

C.J. Sand Wins First Gold Bracelet of 2016 World Series of Poker

Caesars Palace sportsbook employee tops 731-player field in annual Casino Employees Championship, collects \$71,157.

Sand Sinks Them Quick

The 47th annual World Series of Poker kicked off in rousing fashion today with the first of 69 gold bracelet tournaments scheduled for this summer. Event #1 was the Casino Employees Championship, a \$565 buy-in No-Limit Hold'em tourney played over two days and nights at the Rio in Las Vegas.

Christopher Sand won the very first gold bracelet of 2016. He topped a higher than expected turnout of 731 entrants, and in the process collected poker's most coveted prize to go along with \$75,157 in prize money. This marked the Chicago native's first WSOP-related victory and the biggest cash of his tournament career as a player.

Sand, who goes by "CJ," is a 45-year-old poker player who recently moved to Las Vegas from Diamond Bar, CA. The former bartender and part-time disc jockey is currently employed as a sports book writer and cashier at Caesars Palace. This marked his second occasion to cash in the WSOP, after finishing in-the-money (1,596th place) in last year's famed "Colossus I" tournament, which drew the largest turnout in live poker history. His first-place cash winnings for this tournament alone amounted to nearly a four-fold increase over his previous entire career prize money earnings, which is now close to six figures.

In a post-victory interview, Sand credited his late mother who taught him how to play poker. "This is amazing," Sand said. "My mom first taught me how to play poker when I was 13 years old, so this is 30 years in the making."

Sand noted that he started out playing Seven-Card Stud, then switched to No-Limit Hold'em after the poker boom began, around 2003. He said he

still prefers Stud and mixed games, but acknowledged he might have developed a penchant for Hold'em, as well. This was only the third WSOP event Sand had ever entered, and he's now cashed in two.

"Stud is still my favorite game," Sand said. "But maybe after today, I might have to re-think that and go with Hold'em."

Even though he entered the final table as chip leader, Sand seemed to be the least likely player to become the champion at one point. After taking a few bad beats early at the final table, particularly on one hand when his A-K lost to A-Q, Sand had only seven big blinds remaining in his stack and appeared destined for a respectable early exit from the finale. However, Sand then began to catch cards and pushed his advantages, resulting in a massive chip lead by the time play reached three-handed. It took Sand only about 20 minutes to defeat his final opponent and achieve victory.

"I don't ever get too high or too low, because I know it's poker," Sand said. But at this moment, it's a real high. I'm blessed. This bracelet is for my mom who is watching over me in heaven. There was a little magic with me tonight and I know where it came from. Poker is one of the best memories I have over her....poker is in my veins and now I have this -- all because of her."

Kerryjane Craigie, a poker manager from Sevenoaks, U.K. finished as the runner up. She collected a nice consolation prize in the amount of \$46,420.

The Casino Employees Championship has served as the launching pad on most WSOP calendars since it was initially added to the official schedule in the year 2000. That first year, the tournament was called the "Dealers Poker World Championship," since the closed event was open only to eligible casino dealers at the time. The following year, all casino employees became eligible and were invited to play. The inaugural event attracted only 109 entries. However, the number of entrants doubled in size the following year when it was expanded to include all casino employees and has adapted the same requirements ever since. However, the event transformed from a Limit Hold'em competition into No-Limit Hold'em in 2004.

The popular annual tournament is intended to honor the dedication of millions of employees who work within the casino sector. According to the American Gaming Association, which is the industry's national trade association, more than 1.7 million jobs have been created within the gaming business, which is even higher in number than the number of employees who work within the airline industry.

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