



BRANDON BARNETTE WINS FIRST GOLD BRACELET EVENT OF 2015

California Poker Supervisor Pockets \$75,704 in Casino Employees Championship

Most of the last twenty years at the World Series of Poker have honored casino employees with their very own gold bracelet event, a gathering designed not only to determine the top industry poker player, but also intended to recognize and honor the extraordinary work performed by all sectors of a much larger segment of national economy which employs far more people than many might realize.

Consider this: The gaming industry employs more people than either the automobile industry, or the airlines.

Indeed, the gaming industry has never been bigger, nor reached more people than today, impacting the lives of workers and families in virtually all 50 states in a positive way that provides both career opportunity and personal advancement.

The annual WSOP Casino Employees event continues to stand out as the longest-running, most prestigious employee-related sporting competition in the world, attracting workers in numerous trades and skill sets – from dealers and bartenders, to reporters and executives, to online tech support people and so many more professionals currently working in the business -- who come to Las Vegas each year to try and make a dream come true.

Brandon Barnette had his dream come true, and then some, on this Thursday evening at the Rio Las Vegas, as the first gold bracelet winner of 2015. He topped a field of 688 players and collected first-place prize money totaling \$75,704. This marked his first gold bracelet victory, and the triumph couldn't have possibly been more exciting, since it pitted two former WSOP dealers against one another at the conclusion.

Barnette is a 29-year-old dual-rate poker supervisor from Corona, CA who has dealt two years previously at the WSOP -- in 2010 and 2012. His home base is the Pechanga Casino in Southern California. Remarkably, Barnette is a champion of two different competitions now, since he's previously played on the world championship roller hockey team, which won three such titles.

Following two long days of steady competition, Barnette was in serious competition throughout most of the tournament. He arrived at the final table of nine players as chip leader. Barnette lost his advantage at one point momentarily to the player who would become his main rival during the finale -- Greg Seiden. However, once play reached five-handed, Barnette seemed to be a dominant force and was not in serious jeopardy of busting out as players were eliminated, despite some formidable competition. Then, the unexpected happened, when two critical hands late in the tournament during heads up play completely flip-flopped the course of events, leading to a major comeback by Seiden which no one could have foreseen earlier.

In shocking fashion, Seiden seized the chip lead away from Barnette during heads-up play, catching what can only be described as a couple of miracle cards on two different hands which extended his life at the final table and put him on the verge of victory. In fact, he had Barnette down to just four big blinds at one point, when Barnette hit his own two-out miracle on the river when facing elimination. He rode that momentum back to the chip lead over the course of just a few hands, and eventually won the gold bracelet. On the final hand, Barnette won with a full house.

"I felt the lead slipping away at one point, but I came this far and I wasn't going to go away easy," Barnette said afterward. "I felt like I had the advantage when we were heads up, so my goal was just to keep the pressure on. You don't get here often, so you have to make the most of the opportunity."

As the runner up, Seiden earned \$46,735 as a consolation prize. He is a full-time teacher and part-time poker dealer from Las Vegas, NV who has also previously dealt at the WSOP.

Third place went to Zachary Seufert, a 28-year-old dealer from Ventura, CA. He collected \$30,382.

Gary Kochalka, a casino shift manager from Reno, NV took fourth place, good for \$22,315. The 58-year-old Michigan State University graduate enjoyed his best poker payday ever.

Fifth place went to Michael Kahn, a 48-year-old prop player (e.g. poker pro) from Chicago, IL.

Overall, 72 casino employees enjoyed a payout, from a prize pool totaling \$344,000. The in-the-money finishers were stacked with American and Canadian players, who made up the vast majority of entrants.

One of the most interesting developments of this finale was that among the top seven finishers, *none* had ever cashed in a WSOP-related event before. All of the top seven players were newcomers to the WSOP and appearing at a final table for the first time. This made for a final day that was both exciting and unpredictable, with Brandon Barnette ultimately coming out on top as the first gold bracelet winner at the 2015 WSOP.

When asked what he plans to do next, given the biggest payday of his career, so far, Barnette wasn't sure.

"At least my boss gave me tomorrow off," he said.

HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE: This event originated in 2000. Prior to that, it was known as the "Media Invitational." In the 16 years the Casino Employee's Event has been held as part of the WSOP, poker dealers have won 12 of the 16 championships, or three-fourths of the total victories. The only Casino Employee champion to go on to bigger things later in poker was David Warga (Chandler, AZ), who won this tournament and then also won a second gold bracelet in an open event held a few years later.

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