Phillips raised to 160,000 from UTG+1 holding Q♦ 10♦. The Villain called from the big blind.

Flop: 6♥ 5♦ 3♥

Villain bet 110,000.

CT: What did you make of this donk bet?

TP: Even with ICM adjustments and what should be a lack of offsuit gappers that make straights here, this board is still one where big blind will have some leads.

But I believe most aggressive live regs at the mid-stakes are leading far too often here. A lot will just see a low board and auto-lead 100 percent of their range.

Also, my hand just has too much equity in general versus the big blind range to fold to a 25% bet here.

Phillips called.

Turn: 2♦

Villain bet 330,000.

CT: Did you give the Villain any more credit now with the turn bet?

TP: Once the Villain leads on the flop, they are 100 percent barreling this card as well.

I picked up a backdoor flush draw, and now I can really never fold unless the big blind does something unexpected, like jamming 2x+ pot.

After playing with him for two days, I wasn't worried that he was somebody who would mostly have it here when he continues to barrel.

CT: What was the plan?

TP: I had two options. I could call, hope to hit a queen or ten, and bluff-catch. Or I could hit a diamond, and be ahead of basically all of his value.

The other option was to jam the turn and deny all equity, and possibly get some one pair hands to fold.

I was very focused on his actions while counting out chips, trying to get a read on what his confidence level was in the hand. While he was thinking about what to do and counting out chips, it just appeared to me that he was not confident in his bet, and he seemed very uncomfortable.

I also assumed that when I missed, I would lose the pot



100% of the time because I felt like it was extremely unlikely my opponent was ever going to check-fold. They were either jamming rivers or check-calling.

This ultimately led me to the decision to take the line of jamming, hoping to get the fold and end the hand right there.

Phillips moved all-in, and Villain folded. Phillips won the pot of 990,000.

TP: Fortunately for me, my opponent snap-folded, and I took down a significant pot.

HAND NO.2

Stacks: Tyler Phillips – 70,000,000 (58 BB)

Jacob Ferro – 60,000,000 (50 BB)

Blinds: 600,000-1,200,000 with a 1,200,000 big blind ante

Players Remaining: 2

TP: Going into heads-up play, I had been playing defense basically the entire final table anytime my opponent had opened or three-bet due to ICM pressure.

Ferro had held a pretty significant chip lead from six people on and was playing very well, and aggressively. This led to me being a nearly 4:1 dog going into heads-up play.

CT: What were you feeling as heads-up play started?

TP: To be honest, in these spots, I actually feel more relaxed and ready to battle because my expectations aren't as high. I am just focused on playing well and giving myself a chance to win.

Early on in the match, I was able to get value in a few spots and bluff catch in others. Momentum was heavily in my favor, and we were basically even in chips going into what was a very significant hand.

Ferro raised to 2,500,000 from the button. Phillips called from the big blind with 9♦ 8♠.

CT: Would you ever reraise in this spot?

TP: I did consider a three-bet, but it's also a situation where if he four-bet jams, it's pretty sad to have to fold this type of hand.

Flop: 9♠ 5♠ 4♠

Phillips checked, and Ferro checked behind.

Turn 8♠

CT: Would leading out be appropriate after he checked behind on the flop?

TP: I think going for a large bet or going for a check-raise are both on the table. I do think I will have bluffs, so leading large was fine.

Phillips bet 6,500,000, and Ferro called.

River: 10♠

TP: That was a horrible river. One that I am going to have to check and hope they check-back or check-fold. So many hands that can face a large pot-sized turn bet got there. Those hands can now bet for value or check back and win.

Phillips checked.

TP: Ferro immediately reached for chips to start counting them out.

Ferro bet 22,000,000.

CT: What did you make of the bet?

TP: Something felt off about the sizing, and in general, my gut was telling me almost immediately that he was hoping for a fold.

CT: How so?

TP: I understood that he had a lot of combos that were going to have me beat on the river. I also didn't believe he'd put this much pressure on me in a spot that looks like I may not have much that can call a large river bet.

We can go down the rabbit hole of... 'if he knows you think that, then maybe he'd bet larger, so you level yourself into a call.' But ultimately, I just had to go with my gut, and I decided he wanted me to fold.

Phillips called, and Ferro turned over 8♥ 4♥. Phillips won the pot of 63,200,000.

CT: I doubt you expected Ferro to have that hand.

TP: I was surprised when he showed 8♥ 4♥ for a worse two pair. Clearly, turning it into a bluff, not going for value.

I would have assumed that hand was strong enough to check back and win at showdown a high enough percentage of the time to not have to bluff.

