

2016/2017 World Series of Poker Circuit

Season 13

Harrah's New Orleans

New Orleans, La.

Event #9

No-Limit Hold'em Six-Max

Buy-In: \$2,000 (+\$200)

Total Entries: 197

Prize Pool: \$394,000

May 18-19, 2017



Michael Lech's World Tour Uncovers Gold in New Orleans

Traveling pro returns to the States, takes down WSOPC High Roller at Harrah's

NEW ORLEANS, La. (May 21, 2017) — Michael Lech won the biggest-buy-in tournament at the WSOP Circuit Harrah's New Orleans on Friday evening. He outlasted a field of 197 entries in the \$2,200 High Roller, winning his second gold ring and the top prize of \$106,377.

Lech is a 27-year-old professional poker player originally from Alma, Alabama, a tiny, unincorporated town in the proverbial middle of nowhere. Population? Call it 600 people, though the town is so small that even the census data is hard to come by. His mail still goes to his family's house there, but Lech is seldom found in Alabama — or in the United States at all, for that matter.

Shortly after graduating from the University of Arkansas with a degree in International Business, Lech finished in sixth place in a tournament in Colorado, earning a career-best live score of \$22,310. Having saved up a little money through college, too — he's been a successful online player since the age of 18 — he made a big decision for his future self.

Lech had studied abroad in Spain and Costa Rica while in college, and he decided to embark on a life-experience trip to Latin America. He sold off most of what he owned and booked a one-way ticket to Bolivia.

In the time since, Lech has spent his days doing... whatever, essentially. He hops from one South American country to the next on a whim. "Three months here and there," he said. "Most of my time in Bolivia. A lot of time in Argentina and Ecuador. Little bit of time in Brazil." He volunteers when he finds a spot to do so. He's become a pretty passable Spanish speaker, too. Even a little Portuguese. He learned to dance the samba. He's hiked Maccu Piccu, kayaked in Anguilla, and snorkeled in Costa Rica. And, of course, he still plays poker when the opportunity presents itself.

Last summer, Lech set a new career-best, finishing as the runner up in the WSOP Crazy Eights event for a huge score of more than \$400,000. "That was a life-changing thing for me," he said. "It was a breakthrough." That big payday gave Lech the freedom to continue to live the life he'd chosen without having to worry too much about finances. So, basically, it didn't change too much.

A couple months later, Lech's travels took him to Punta Cana where he won a \$900-buy-in event for another \$30,000 or so. Then it was straight to St. Maarten where he won his first WSOP Circuit ring in the \$365 six-max event. Then on to Panama for another four cashes, including a ninth-place finish in a big \$5,300-buy-in Championship event.

Most recently, Lech's world tour brought him to New Orleans to visit his cousins, and the WSOP Circuit just happened to be in town while he was. He entered the \$2,200 High Roller event along with 196 others, and by the end of the next day, he was clutching one of the season's final gold rings and a check for more than \$100,000. His total career live earnings have now moved across the \$800,000 mark.

As expected from an event that carries this sort of buy-in, the field standing between Lech and the win was an especially tough one. He entered the eight-handed final table in eighth place, well behind the likes of Ryan Dunn, Ray Qartomy, Marshall White, and Maurice Hawkins, the Circuit's all-time leader in victories.

Hawkins fell in fourth place, though, and Lech eventually worked his way into a heads-up match against three-time ring winner Marshall White. The pro from North Carolina is running as hot as anyone on tour right now, fresh off a win and a runner-up finish in separate events over the previous three days.

Lech defeated White, though, storming back from a 4:1 chip deficit to claim the title. The victory was a bit of vindication for the new two-time winner. "It was fun to win a tough heads-up match," he said. "Especially since I lost heads-up last year for a bracelet. I'm ecstatic."

As he continues to pursue life-enhancing experiences, Lech is growing less and less interested in living the life of a professional poker player. "Long-term, I'd like poker to be my hobby," he said. "I'm definitely trying to evolve into other things. I love poker, but..." he trailed off.

Despite his nomadic ways, Lech still takes the opportunity to return home every few months, and there was no hesitation when asked about his favorite place in the world. "Oh, the United States," he said. "We have the most diverse county. We have a lot of great things. I appreciate it more every time I come back."

Event #9 was the ninth of 12 gold ring events on the WSOP Circuit schedule at Harrah's New Orleans. The \$2,200 High Roller drew a field of 197 entries, generating a prize pool worth \$394,000. The final 20 players finished in the money.

The tournament began Thursday, May 18 at 1 p.m., and Day 1 concluded with 31 players remaining after Level 15 — around 1 a.m. Day 2 was held on Friday, May 19 beginning at 2 p.m., and the last hand was dealt around midnight.

The player who accumulates the most overall points during Harrah's New Orleans 12 ring events earns the title of Casino Champion and receives automatic entry into the WSOP Global Casino Championship.

Additionally, all players who cash in ring events earn points that apply toward the season-long race to claim one of the limited at-large bids. More information on the points system is available on WSOP.com.

All rings at the Harrah's New Orleans are furnished by [Jostens](#), the official ring supplier of the 2016/2017 WSOP Circuit season.

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