

USD 12 Million Prize: Poker champion's riches challenged

The newly crowned World Series of Poker champion has found himself in another heads-up competition, only this time the venue is the Regional Justice Center and the stakes are half of his main event prize money.

A British television producer now living in Los Angeles has sued Jamie Gold in Clark County District Court, saying the winner of the World Series of Poker's signature event had failed to live up to an agreement to split any winnings.

A judge earlier this week signed a temporary restraining order keeping Gold from collecting any of his prize money.

Gold, a 36-year-old self-proclaimed Hollywood agent from Malibu, Calif., finished first out of a field of 8,773 players to win the \$ 10,000 buy-in no-limit Texas Hold ,em event. Play spanned two weeks at the Rio and ended in the early morning hours of Aug. 12.

Gold's prize was USD 12 million, the largest single payout in World Series of Poker history.

However, nine days later, Bruce Crispin Leyser, who bills himself as a poker instructor and player, said Gold had reneged on their agreement to split the prize money 50-50.

In the lawsuit, Leyser contends that he and Gold both were vying for a single entry in the main event to be paid for by Bodog, an online gambling site.

Leyser helped Gold secure a pair of Hollywood B-list celebrities to wear clothing emblazoned with the Bodog logo during the World Series main event. The filing stated that Gold insisted he be the player to use the Bodog seat in the

main event but would split any winnings with Leyser.

Gold had a remarkable run during the tournament, taking over the chip lead on the fourth day and extending his margin each session.

At the final table of nine players, Gold entered play with a USD 9 million lead in tournament chips.

On Aug. 10, the day before the final table began, Gold left a telephone message for Leyser, assuring him that their deal was still in place, according to the filing.

„I wanted to let you know about the money,“ Gold said in the message.

„You’re obviously very well protected; everything will be fine, but nothing’s going to happen today, that’s for sure. I have the best tax attorneys and the best minds in the business working for me from New York and L.A., and what we’re probably going to do is set up a Nevada corporation, and it’s going to ... have to pay out of the corporation. I can’t just pay out personally because I could get nailed.“

Gold said payment might take a few days, and he asked Leyser to be patient.

„I promise you, you can keep this recording on my word, there’s no possible way you’re not going to get your half ... after taxes.“

According to the complaint, Leyser said Gold has refused to pay.

Las Vegas attorney Richard Schonfeld, who is representing Leyser, wouldn’t comment on whether there was a signed document spelling out the agreement between Leyser and Gold to share the winnings.

Schonfeld also said he wasn’t aware whether Gold had agreed to

split the winnings with anyone else.

Sources said Leyser attended the final table, watching as Gold eliminated seven of his eight competitors over a 12-hour stretch.

In a statement released through his lawyer and publicist, Gold said he was „disappointed“ that „a person he has only known since July of this year has elected to file litigation rather than continue the parties' discussions in an effort to find a resolution to this matter.“

Harrah's Entertainment, which owns the World Series of Poker, declined to comment on the lawsuit, citing the pending litigation.

Sources said the Rio is still in possession of Gold's USD 12 million prize.

Gold has a two-year endorsement deal with Bodog that calls for the Web site to fund standard tournament buy-ins and for Gold to make promotional appearances.

Also, the Internet gambling site agreed to fund a USD 1 million television production deal for Gold. Bodog now has a Jamie Gold poker table that enables Bodog players to compete against the World Series of Poker champion.

Susan Mainzer, a spokeswoman for Bodog, said the company did not have an agreement to share in any of Gold's winnings from the World Series. All that was asked of Gold was that he wear Bodog logo shirts and hats during the main event, which was filmed for television broadcast by ESPN.

Bodog released a statement concerning the lawsuit, saying Gold earned the Web site's entry by helping find celebrities to play in the main event.

„We made the decision to include him on Team Bodog in the World Series due to his aid in setting up our celebrity team,

his successful tournament background and his master-student relationship with (two-time World Series of Poker champion) Johnny Chan," Bodog said. „We are unaware of any side deal he may have made in obtaining these celebrities.“

According to Internet Movie Data Base, an online site, Leyser was listed as the producer of three British television series between 1998 and 2001.

In the lawsuit, Leyser said he helped secure two celebrities for Bodog: actor Matthew Lillard, who played Shaggy in the Scooby-Doo movies, and Dax Shepard, a comedian who appeared on the MTV series Punk'd.

Leyser asked the court to block the Rio from paying Gold because he was afraid Gold would gamble away the winnings.

„It may be Defendant's desire to divert the funds at issue into a business or corporate entity and Plaintiff could then lose his ability to collect the funds that he is lawfully entitled to," the lawsuit stated.

Gold said after winning the tournament that he wanted to use the money to help his father, who is ailing with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Since the final table ended, Gold has drawn his share of controversy, fueled in part because he was seen with bodyguards during the later part of the tournament.