CT: Great call. How much longer did heads-up last?

TP: After a few more hands, I jammed K-8 offsuit on the button and won versus Q-J offsuit to secure my third ring. I was very happy to win because my dad was planning on leaving that day, but decided to stick around to see how the tournament went for me.

It was great to share a victory photo with him and a memory that will last the rest of my life. It was also great having friends stick around to sweat the final table and support me. I feel very fortunate for everything that went into that win.

Follow Phillips on Twitter/X @TylerP_Poker. ♠

A COSTLY PREFLOP MISTAKE

By Jonathan Little

Someone on Twitter recently told about a hand from a \$500 buy-in tournament that illustrates a common mistake that many poker players are unaware they make.

With blinds at 800-1,600 with a 1,600 big blind ante, a loose, but straightforward player raised to 4,000 out of his 56,000 effective stack. A tight player called in the cutoff. Our Hero in the small blind three-bet to 14,000 with 9-9.

This three-bet size is not ideal at all. When faced with a three-bet that is only 10,000 more, both the preflop raiser and the caller are getting excellent pot odds, meaning they should continue almost every time. This would be fine if Hero had an extremely strong hand like A-A that is unlikely to get outdrawn, but most flops bring at least one overcard to pairs like nines, and unpaired hands are unlikely to make a pair.

If I wanted to three-bet with 9-9, I would have gone all-in for 56,000 total. While this will force many marginal and weak hands to fold, our Hero will often scoop the 12,000 pot with no showdown. When he happens to get called, he will usually be against a decently strong range of big pairs, A-K and A-Q, but even that is not too terrible because Hero will win roughly 35% of the time.

While going all-in risks going broke, it is almost certainly the most profitable option. Calling to try to see a favorable



flop is also acceptable, especially if the initial raiser is overly tight (meaning he will rarely fold to any three-bet).

As expected, both opponents called the 14,000 three-bet. The flop came $K\spadesuit J\heartsuit 6\diamondsuit$. Hero checked and then folded when the initial raiser bet 12,000 into the 45,200 pot.

While this may seem like an innocuous hand because Hero made an easy check-fold in a multi-way pot on a flop that is awful for him, he was completely unaware that a simple all-in before the flop would have likely won the pot with relatively little risk, especially given the preflop raiser is somewhat loose.

To help ensure you do not make this mistake, use the following equation to determine if a preflop all-in is profitable.

If the all-in is decently profitable, it is usually the best play. If it is only marginally profitable, calling the preflop raise (or folding if your hand is junky) is likely best. Most of



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the time when your stack is roughly 20 big blinds or shorter (or even a bit deeper if there is a raise and a call before the action gets to you), three-betting small is not a wise play.

Profit for an all-in over a raise = (% everyone folds) x (amount you win when they fold) + (% someone calls) x (equity in the pot when called – amount you put in the pot)

You first must figure out how often someone yet to act will call. While it is difficult to determine with a high degree of certainty, you can estimate. The big blind will rarely call and the preflop caller is also unlikely to call because if he had a premium hand, he would have three-bet before the flop. The preflop raiser will usually only call with A-A, K-K, Q-Q, J-J, 10-10, A-K, and A-Q. That range is a total of 62 combinations of hands.

Most loose players raise from middle position with all sorts of hands, such as A-2 suited, 9-7 suited, and J-10 off-suit. This will be roughly 310 combinations of hands, meaning Hero will get called by the preflop raiser $62/310 = 20\%$ of the time. To account for the players yet to act, let's assume Hero actually gets called 35% of the time.

When Hero gets called, he will win the 119,200 pot 35% of the time, meaning his equity when called is $.35 \times 119,200 = 41,720$. Plugging in the numbers, we have:

Profit = $(.65)(11,200) + (.35)(41,720 - 56,000)$

Profit = $7,280 - 4,998 = 2,282$

While profiting 2,282 (or about 1.5 big blinds) on an all-in may not seem like much, it is actually a hefty profit to extract from out of position. Also, I assumed that the preflop

raiser is tighter than many loose players are, and also that the players yet to act will call more often than many will. So, profiting 1.5 big blinds is essentially the “worst-case scenario.” When the worst-case scenario is a decent profit, that play should strongly be considered.

You may be wondering how you are supposed to do this math at the poker table. Well, you aren't!

You should spend significant time away from the table to determine when you should make these all-ins so you can easily recognize them when they arise. If you run enough simulations away from the table, you will understand better when this maneuver is justified.

