

MICHAEL WANG WINS FIRST GOLD BRACELET AND \$466,120 IN \$5K NLHE

New Jersey Poker Pro Outfoxes Fellow Pros at Stacked Final Table -- Including Bryn Kenney (2nd), Greg Merson (4th) and Amir Lehavot (6th).

Greg Merson Moves Past \$10 Million in Career WSOP Winnings

Michael Wang arrived in a big way tonight, on poker's biggest stage, against the toughest competition.

The 26-year-old poker pro from Livingston, NJ collected his first World Series of Poker gold bracelet, an accomplishment made even more impressive by the intensity of play throughout the tournament, a huge comeback when he was battling heads-up, all culminating at the end of a long six-year journey to reach this personal poker pinnacle.

Wang won what was the first event open to all players at the 2015 series, collecting \$466,120 in prize money. Moreover, he now enjoys bragging rights for conquering what's expected to be one of the toughest fields of the entire year. This achievement comes after grinding out cash game profits for years, mixed with an occasional WSOP Circuit event. However, until this point, Wang had not done anything close to this in terms of glory or self-satisfaction.

"I felt I could play against anyone, but then to actually come here and prove it, is pretty overwhelming," Wang said afterward. "This tournament is surely one of the tougher there is."

Following the grand opening held at the Rio in Las Vegas, which was the traditional Casino Employees Championship completed the previous day, Event #2 brought together quite a different lineup consisting of 422 of the world's top No-Limit Hold'em specialists. Indeed, this was a \$5,000 buy-in marquee competition that produced a stellar lineup anticipated to be stacked with well-known professionals, many with considerable WSOP past glory attached to their resumes. Such expectations were met, and then some. The tournament lasted three full days and ended late on a Friday night on the ESPN Main Stage with a packed gallery of spectators.

The final table included three gold bracelet winners -- including Greg Merson (Laurel, MD), a three-time champion best known for winning the 2012 WSOP Main Event. Had Merson won instead, this would have marked his fourth triumph in four years. Also among the gauntlet of formidable challengers was Amir Lehavot (Tel Aviv, Israel), a former WSOP Main Event championship finalist and gold bracelet winner. Then, there was Bryn Kenney, who was aiming for his second win following his breakthrough victory at last year's WSOP in the \$1,500 buy-in Ten-Game Mix (Six-Handed) event.

This finale seemed to belong to Kenney most of the way, at least until the final hour of competition when a stretch of three hands basically flip-flopped the outcome. Kenney,

adorning is trademark designer sun shades and a steely glare under the spotlight, arrived as the final table's second-biggest stack. However, he seized the chip lead and appeared unstoppable at one point. In fact, Kenney seemed to get stronger as the final day grew longer, widening his advantage with each passing hour as his opponents were steadily being eliminated. Kenney seemed easily on his way to victory, but then lost the critical hands late which see-sawed the title over to Wang, who had been speechless and contemplative throughout, until the final hand when he finally revealed both emotion and relief.

The final hand occurred when both players completed a flush on the turn, but Wang's Jack-high hearts topped Kenney's Nine-high. Wang moved all in on the river and after about a minute of thoughtful deliberation, Kenney somewhat reluctantly announced a call, thus ending the night in spectacular, as well as unexpected fashion. One doesn't often see someone patiently waiting for spots and overcoming big chip leads against great players very often.

Kenney, from Long Beach, NY finished as the runner up. The 28-year-old poker pro collected a respectable consolation prize amount to \$287,870, although he was clearly disappointed after losing a 9 to 1 chip advantage when heads up play against Wang began.

Third place went to Artur Koren, a 26-year-old student from Vienna, Austria. The payout totaled \$208,177.

Former world champion Greg Merson, now representing WSOP.com as an online player and ambassador finished in fourth place. He scooped another \$152,126 from the series, moving to more than \$10 million in career WSOP earnings.

Fifth place belonged to Jason Wheeler, a Chicago-based poker pro. The winner of the World Poker Tour's "High Roller" event in Amsterdam held just a few weeks ago, added \$112,339 to his poker bankroll.

Amir Lehavot, third in the 2013 Main Event championship, took sixth place. The poker pro originally from Israel earned \$83,838, but missed the chance to add to his jewelry collection following his previous win in 2011. With this cash, he now has more than \$4.6 million in career WSOP earnings.

The seventh-place finisher was Joe Ebanks, from Kent, OH. That deep run paid \$63,210.

Eighth place went to Long Nguyen, a machinist from Houston. Nguyen picked up a nice check for \$48,137.

Rounding out the final table was Byron Kaverman, from Columbus, OH. Busting early from the finale still netted a nice score worth \$37,030.

The winner, Michael Wang, was born in New Orleans, LA. He is a graduate of Lehigh University in Pennsylvania with a degree in biology. Wang has been playing poker off and on professionally for about six years. This was his biggest career win, by far.

“I’m still trying to process it,” Wang said afterward. “This is the most prestigious prize in poker. This is the best thing in the game that’s ever happened to me. It’s going to take some time for this to sink in.”

FUN FACTS:

First open gold bracelet event in the 2015 WSOP schedule
Average Age of Participants: 34.8 years
Males (415) / Females (7)

EVENT DIRECT LINKS:

For this event’s results, visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/tournaments/results.asp?grid=1136&tid=14202>

For Wang’s player profile page, visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/players/playerprofile.asp?playerID=94422>

For the Live Reporting Log for this event, please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/tournaments/updates.asp?grid=1136&tid=14202>

For photos from this event, please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/tournaments/photos.asp?grid=1136&tid=14202>

For official winner photo, please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/pdfs/reports/14202-winner-photo.jpg>

For the live stream archive of this event, please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/videos/?vcat=2>

(Note, shows up 48 hours after event airs)

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