



## 2016 WSOP OFFICIAL REPORT

### RAY DEKHARGHANI WINS \$10K RAZZ CHAMPIONSHIP

Kansas poker pro collects \$273,338 top prize in Event #20

18 years after finishing second at WSOP to Doyle Brunson, Dehkharghani finally gets his gold bracelet

Poker world on edge, some breath giant sigh of relief as Jason Mercier finishes as runner up

Phil Hellmuth cashes, now has 117 in-the-money finishes at WSOP, more than any player in history

### MEET THE LATEST WSOP GOLD BRACELET CHAMPION

Name: Ray Dehkharghani

Birthplace: Tehran, Iran

Age: 45

Current Residence: Kansas City, KS (USA)

Marital Status: Married

Children: 1

Profession: Poker Player (former medical student)

Number of WSOP Cashes: 13

Number of WSOP Final Table Appearances: 6

Number of WSOP Gold Bracelet Victories (with this tournament): 1

Best Previous WSOP Finish: 2<sup>nd</sup> (1998)

Total WSOP Earnings: \$681,791

Personal Facts: Both parents are doctors, came to US and studied medicine, but decided to play poker for a living and has been doing so for 20-plus years

Winner Quote:

*“It means a tremendous amount to win this gold bracelet. The best players, they are generally spending their time playing in high-stakes cash games. That being said, we do follow what goes on in the tournaments, especially when one of them (winners) sits down with us to play. But the reality is, it’s meant a lot to me for a long time. My goal this summer was to win a gold bracelet. I only play 2 to 3 tournaments a year....my mission was to win a bracelet and now I’ve won a bracelet, so I feel very fortunate.”*

There was a lot more on the line than just a World Series of Poker gold bracelet and more than a quarter-million dollars in prize money when Jason Mercier and Ray Dehkharghani became engaged in the fiercest heads-up duel of any gold bracelet competition played thus far at this year’s series.

The focus of pretty much the entire poker universe focused on the ESPN main stage at the Rio in Las Vegas where Mercier and Dehkharghani tangled in a knock-down, drag-out lowball battle that reportedly could tip the scales in favor of a potential seven-figure swing should Mercier’s tournament rampage at the 2016 WSOP continue.

Just three days after winning his fourth career gold bracelet in the \$10K buy-in Deuce-to-Seven No-Limit Draw Lowball Championship, Mercier was back onstage again hoping to win a fifth WSOP title and second victory this week.

However, Dehkharghani had his own ambitions and sights set on a different final outcome that some might have anticipated. The Iranian-born poker player from Leawood, KS won the \$10,000 buy-in Seven-Card Razz Championship tournament, which was played over three days and nights and just concluded at the Rio in Las Vegas, while a near record viewership watched the action on a delayed live-stream.

Dehkharghani collected \$273,338 in prize money, making this the biggest tournament win of his career. Perhaps just as interesting as the thrilling heads-up finale was the story behind Dehkharghani’s long journey to get here.

Born in Iran in 1971 to two medical doctors, the Dehkharghani family immigrated to the United States when Ray was young. He aspired to become a doctor as well, but while attending medical school at the University of Kansas, he discovered a passion for poker.”

“I took a leave of absence from medical school to play poker, and then went back,” Dehkharghani remembered. “I went back for one day, and quit. I’ve been playing poker since.”

Dehkharghani quickly outgrew the local games in Kansas City and began taking road trips more often to Las Vegas. He began playing in higher-stakes games at the Mirage, and continues to play Mixed Games around the city.

Dehkharghani won his victory by ultimately conquering a final table which included several notable stars, including Jason Mercier, John Racener, Brian Hastings, Rich Zhu, and Bart Hanson. However, Dehkharghani fully expected to get into a one-on-one duel with Mercier, which is exactly what happened. Oddly enough, the added pressure of Mercier's well-publicized side bet, which could conceivably pay him close to \$2 million should he accomplish what some might say is an extraordinary longshot – winning three WSOP gold bracelets in a single year, might have been his downfall, at least according to Dehkharghani, who had the best seat in the house in order to express such a direct observation.

“Jason and I were at this final table and I kept telling him, ‘it’s going to be me and you,’” Dehkharghani said. “It played out that way. He started off as an underdog, and did very well early, and had me down about 2 to 1. Then, when he lost his chip lead, it was really clear the stress really set in and affected him. It wasn’t a matter of my capitalizing on that, but I do believe the weight of (the side bets) affected him negatively in the match. It was palpable.”

Dehkharghani continued: “I wish the best for him, but I also wanted to win, of course. Jason is not one to become frustrated. But he did become frustrated. If it weren’t for that added pressure, the final table would have turned into a party. We would have been high-fiving each other and drinking beers. It still would have meant a lot to win, but I think the distraction of that side action was significant.”

While Mercier finished as the runner up, the \$168,936 consolation prize seemed to be the last thing on his mind. That said, he’s clearly primed for more deep runs and potentially another sweat as a final table finalist with so many events still to play (49 as of this writing).