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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 STRATEGIES FOR CRUSHING LOOSE-PASSIVE TABLES

By Alex Fitzgerald

Loose-passive tables can be goldmines if you know how to exploit their biggest weaknesses. In this article, we'll break down five proven strategies that will help you consistently extract maximum value from the most profitable games in poker.

Raise To Two Times The Pot

Many times, I'll be playing a passive cash game, and I'll see one of my friends raise to the size of the pot.

“No!” I want to yell at them. “Raise to two times the size of the pot! They'll still call you!”

If you're reading this article, it's likely you're more serious about poker than you realize. Most players don't do any kind of study. You likely play better hands than your opponents. You should raise and get value from them because they're not going to fold to you!

Your weakest opponents will call anything just to see the flop. Your opponents with a clue will fold. That means you'll be playing HUGE pots versus the worst players at the table with generally superior hands. If you can get in position as well, this is an INSANE edge!

Do you want to put together a huge stack quickly when you sit down? This is how you do it.

Do Not Three-Bet These Hands

Oftentimes, I'll be sitting at a loose-passive table with my friends. One of the local regulars will raise for the first time in a while. My friend will dutifully three-bet A-Q offsuit from the cutoff and end up losing a large pot.

On the way home I have to ask them, “What the hell were

you thinking?”

They will inevitably say something like, “I had A-Q off-suit in position. What's the problem?”

But let's think about this for a moment... If your opponent is the type to limp in with everything, won't that also include A-J and A-10? If that's the case, what are they raising with? 10-10+ and A-K+ right?

Oops. Why would you want to three-bet into that range? They're limping their mediocre and good hands. You have to expect they can only have the premiums left when they finally do raise.

The good news is you can cold call more versus these players because they get married to one pair post-flop. Hands like pocket pairs, suited connectors, suited-gappers, suited aces, and suited Broadways go up in value versus them because they're so likely to make a top pair or overpair that they can't get away from.

Who Is Predictable Post-Flop And Who Isn't?

It's important when you first sit down at these tables that you pay attention. Some of these players will limp in with anything and then look annoyed once you raise. This is someone who expects to be coddled at every poker table. Their home games back home always featured a lot of limping and flops. They think you're an asshole for not playing poker their way.

They'll still call you preflop, don't get me wrong. But they won't have a plan for post-flop. They're not used to pots this large in their home games.

If they flop a set or two pair with draws out there, they'll often get excited and jump the gun with a big raise. If they just call your continuation bet and look annoyed, they will have a mediocre pair or draw that they want to see more cards with.

Deny them the privilege. Blast them. They'll hate you and end up folding.

If your table is loaded with players like this, you need to be raising with any hand that has a semblance of value. You'll be getting so many bluffs through it doesn't even matter.

However, if the players at your table love to call down randomly or raise for the hell of it, you can't raise anything you want. You'll have to raise value hands and play them well. You'll have to be willing to call down when a line makes zero sense.

Now, that doesn't mean you play 8-8+ and A-Q+ necessarily. If everyone is limping J-5 suited then K-J offsuit becomes a value hand to isolate with. But you still need something that beats their hand when no one wants to fold.

Who Is Getting Sick Of You?

If you execute the strategies I've described above, you are going to make enemies.

Most people want to play a friendly card game. They've worked eight hours that day and they want to relax. They want to see some flops, drink some beers, watch some sports, and hang out.

Then your stupid ass shows up and starts raising huge on every other deal. They get indignant. 'Who does this idiot think he is? Does he think he can bully me?'

You'll get folds for a while, but the rubber band will snap

at some point. You'll start seeing hints. They'll fold with more disgust. They'll start talking shit. They'll begin making comments about your raise sizes.

Good. That shows you got in their head. They wouldn't be complaining about you if they didn't feel threatened.

If they keep going at you just say a flat, "I guess I play bad."

If they won't stop, keep repeating, "I guess I play bad."

It holds a mirror up to them, and they don't like it.

Tighten your ranges once you live rent free in their head. You'll love the results.

Who Always Calls When A Draw Misses?

This is a very important detail...

There are many people that cannot fold on the river when they see a missed draw on the board. The thought that you might be bluffing with a missed draw eats them alive. They can't live with it. They will always call.

If you learn you have one of these players at your table, you need to bluff them less and go for more thin value bets.

