



WSOP CIRCUIT 2017-18 MAIN EVENT REPORT

Circuit Stop:	Harrah's Cherokee	Date:	4 December 2017
Event:	No-Limit Hold'em Main Event	Entries:	957
Buy-in:	\$1,675	Prizepool:	\$1,435,500

CHARLES JOHNSON WINS CHEROKEE MAIN!

Atlanta grinder snags the ring and almost \$275,000 for his landmark victory

Charles Johnson has just become the WSOP Circuit's newest Main Event Champion. Johnson outlasted a field of 957 entries in the series' flagship event, collecting his first gold ring and the top prize of \$272,744. He also earned one of the precious tickets for the season-ending Global Casino Championship.

"We're here, man!" the champ opened his postgame interview. "It's really a dream."

Despite putting on a stern face as he posed for photos, Johnson let his emotions take over once he started talking. "There are a lot of people who've been doing this for a lot longer than I have and have never been here," he said, struggling to keep his composure. "I feel blessed. Like... just blessed."

Johnson, 37, is the manager of a contact center in Atlanta, Georgia. That's just his day job, though. By night, he's a poker player. He's new to the game, having only discovered it within the last four years.

Atlanta is home to a thriving and talented community of poker players, and Johnson has embedded himself into it. He plays in charity tournaments at the American Legion several times a week, facing off against a rotating cast of characters that includes ring winners Hamid Izadi, Cody Pack, David Aker, and Bubba Dukes. It's not your typical home game.

Johnson credits that group (and Dukes in particular) for helping shape his own strategy over the past four years. "I feel like that got me ready to be here tonight," he said after his win. "I'm a pretty decent player, but there's something about the experience those guys have."

As Johnson tells it, this breakout came on the heels of one of the worst downswings he's experienced as a poker player. He recounted some of his recent results: "I went to Tampa. I was

the chip leader late in Day 2. Dumped off my chips. Went to Jacksonville. Ran it up, dumped off my chips. You see the pattern here?”

The trip to Cherokee started off pretty poorly, too. Johnson bricked everything he played early in the series, and he decided to leave town and head back home to get his head straight. He almost skipped the Main Event entirely.

“It just wasn’t happening for me,” he explained. “I’m like, I’m done. I had to get my shit right.”

After playing at the Legion on Thursday night, Johnson decided to make the drive back to Cherokee to try to satellite into the Main. “Ended up getting a seat, and that’s all she wrote,” he beamed.

Johnson did not dump off his chips in this one. He ended Day 1 with 159,500 chips on a single entry, and he had climbed into the chip lead by the end of Day 2. From there on out, he said he executed his game plan to perfection.

“Learning from all those mistakes, learning from those guys,” Johnson said, “it finally all came together over these last three days. It got me this ring.”

Johnson’s previous best score came in last year’s Monster Stack event at the same venue. He made the final table, finishing in ninth place for about \$5,400. He intended to use that as a stepping stone to a larger result.

“My goal was a five-figure cash,” he said, glancing down at his payout card in front of him. “We just skipped over that,” he laughed. Johnson went straight to six figures.

Winning a quarter of a million dollars is enough to change the lives of most folks, but Johnson said he doesn’t want it to change his: “I’m going back to work,” he said. “I may not be there tomorrow, but I’ll be there this week.”

He lingered on that thought for a while, too. “I’ve seen a lot of people win a lot of money, and the next thing you know, they’re broke. I’m not trying to do that,” he continued. “I’m not going to do anything stupid. I’m going to continue doing what I’m doing now. Grinding.”

Despite rubbing shoulders with Atlanta’s elite players, Johnson said he’s never played an event quite as taxing as this one. “This shit is hard,” he admitted. “This tournament was by far the most difficult tournament I’ve ever played. It’s a mental grind. It’s draining.”

The Main Event field was littered with bracelet winners, ring winners, and other tournament poker standouts. The final table alone included three former WSOP Circuit winners, Ryan Jones (2 rings), Krzysztof Stybaniewicz (2), and David Jackson (1).

For Johnson, the victory is the culmination of four years of hard work on the felt. He explained how far he’s progressed since he began playing the game.

“Four years ago, I didn’t know what a big blind was,” he said. “A year ago, I didn’t know what a three-bet was. I had no clue. I had to go and read, study, and all that good stuff. We all gotta come from somewhere.”

As he shook hands with the staff and soaked in his friends’ congratulations, Johnson had a final thought for the reporters: “One thing I want you to know is that I’m going to be back,” he said. “I promise.”

MEET THE LATEST WSOP CIRCUIT RING WINNER

Name:	Charles Johnson	Age:	37
Nationality:	USA	Profession:	Manager
Birthplace:	Columbia, SC	WSOP Bracelets:	0
Current Residence:	Atlanta, GA	Previous WSOP Circuit Rings:	0

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