

# Father of six wins World Series of Poker

Las Vegas – By pulling a six of hearts on the river card, Jerry Yang made a low straight – but high enough to beat Tuan Lam's pair of queens and win the World Series of Poker in the wee hours of Wednesday morning.

The two Asian-born immigrants went head to head for more than 30 hands before Yang finally prevailed. And for winning the No Limit Texas Hold'em World Championship, he takes away USD 8.25 million, what will doubtlessly be many lucrative sponsorship deals and the coveted title bracelet – the ultimate poker honor.

Coming into the final showdown at Harrah's Entertainment's Rio casino here with over USD 100 million in chips, a better than 4-1 advantage, Yang used it to relentlessly whittle down his opponent's stack with a series of raises Tuan could not afford to match. Down to USD 9 million, Tuan did come back with an all-in bet to double his chips at one point but just couldn't come back from such a deep deficit.

„When I came, it's kind of like I had this feeling inside that I can do it," Yang said after his big win. He added that he did a lot of praying – often for specific cards during a tight hand. „God helped me win this thing," he said. „All the credit and glory goes to him."

As the runner up, Tuan walks away with USD 4.8 million. „Something came into my head that I would come in second," he said. „I didn't have any cards at all today."

Yang was one of the more compelling and colorful personal stories in the tournament. The 39-year-old escaped from the Communists ruling Laos when he was a child and spent time in a Thai refugee camp. He spoke no English until he was 13 and

only started playing poker two years ago, making him a rank amateur by most standards. Now a psychologist and social worker, he won his place in the tournament courtesy of a USD 225 buy-in to a satellite event in California.

„I am a very, very part-time player,“ he said at a press conference before play got underway. „As a father of six, I don't have a lot of time to play [and use] just a little change here and there.“ He added that he plans to 10% of his winnings to four different charities, including the Ronald McDonald House, the fast-food giant's favorite cause.

Tuan, born in Vietnam in 1966, made it out to Canada at the age of 19. He worked as a laborer before deciding to turn poker pro. This is his third appearance in the tournament, having previously finished no higher than 46th.

### **Seeming sprint turns marathon**

The final table of nine started championship play at noon Tuesday Pacific time. The end came just before 4 a.m. Wednesday after more than 200 hands and about 16 hours of play, including breaks.

At first it looked like it would be quick. The players fell off fast in the early rounds as Yang went on a tear, quickly knocking out Philip Hilm, a 31-year-old Dane with a degree in economics. Hilm had started the day as the leader among the final nine with USD 22.07 million in chips but was gone after less than two hours when he went all-in only to miss a flush draw and fall to Yang's two kings.

Yang, who played aggressively in the hours after the opening hand, then dispatched three other players in fairly short order: Fellow Americans Lee Watkinson, Lee Childs and Hevad „Rain“ Khan. His chip count cracked the USD 70 million mark at that point and he was holding just under 60% of all the chips in play before losing a couple of big hands and turning temporarily cautious.

South African Raymond Rahme knocked out Jon Kalmar of the U.K. in late afternoon and things slowed to a crawl with a four man field holding until well after midnight before a steadily thinning crowd.

No one else was eliminated until about 1 a.m. – after more than 100 hands – when Yang claimed yet another victim: Alex Kravchenko, who went all-in with an ace and king in the hole but got no help on the flop and was taken down by three eights.

A few hands later, Yang did it again, topping Rahme's pocket kings by pairing up his ace in the hole. That sent Rahme – and presumably his boisterous cheering session as well – back to South Africa in third place, albeit with the consolation of USD 3 million-plus in prize money.

### **,Hard to watch'**

The quick, dramatic bust-outs of the first – and last – few hours notwithstanding, watching live poker in person has little of the excitement of the taped-for-TV versions with their tight edits and „hole cams.“ There is tableside seating for little more than a handful of spectators, mostly supporters and/or family members of the players, while sponsors get the rest of the decent viewing spots.

Fans without those connections will most likely be watching the action on one of the monitors positioned around the cavernous Amazon room in the Rio's convention center. Breaks are frequent and the cross-table banter that makes the broadcasts so entertaining is sparse – and generally inaudible even when the players do talk.

Of course, when things get slow, the spectators can always gawk at the grand prize, which is piled up in cash on a table under the watchful eye of several armed guards.

Earlier in the evening, Harrah's CEO Gary Loveman stopped for

a look at the final table. His company has invested millions in the World Series of Poker since buying it in 2003 – mostly with an eye toward building out the franchise as an intellectual property play rather than a gambling one. While pointing out the brisk action of the first few hours Tuesday, he conceded the whole thing is better viewed after ESPN's editors have had the time to juice it up.

In person, he said, „it can be pretty hard to watch.“

Of course, it does have immediacy: Disney unit ESPN won't even start showing the World Series until late next month and it will be well into the fall before the final table makes it to the small screen.