

The Main Event

“Jamie Gold has done it!” The announcer shouted at the end of the 2006 World Series of Poker Main Event. Although he had a good run of cards unlike anything ever seen on television, Gold outlasted a record eight thousand, seven hundred, and thirty-three competitors to win a cash prize of twelve million dollars. Jack had watched it almost every time it was shown on TV, and every time he saw it, it gave him goose bumps. *That’s gonna be me next year* he thought to himself. *Except with less luck and more skill.* Jack had been playing No Limit Texas Hold ‘em poker seriously now for a couple of years. He often played online for cash, or in any tournament he could get into at the local casino. He had developed his skills quite well since beginning and had no reason to doubt why he could not be the next Main Event winner. His mom had always doubted him from day one.

“Many people dream, but very few make a lot of money,” she would say. He had proven to her that he was not a fluke and can play the game, but she still had her doubts.

“What is it gonna take mom?” Jack always asked her.

“I’d rather you not play at all you can get into a lot of problems gambling,” she would reply.

“Mom, it’s not gambling, it’s a game of skill how many times do I have to tell you that?”

“I know dear, but you can’t always guarantee that you’re gonna win.”

“As long as I win more money than I lose then I’ve done my job.”

“But how many times are you gonna lose your money before you start winning a lot?”

“I guess I don’t know.”

He wanted to prove to her so bad that he could make a lot of money playing a game. Not only would the money be nice, but the satisfaction of proving to his mom that he does know what he is talking about would be a great as well. Two thousand seven was gonna be the year that it happened. Jack would be twenty-one in April and would therefore be old enough to play in the World Series in Las Vegas which takes place in late July. Until then he had to make sure his grades didn’t slip or his parents wouldn’t let him play at all. His dad didn’t mind him playing poker, as long as he kept his grades up.

Finals were coming and this was the worst time to be thinking about the World Series. Every time he sat down to study he could not think about anything else but the World Series. He had not even won his seat to the Main Event yet, but he knew he was going to; it was only a matter of time. Jack had entered an online tournament for fifty dollars. The tournament would have about one thousand participants and the winner would win a seat to the Main Event. On top of studying, Jack was scanning through all of his poker books brushing up on his game. He had all of the favorites, *Harrington on Hold ‘em* Volumes I-III by Dan Harrington, *Super/System I and II* by Doyle Brunson, *Caro’s Book of Poker Tells* by Mike Caro, and *No Limit Hold ‘em: Theory and Practice* by David Sklansky. This would be the most important tournament of his life. That is, unless he won the tournament then the most important tournament would be the Main Event.

You got to focus Jack. You won't even be able to play if you screw this up. You are going to regret it if you don't make it to the World Series because of some bad grades. No more poker until you pass these exams, got it?

Finals were over and Jack managed to squeeze out a few A's and a B+.

"Not bad kid," his dad said.

"Thanks Dad."

"Yes dear, very good," his mom replied.

"You'll be saying that later this summer when I win the Main Event," Jack stated.

"OK dear."

"You will be there with me **when** I make the Main Event right?"

"Yes dear, I will be there **if** you make the Main Event."

"That's all I ask."

It is the day of the tournament and Jack is fully prepared. Jack sits down at his computer and starts the game up. *You know what you need to do. You've played online many times, just play your game and you will be fine.* Jack clicks on the tournament to enter the lobby. The tournament doesn't start for another ten minutes, Jack is growing impatient. Seconds tick by like hours. *C'mon, let's get this thing going.* A window pops up on Jack's screen. "The tournament is starting, please wait while the players are seated." *How about we just play instead of waiting all day?* After what seems like hours, the first hand is dealt out and Jack looks at an eight deuce off suit. *Let's see if we can't get a face card next time* and Jack folds his cards. Jack takes a second to look at the number of players left and sees that there are twenty gone already. *Wow, what a waste of fifty dollars.* The next hand is dealt and Jack is dealt a king nine of spades. *Not especially*

great, let's see how the rest of the table acts. Jack is the dealer this hand so he will be last to act after every community card is laid out, a good position to be in. Everyone folds around to Jack who puts in a small raise. Both people after Jack call and there are three people going to see the flop, which are the first three community cards laid face up for everyone to use in combination with their two cards. The flop comes king of diamonds, three of clubs, and queen of diamonds. The player to the left of Jack puts in a bet and the player to the left of him folds. Now it is Jack's turn. *He's probably on a flush draw, I don't want him to hit that flush, I better put out a good-sized raise.* Jack raises it up to two and a half times the initial bet. The player ponders what he is going to do and finally mucks his cards. *Alright, good small win.*