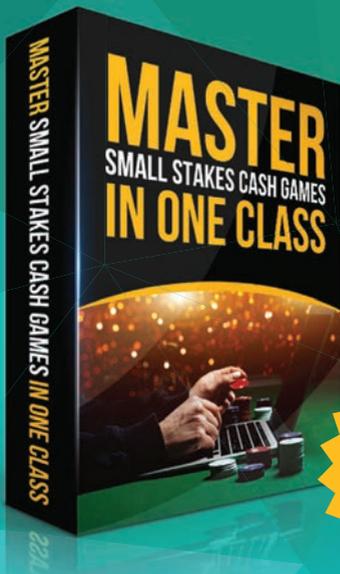
Conclusion

Loose-passive players give you every opportunity to win big pots, you just need the discipline to play them correctly. By applying these five strategies with patience and precision, you'll turn chaotic tables into steady, reliable profit. ♠



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: AN EXTRA ZERO MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

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.

On my way to final tabling the 2019 *Triton London* main event, I made a big call down vs. Mike Watson, a fellow Canadian pro with an impressive resume that includes a *World Series of Poker* bracelet and *World Poker Tour*, *European Poker Tour*, and *Triton Poker* titles.

Sosia Jiang was so impressed by my play that she called me “a maestro” at the table. You can watch the clip of the hand online (or by following the QR code), but the broadcast switched to the other table before Sosia complimented me, so you’ll have to take my word on it.

In the hand, Mike (30 bbs) min-raised the button, I (100 bbs) defended J♦ 4♣ from the big blind. I check-raised a 4-3-3 rainbow flop and Mike called. On the 2♦ turn I made a blocker bet and Mike called, and then I checked a 10♦ river. Mike made a pot-sized shove and I called and beat his K♣ 5♣.

The day ended, and I went back to my room and quickly set up a sim to run overnight to assess my level of mastery throughout the hand. I woke up to some sad news instead — I had punted.

When I arrived at the turn, I was actually supposed to shove. Mike will have a lot of ace-high hands that turn a wheel draw, and I want to deny equity to his 10-outers.

I remembered this hand and thought to myself, “This is perfect fodder for POTD.” I was literally called a “maestro,” for the first and likely last time in my life, after I won a hand where I blundered. A humbling experience for all involved, except...

When I dug into this hand for this column, I realized something. In the initial sim I ran, I must have given myself a larger flop check-raise than the one I used in game and in reality. In actuality, I played J-4 perfectly vs. Mike. Bradley Cooper should star and direct in a biopic about me!

So, I had to go back through my big file of hands where I punted to Mike to find a different hand I could write about. I found another hand which also looked like I did everything right. I had weak top pair on a paired board and got all-in with the best of it vs. a huge draw that bricked and I won.

However, upon further analysis, there were a couple of problems. I had accidentally added a zero to the small blind’s stack size, giving them 70 big blinds instead of seven. That gave me a very different pre-flop output that drastically changed what my pre-flop and post-flop strategies should have looked like. Keep reading to see how I messed up.



Event: 2021 PokerStars \$5,000 No-Limit Hold’em
The Hand
 In level 15 of an online tournament with blinds of 3,500-7,000, I had 658,625 and was the biggest stack at the table. An unknown player who started the hand with 216,545 raised to 15,750 from the hijack. I called from the cutoff with J♣ 10♣.
 Mike Watson then three-bet to 47,250 from the button, having started with 456,173. The blinds folded, as did the initial raiser, and I called.
Flop: J♦ 9♣ 9♠
 I checked, and Mike bet 39,813. I raised to 126,000. Mike called.
Turn: 7♦
 I moved all in, and Mike called for his last 266,298 with Q♦ 10♦.
River: 2♣
 My hand held against his big draw and I dragged the 943,846 pot.
What Was I Thinking?
 I thought that given the stack sizes, Mike would have enough hands like A-K offsuit, A-Q offsuit, and 8-8 that I’d need to continue J-10 suited against a three-bet, even

though my range was a little face-up and I was out of position.

On the flop, I thought I wanted to fast play top pair with an undercard to the jack, because it was more vulnerable to overcards and had the most backdoor straight potential, which would give it the best equity against overpairs.

Once I got to the turn with so little to play and top pair with a gutshot, I had no other option but to stick it in.

What Did I Get Wrong?

At the time, I thought my preflop call was close, but fine. The problem is, once I give the small blind the correct seven big blinds instead of 70, Mike gets a much worse price on his squeeze. Because with almost seven big blinds dead, the small blind can call all-in 25% of the time with hands as weak as 5-4 suited.

Since Mike will end up all-in vs. someone a lot of the time he three-bets, he naturally three-bets a lot less often. However, he still mostly three-bets hands as strong as Q-Q+, and when he three-bets with a short small blind, he has J-10 dominated with an overpair almost a quarter of the time. J-10 suited does not have enough equity to call preflop and should have been folded to the three-bet.

