

Davis Harari
12/9/22
PSPC GRID Entry

I spent 6 months grinding up a \$5,000 bankroll playing home/casino games ranging from .5/1 to 1/3. The week that I hit that \$5,000 mark, Matt, one of my best friends from college informed me that his job had placed him in Las Vegas for the next month and that I could crash with him for a few nights if I wanted to come out west. I had frequent flier miles for the flight and some Mlife/Fremont hotel comps for the rest of the trip. My grand total for flight and lodging for 10 days came to \$200.

Now, I'm not going to bore you guys with low-level cash hand histories. The next 10 days were filled with me playing low stakes poker for 10-12 hours a day. It's as fun as it sounds – it's not. I was having a good time in Vegas otherwise, but towards the end of the trip I had a realization: 1/2's the same everywhere. I didn't have to fly out to the desert to raise to \$10 preflop.

After 10 days, my grand total from poker (and a fair amount of degen'ing on Fremont) was -\$186. That wasn't what I came out to do — I knew that I was a better player than my recent results had indicated. The morning of my return flight, I decided I was going to play tournaments until I either busted my \$5,000 bankroll or hit something worthwhile.

I impulsively decided to not get on my 1pm plane at 11:30am. Checkout time from Luxor was at 11:00 – and I didn't know where I was going yet. I had 30 minutes to pack up my stuff and figure out where I was going. I sorted TripAdvisor by cheapest first – I've stayed in crappy hostels/motels before and overall am a very low maintenance person. I figured that by staying somewhere for \$20 a night, I'd be able to maximize the amount of shots I could take before flying back home. I accepted that there was a real chance I'd go back broke – but I didn't really care. If I didn't take my shot now, then when?

I booked the cheapest bed in Vegas - a 6-person shared hostel just past the Stratosphere. Let's just say you get what you pay for — it was not a happy place. A fair amount of the people there were bordering on homelessness and there was barbed wire surrounding their outdoor gym. In addition to this, I had the constant stress of knowing that all that separated my bankroll from the rest of my roommates was a tiny lock. My plan was to take the Deuce to the strip and live off food comps. I was in town to play poker, nothing else.

Disclaimer: I had never played tournaments prior to not getting on that flight. My only knowledge of hand ranges was from watching televised events. I downloaded a free Nash chart app on my phone while on the Deuce to the strip and studied it for 5 minutes – whatever, I get the jist of it. Let's play some cards.

The first day, I played the \$140 daily at the Aria. Top 13 spots paid -- I finished in 15th. It was depressing to say the least — I felt as if I was at rock bottom. Before the first night of sleeping at the hostel I called the airline to see if I could get on the flight that I had deliberately missed the day prior. I couldn't.

I couldn't have slept more than 2-3 hours the first night there. One of my roommates was loudly vomiting all night, the sheets itched, and I was going through an existential crisis... like dude, you've got a finance degree and you're really doing this? I made it my goal to at least cash something so that I could get a decent hotel room.

While on the bus to the strip, I opened Poker Atlas and saw that there was a \$200 satellite to win a seat into the \$1,600 Venetian main event. I decided that I was going to go take a shot at that. I was at risk twice in the satellite but after studying the GTO method on how to win flips, I persevered and won a seat to the main.

The first day was surreal – once again, I was running on minimal sleep due to my housing arrangements, but I managed to bag a slightly above average stack. As I walked back to the Deuce stop outside of the Venetian and headed on my way back to the hostel. I kept thinking to myself, someone's gotta win this thing, why not me?

I had to get in the money for this tournament to be able to get out of there. A min cash here was over \$3k – that was more than enough for me to get a nice room for a few nights, party for a bit and get home with my head held high.

Day 2: I get up at 7am after already being completely awake for the past 4 hours by my fighting roommates. There's no way I slept more than 3 hours last night. I hit the Denny's by the Stratosphere then get on the Deuce.

I get to the Venetian and feel like I'm about to fall asleep. I go to the self-serve coffee/tea dispenser in the middle of the room and make myself an iced coffee. I get to my table, and the cocktail waitress comes around. I ask for another iced coffee and toss her a fiver.