Meanwhile, Dehkharghani was thrilled with his victory, particularly given his own history in WSOP events. In his first cash 18 years ago, Dehkharghani played heads up for a gold bracelet against poker legend Doyle Brunson, and lost.

“At the (1998) final table it was me, Doyle, and Berry Johnston, and Harry Thomas. I remember it well,” Dehkharghani recalled. “Then, it got down to Doyle and myself – and Doyle was the superior player. His skill and experience was superior. It was something like this (tonight), to be candid.”

Tonight, some two decades later, Dehkharghani reversed the tables on another great player and this time walked away with his first WSOP gold bracelet. With this victory, Dehkharghani now has 13 cashes and 6 final table appearances.

Dehkharghani is married and has one child. He spends much of his time playing poker on the road in high-stakes cash games in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. In fact, he plays regularly with Brunson locally in Mixed Games. Demonstrating how oddly tight-knit the poker community can be sometimes, he’s also good friends with Mercier.

This exciting tourney attracted 100 entrants which created a prize pool totaling \$940,000.

Aside from the winner, here's a brief report of the other top finishers who made the final table:

**Second Place:** Jason Mercier, from Hollywood, FL was the runner up. He owns four gold bracelets and barely missed latching on number five. Mercier, fresh off his last win in a lowball event three days early, had to settle for a \$168,936 payout.

**Third Place:** Yueqi Zhu, originally from Benxi, China and now living in Rowland Heights, CA cashed for the third time at the 2016 series, which now includes a second- and third-place showing. Zhu was runner up in the \$1,500 buy-in Dealers Choice tourney. He's pocketed more than \$200,000 during the first two weeks of events this summer after adding \$116,128 to his poker bankroll.

**Fourth Place:** Brian Hastings, from Hanover Township, PA took fourth place. This was his fourth cash of the summer and deepest run in 2016, so far. Last year, Hastings won two gold bracelets and now has three WSOP wins to his credit. This deep run paid \$82,078 in prize money. He now has more than \$1.8 million in career earnings as the WSOP.

**Fifth Place:** Robert Campbell, from Berwick, Australia, made his third final table appearance at the WSOP with this fifth-place finish, which paid out \$59,694. Last year, the Australian poker player finished as the runner up in the \$1,500 buy-in HORSE tournament.

**Sixth Place:** John Racener, from Tampa, FL posted his second final table showing of this year's series. Sixth place paid \$44,712. Racener, a former November Nine finalist, now has \$7.1 million in career WSOP earnings. However, he has yet to win the elusive gold ring, despite 39 in-the-money finishes.

**Seventh Place:** Bart Hanson, from West Hollywood, CA came through with his fourth cash in 2016, paying out the sum of \$34,521. Hanson now has 27 career cashes at the series, including five final table appearances. This tied his best showing, to date.

**Eighth Place:** Jyri Merivirta, from Helsinki, Finland, has now cashed five times at the WSOP, but three of those deep runs placed him at a final table. This first cash of the year for Merivirta paid \$27,499 in prize money.

#### **OTHER NOTABLE IN-THE MONEY FINISHERS:**

Max Pescatori, a four-time gold bracelet winner, bubbled the official final table as the ninth-place finish.

Robert Mizrachi, who won his fourth gold bracelet earlier at this year's WSOP, finished 10<sup>th</sup>.

Matt Grapenthien, a gold bracelet winner who came in second in an event earlier at this year's WSOP, cashed in this event (13<sup>th</sup>). He now has three top-12 finishes in 2016.

Shaun Deeb, a gold bracelet winner, cashed in 14<sup>th</sup> place.

Phil Hellmuth, Jr., a 14-time gold bracelet winner and member of the Poker Hall of Fame, finished in 15<sup>th</sup> place. This marked his 117<sup>th</sup> cash at the WSOP, more than any other player in history.

### **FUN FACTS:**

The ages of participants ranged from 21 to 75. The eldest player in the field was Billy Baxter.

There were 74 Americans and 26 players from elsewhere. The top five nations represented were – the United States, Russia, Great Britain, Austria, and Australia.

The breakdown by gender in this event was 97 percent male and 3 percent female.

### **EVENT DIRECT LINKS:**

For this event's official final results (listing all players who finished in-the-money), please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/tournaments/results.asp?grid=1232&tid=14920>

For Ray Dehkharghani's official player profile page, please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/players/playerprofile.asp?playerID=1733>

For the live reporting logs for this event, please visit:

<http://www.wsop.com/tournaments/updates.asp?grid=1232&tid=14920>

To access licensed images from this all other 2016 WSOP gold bracelet events, please visit:

[www.pokerphotoarchive.com](http://www.pokerphotoarchive.com)

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

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

*(Note: Will appear 48 hours after event concludes)*

*Written by Nolan Dalla (WSOP Media Staff)*