The reasoning for why I should fold preflop is the same reasoning for why I should never raise the flop, in that I am simply up against an overpair too often. This is especially true vs. a range that often bluffs A-J offsuit and K-J suited preflop; my hand is not good enough to put money in the pot preflop and not good enough to raise the flop.

Additionally, my flop raise size is much too large. After Mike bets the flop I have around two times the pot to play for, so I don't need to make a raise much larger than the

minimum. I raised more than 3x.

Once we got to the turn, there was no debate. I needed to go all-in with top pair and a gutshot, and I was fortunate to have the best hand and held.

Types Of Errors I Made

Too Much Money

Grade

I made a lot of mistakes in this hand, but I think the saving grace is that Mike was probably not adjusting his three-betting range as extremely as the solver was. The solver plays some goofy traps with hands like A-Q suited that humans never find, so I suspect all my plays are doing fine.

I can't perfectly range Mike, but there's an asymmetry to all my plays; it feels like my preflop call could be winning small or losing medium. My decision to raise is probably fine, but not for that sizing, especially when calling will always be fine.

Squeezed pots with unequal stacks preflop are unusual spots that are difficult to execute, but they are technical hands that are all about the details. My plan was not detailed enough, so I will give myself a B-. ♠



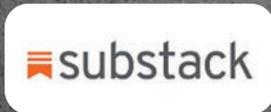
Sam Greenwood is one of the winningest tournament poker players ever and is third on Canada's all-time money list, having cashed for \$42 million and counting in high roller events all over the world. The former stock trader-turned-champion has played millions of poker hands and is breaking them down 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.

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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SPICE UP YOUR HOME GAME: THE VARIETY PACK

By Kevin Haney

As this is the final planned article in the Spice Up Your Home Game series it seems like a good idea to highlight a few exotic variants that didn't fit neatly in past installments.

Around 10 years ago there was a game called **Duck Flush** that got its 15 minutes of fame in high-limit mixed cash. It's a one-winner, five-card triple draw variant where the best high hand wins. However, it must qualify with at least a flush. If no one qualifies, then the best deuce-to-seven low holding scoops the pot.

It's worth repeating that this is not a split-pot variant, a seven low is worthless if at least one other opponent makes a flush, full house, or better.

A flush is often the winner because when you pick up a four-flush, it's much easier to complete that draw than it is for either two pair or a trips to fill up or make quads. However, a premium low draw has value, particularly against a single opponent. While it may be a small underdog against a dealt four-flush that will get there around half of the time, it would be a clear favorite over two pair, trips, or three to a flush.

As always, position is paramount. Suppose after the second draw you are holding $8♥ 6♥ 5♥ 3♥ 2♣$ and your opponent checks, indicating that he is likely incomplete. When that is the case, your likely best play would be to bet and stand pat. If your opponent is destined to make a flush you are apt to lose even when you make one as well, however, when he bricks you virtually always have the winner.

It's safe to say this game is quite unlike any other and for that reason alone it might be worth a try.

Then there's a split-pot Omaha High variant that begins with three boards but whichever one receives the lowest river card disappears leaving only two. While this game has been around for many years, I've recently heard it referred to as **Squid Game**, presumably as a nod to the highly popular Korean dystopian Netflix series where losing contestants are executed.

Which board gets eliminated is pure chance, thus it's important to have good prospects on at least two of them. It appears that more skill would be involved if the eliminated board was the one that has the lowest card amongst all five board cards. (For instance, if one of the three flops contained the $2♥$ then it would be a big favorite to be eliminated as only either the $2♣$ or $2♦$ appearing on one of the other two big boards would cause them to be killed.)

But there could be more interesting scenarios such as when the lowest card among the three boards was instead the $5♣$ where the other boards are drawing to many outs to be eliminated. All of this must be accounted for in your decisions.

Omaha X-or-Better is another interesting game. It plays the same as Omaha high-low before and after the flop, but before the turn is dealt two dice are rolled to determine X, the qualifier for the low hand:

12: Queen

11: Jack

10 through 5: Face Value

4, 3, or 2: No low is possible, so it's played purely as high

Craps players will recognize that seven is the most likely outcome, so you will often be playing Omaha seven-or-better, but a six or the normal eight qualifier are frequent occurrences as well. The qualifier will be a seven or higher 58.3% of the time, so low-oriented holdings, particularly those containing an A-2 combination, are still highly desired. However, there might not be a low possible, or it might be very hard to make, so drawing to non-nut low draws with no other possibilities would likely be a losing play.