The first few hours of the day go easy as can be – my bluffs got through and I flopped a set and got paid. This poker thing is pretty easy, right? The table breaks and I bring my 3 racks of chips to the new table and immediately get some comments – whatever, I'm just on a heater, it happens. At this point, my body was giving out. I was trying my hardest not to fall asleep in between every hand.

CO opens, I'm in the SB, I look down at KK. I put in the 3b, and it folds back to him. He puts in a healthy 4b. We're the two big stacks at the table – around 50bb effective. God damn, am I good enough to fold kings here? No, I'm not. I shove, he snaps, I know that I've just ruined my tournament. He shows the aces but the dealer puts a king in the window, and I hold. I'm for sure the chip leader now.

I lose a few 10-15bb flips and chip down a bit. I still have a very healthy stack, around 80bb. I was falling asleep in between hands at this point. The lack of sleep combined with the intensity of playing stakes that I'd never even come close to before was starting to wear heavy. We go on a 15 minute break and I pass out, sprawled across a recliner in the sportsbook.

I groggily stumble back into my seat and realize that I'm a bit out of place at this point. There were no recreationals remaining at my table and I recognized a few players from old WPT episodes. It was at this point that something clicked in my head – this might be the only opportunity that I'd have

for a long time to prove to myself that I could hang with the pros. They might be better studied than me, but there's no question who was hungrier.

The button was a young aggro Asian guy with a huge chip stack. He was clearly comfortable playing these stakes and seemed to be a very good reg. I found out later that my assumptions were correct – as of today, he has over \$4m in winnings on Hendon Mob and is constantly in the mix in high rollers. He had opened into my BB the past few orbits and I had to toss the 83o'ish hands every time. I thought he interpreted my table image as a straightforward rec who didn't have the capacity to play back at him. I was itching for a chance to 3bet him and take it to the streets. Regardless if I'm selected to be a finalist for the PSPC, I'm just happy to share this hand with other members of the poker community.

Stephen Song opens button 2.1x. SB folds, I look down at 43ss and raise to 8x, he flats.

Flop comes 894ccd. No reason to bet, I expect him to fire this flop nearly 100% of the time. I check, he bets 60% pot, I call. Turn's the 9d. In my head, I just know that there's no way that this guy has it. I check, he bets 75%, I call.

River's 10c. Everything gets there – nothing I can do but check and evaluate. I knew that regardless if he had it or not, I was about to face a healthy wager. Low and behold, he bets 1.2x pot. I know that I have better hands to call here - but I still wasn't convinced. I start cutting out chips and asking him how much the bet is, telling him that I have to pay him off. Say what you want about live reads, he looked like he was going to shit himself.

I flick in a chip, he says the magical words "you're good". I motion for him to show, and he angrily throws down KcQx. I show my bottom pair with no kicker and quietly say ship it. After this hand, I went into beast mode for the rest of the day – the combination of having a huge stack near the bubble and sleep deprivation was dangerous. I haven't heard of many people playing in their 3rd ever tournament 4betting KQo OOP and getting value on the river on an AKxxx board or overbet jamming 2.5x pot with a set and sending an Upswing poker coach into a 10 minute tank, but here we were.

I finished day two 2nd in chips out of the 64 players remaining. More importantly, I was in the money. My friend Matt offered to give me a ride to the hostel to grab my stuff. On the way to the hostel I'm telling Matt how trash the place is and he's kind of like yeah man, whatever, it can't be that bad. We gather my belongings and head on out. Matt remarked to me that the hostel reminded him of jail mixed with a summer camp.

Day 3: 20 people remaining, and I'm in the middle of the pack. MP opens, Martin Zamani shoves 22bb on the button. After the past 3 days of play, with everything that I had experienced, the feeling of looking down at 2 black aces in the BB was indescribable. I reshove, MP calls off. I'm up against AQo and QQ. There wasn't enough frog poison in the entire world to find that last queen in the deck.

I end up coasting to the final table – with 5 players left, we agree on a chop where I would take home \$129,000. Not bad for my third tournament ever, right? All of a sudden, my student debt was gone, my mom's mortgage was paid for a few months, and (most importantly in the moment), I could get a

nice hotel room and pass out. I'll always be eternally grateful to the game of poker – and it would be an honor to come out to the PSPC and prove to myself once again that I can hang with the best.