In contrast **Omaha 10-or-Better** played where the superior deuce-to-seven low takes the low half will create a drastic divergence in playable hands when compared with normal Omaha high-low split. The ace loses all of its power with regards to making a low and the new premium hands

would contain either 2-3 or 2-4, however there's more balance in playable holdings as there is no longer one all-powerful card.

Let's not forget about the stud variants, a friend of mine told me that his private game often includes **Caveman**, a split-pot game where the best stud high and badugi holdings chop. And they play it as Super, meaning everyone gets four down cards and must discard two before fourth street otherwise their hand is automatically fouled.

A pair of aces with three different suits and a low card (e.g. A♣ A♦ 2♠) would be a great starting hand as are rainbow holdings such as A♠ 5♥ 6♣ or 2♣ 3♠ 4♥. In this game making a "pair-dugi" on fourth street is quite valuable. For example, 2♣ 3♠ 4♥ 2♦ would now have a pair and an increased number of badugi outs.

Any holding can scoop, and trip kings hold an equity advantage over 2♣ 3♠ 4♥. It's a huge favorite on the stud high side, and with three different suits already in place it will make a king badugi or better around half of the time. And when trip kings don't make a badugi it's often because they picked up either quads or a full house which would be a virtual lock for half.

Finally, there's what may be considered a goofy split-pot stud game that I read about many years ago called **Tommy Tutone**. This may be a fact that mostly only the pre-Money-maker crowd knows, but Tommy Tutone was an American 80's band most famous for its hit single 867-5309 Jenny. The song reached #4 on the Billboard Hot 100 and people all over the country with the phone number were forced to get it changed.

In Tommy Tutone, the pot is split between the best

stud high holding and whomever can "dial" the furthest into Jenny's phone number. The tens are what you need for the zero, but it's quite unlikely anyone would need to get that far. Once you have 8-6-7-5 winning the "Jenny" side is probably all but assured so you either want to make the straight or pair up giving you a chance to scoop.

The eights (and to a slightly lesser extent the sixes) are fundamentally key cards which may create tighter play.

Although nothing compares to the tight play of **Chicago**, a well-known split-pot variant where the highest spade in the hole wins half. The game causes most players to be reluctant to put chips into the pot due to a fear of getting freerolled from the start.

Each of these variants is compelling in their own way and there are many good options here to spice up your home game. Duck Flush might be the most appealing of the bunch since it's another one-winner game to add to a rotation often dominated by split-pot variants. The strategy also appears to be complex and varied, and bluffing may be rampant as any successful shenanigans would be rewarded the entire pot. Let's bring back Duck Flush!



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

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2026 PGT \$1,000,000 Championship
No-Limit Hold'em Freeroll



Chad Eveslage
5,175,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 60%
After Flop: 75%
After Turn: 84%



Michael Wang
4,275,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 32%
After Flop: 25%
After Turn: 16%



PREFLOP

With three players remaining and blinds of 50,000-100,000 with a big blind ante of 100,000, Chad Eveslage limped in from the small blind. Michael Wang checked his option from the big blind.



Eveslage bet 100,000, and Wang called.



Eveslage bet 175,000. Wang raised to 575,000, and Eveslage called.



Eveslage checked. Wang bet 850,000, and Eveslage folded.

COMMENTARY:

With three players left in the PGT Championship, more than half of the prize money was earmarked for the winner. That meant everyone was heavily incentivized to play for the win. Under normal circumstances, with Andrew Lichtenberger having folded on the button with 13 big blinds, that meant Chad Eveslage and Michael Wang should have played very passively. Instead, Eveslage got aggressive right away with second pair on the flop, and Wang called with his gutshot and position. On the turn, Eveslage had a hand that fit well into a small sizing, because he could seek value from high-card hands and lower pairs. A big size would only serve to isolate himself against mostly better hands that had him in bad shape. Draws without much showdown potential are often some of the best turn bluffs. Wang correctly found one here, looking to put pressure on hands like Eveslage's while generating immediate folds from some bluffs, most of which would beat six high. Eveslage stuck around for the river, where he faced a bet of around half the pot. What made this spot especially interesting was that Wang should have been very polar on the river, split between trips or better for value and complete air for bluffs. Thus, he was actually more incentivized to use a much bigger bet with his range, around the size of the pot or even an overbet. It wouldn't make much sense to bluff with even a pair of threes, since that hand would sometimes win a showdown. Eveslage may have suspected something was off with the sizing, as he used multiple time banks. However, he ultimately let it go, ceding the chip lead. Despite the results of this hand, Eveslage would go on win the tournament anyway, with Wang busting in third.

PGT

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

SCHEDULES

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JANUARY	Jan. 7-March 1	L.A. Poker Classic	Commerce Casino ■ Commerce, CA	
FEBRUARY	Feb. 9-24	WPT Las Vegas Spring Festival	Venetian Hotel & Casino ■ Las Vegas, NV	
	Feb. 11-23	Potomac Winter Poker Open	MGM National Harbor ■ Oxon Hill, MD	
	Feb. 12-23	WSOP Circuit North Carolina	Harrah's ■ Cherokee, NC	
	Feb. 16-March 22	Wynn Millions	Wynn ■ Las Vegas, NV	
	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 1-15	PokerGO Cup	Aria PokerGO Studio ■ Las Vegas, NV
March 5-15		Triton One Jeju	LES A Casino ■ Jeju-do, South Korea	
March 5-16		RunGood Poker Series	Graton Resort & Casino ■ Rohnert Park, CA	
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 14-April 1		Triton Super High Roller Series Jeju	LES A Casino ■ Jeju-do, South Korea	
March 16-April 1		WPT Rolling Thunder	Thunder Valley Resort & Casino ■ Lincoln, CA	
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		April 2-12	Spring Poker Round Up	Wildhorse Resort & Casino ■ Pendleton, OR
		April 2-13	WSOP Circuit Illinois	Grand Victoria Casino ■ Elgin, IL
	April 7-19	7 Clans Poker Cup Series	Coushatta Casino & Resort ■ Kinder, LA	
	April 7-19	Minnesota Poker State Championship	Running Aces Card Room ■ Columbus, MN	
	April 8-28	WPT Seminole Hard Rock Poker Showdown	Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino ■ Hollywood, FL	
	April 16-27	WSOP Circuit Lake Tahoe	Caesars Republic Lake Tahoe ■ Lake Tahoe, NV	
	April 16-27	WSOP Circuit Mississippi	Horseshoe Casino & Hotel ■ Robinsonville, MS	
	April 21-26	MSPT East Chicago	Ameristar Casino & Hotel ■ East Chicago, IN	

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POKER GLOSSARY



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

Air - A bad hand with little to no value.

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

Backdoor - A draw needing two streets to complete.

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

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

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

Blocker - Holding one of your opponent's outs.

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

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

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

Broadway - A straight to the ace.

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

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

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

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

Chop - A split of the pot.

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

Collusion - Working with another player to cheat.

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

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

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

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

Drawing Dead - When your hand can no longer win.

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

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

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

Equity - The mathematical expected value of your hand.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gutshot - An inside straight draw.

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

Hollywood - Exaggerating and overacting to sell strength or weakness.

Horse - A player financially backed by someone else.

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

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

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

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

LAG - A loose, aggressive player.

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

Muck - To fold.

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

Nuts - The best possible hand on a given board.

Open - To bet first.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rainbow - Three or four cards of different suits.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TAG - A tight, aggressive player.

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

Tilt - Frustration or anger that leads to poor play.

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

VPIP - The percentage of hands voluntarily played preflop.

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

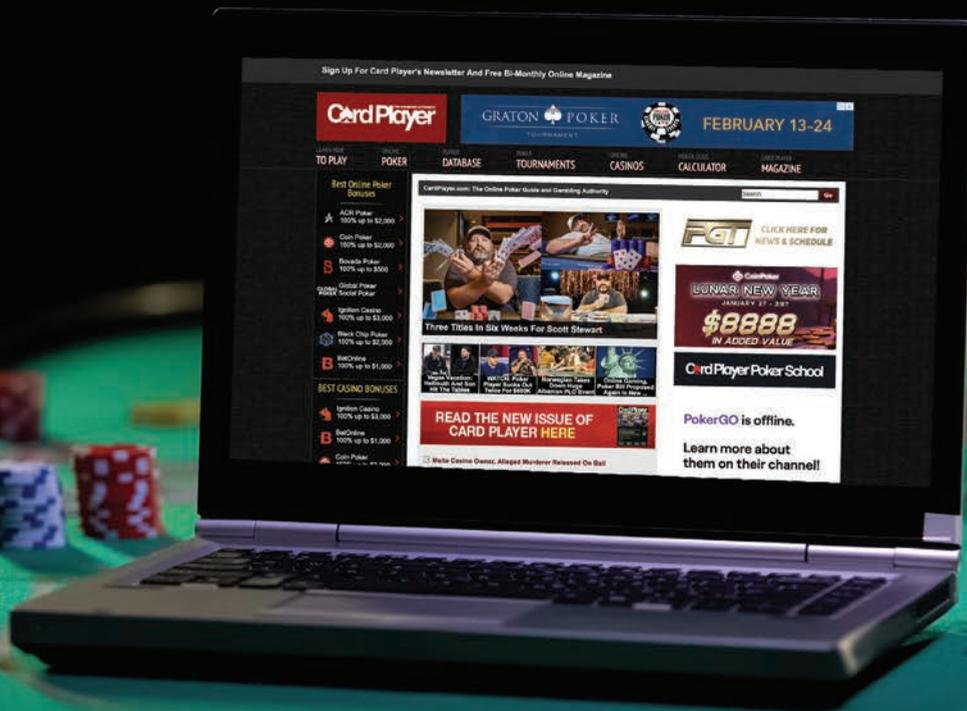
Wheel - A five-high straight.



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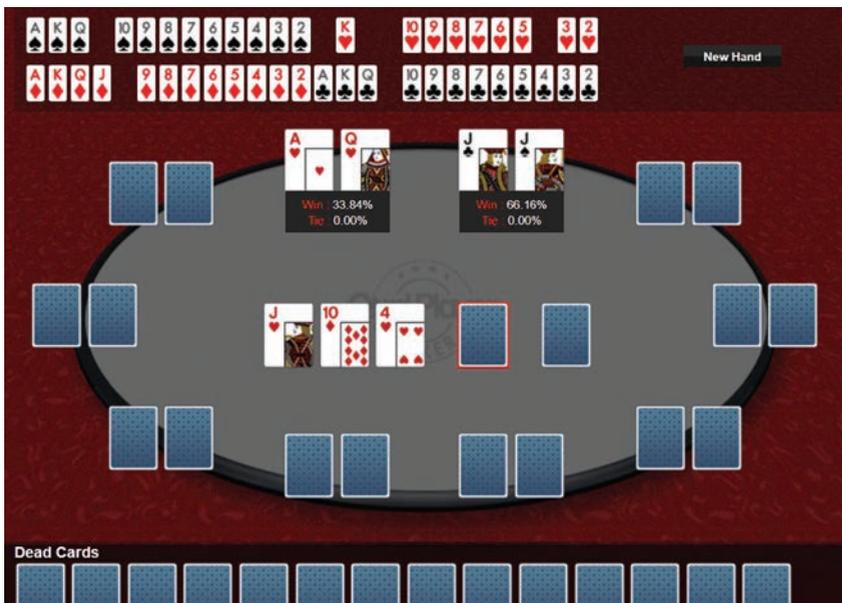
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CALCULATING ODDS

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

HAND MATCHUPS

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

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By Jonathan Little

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Early in a \$1,000 buy-in event, you have a stack of 70,000 at 250-500. The under-the-gun player raises to 1,200 and it folds to you in the big blind with A♣9♣.

Question 1: Should you fold, call, reraise to 3,600, or reraise to 5,000?

Answer: Even though the UTG player should have a strong range, folding is out of the question. Three-betting as a bluff may have some merit with your ace blocker, but being suited gives you plenty of playability to call and see the flop.

You call and the flop comes 5♣5♦3♣. You check and UTG checks behind. The turn is the K♠.

Question 2: Should you check, bet 1,000, bet 2,000, or bet 3,000?

Answer: The turned king should be excellent for UTG's range, which could easily contain hands like A-K and K-Q. While it may be tempting to bet your flush draw, always consider which better hands will fold and which worse hands will call. While a few weaker ace-highs may call, when you bet, for the most part, most better hands will call and most worse hands will fold. When that is the case, checking is usually ideal.

You check and UTG checks behind once again. The river is the A♦.

Question 3: Should you check, bet 1,000, bet 2,000, or bet 3,000?

Answer: When your opponent checks behind on the turn, it is highly likely they have some sort of ace-high or absolutely nothing. If they have an ace, you usually split the pot. If they have nothing, they will not call a bet, but they may bluff. Even though your hand is now quite strong, the best option is to check and try to induce bluffs.

You check and your opponent bets 2,000.

Question 4: Should you fold, call, raise to 6,000, or raise to 22,000?

Answer: Your only viable options are to call or raise. While it may be tempting to try to force your opponent off a chop when they have an ace, the best play is to simply call and realize your equity, because every once in a while, your opponent will show you an abnormally strong hand that you lose to.

You call and your opponent shows A♥5♥ for a full house, which should have extracted substantially more value. ♠



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