Over the next hour or so Jack wins a little and loses a little he has yet to win a big pot that will put him up to the top of the chip leaders. *Just be patient, you're time will come.* There are about seven hundred people left and Jack gets dealt a jack of spades and a jack of clubs. *Jacks, my favorite hand. I never lose with Jacks.* Jack puts in a good-sized raise and has one caller. The flop comes Jack of diamonds, king of clubs, ten of hearts. Jack leads out by betting half of what's in the pot and his opponent goes all-in. *All right let's see here, if he had two kings, he probably would have re-raised me before the flop, a king ten is possible, no flush is possible, if he has two tens I have him dominated, a queen ace, would have given him the straight, but he would most likely not want to put in a big bet with that hand, I think I'll call.* Jack calls and his opponent shows a king of diamonds, and a ten of spades, which is losing to Jack's Jacks. The turn card (fourth community card) is a five of clubs, good card for Jack. All he needs to miss is a king. The river card (fifth community card) is a.....queen of spades, Jack wins the hand with

three of a kind. *Whoa, that queen looked like a king at first.* The next hand Jack is dealt a queen of clubs, and a ten of diamonds. He is first to act and puts out a small raise. Two people behind Jack call and they see a flop of ten of spades, four of clubs, and seven of hearts. Jack is first to act and bets half of the pot. One person folds, and the other person calls. The turn card is a ten of clubs. *Wow, I'm getting great cards.* Jack puts in another bet and the other player calls. *There is no way he has the other ten.* The river card is a two of diamonds. Jack puts in another bet and is called by the other player who shows the three tens with an ace kicker which beats Jack's queen kicker. *That was terrible Jack, what the hell is wrong with you? If he's calling you all the way he's gotta have something. Get your head in the game.* Jack still has a considerable amount of chips, but that loss did take a chunk out of his stack.

Another hour goes by with three hundred participants left. Jack is in the top twenty in chip counts, but he still has a long way to go. The next hand Jack is dealt is a four two of hearts. *Nope, not even gonna try that.* Next hand is a three of hearts, nine of clubs, followed by a four of spades, and a six of diamonds, followed by an eight three of spades, all of which are folded. *Wow, what does it take to get some decent cards?*

Another hour and a half goes by and Jack is at the final table with eight other people. *Alright, you made it this far, keep playing smart and this thing is all yours.* First hand is dealt out and Jack picks up two nines. Jack is the dealer on this hand, one person in front of him goes all-in. Jack calls the all-in and is the only one to call. Jack sees the player has king jack of hearts. *Alright, odds are about equal; let's see if I can pull this one off.* Flop comes queen of spades, ten of diamonds, and three of hearts. *Not good, he picked up a straight draw and two more hearts will give him the flush.* The turn is a six of

hearts. *Ok, not good at all, please no king, jack, heart, or ace, that's all I'm asking, it's not much.* The river is a.....deuce of diamonds and Jack wins the hand with his pair of nines. *Seven more people to go.*

The table is finally down to Jack and one other player. Jack is behind in chips, but not by much. The two players go back and forth for a while trading chips. Jack eventually regains the chip lead and the next hand dealt to Jack is an ace king of diamonds. The player acts first and goes all-in. Jack quickly calls and sees that he is way out in front. His opponent has an ace queen and is severely dominated. The flop comes queen of spades, four of diamonds, and a seven of diamonds. *No way, I had him dominated, come on give me another diamond.* The turn is a six of spades. *Diamond! Give me a diamond!* The river is a.....ten of diamonds. Jack has won the tournament and won his seat to the Main Event.

“Mom, I won!” Jack yelled.

“Good for you honey.” His mom replied.

“So you’ll be there with me right?”

“Of course, I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Jack has about a month before the Main Event starts. He looks over his poker books once again to make sure that he is as prepared as he can be. He also plays a couple of small stakes games online in order to keep his game sharp. It’s gonna be a long haul to get by the competition. There is going to be at least ten thousand competitors in this year’s Main Event, which means about ten days of nothing but poker from afternoon until night, possibly even until the early hours of the morning.

A month later, Jack walks into the Rio Casino and Hotel where the Main Event would take place. Thousands of people line the hallways. It was like rush hour traffic in Chicago. It took forty minutes to get to the front desk which would have normally been about a half minute walk.

“Name?” The man at the check-in desk asks Jack.

“Jack Brann.” Jack told him.

“Brann, Brann,” he says quietly as he searches through the list of names. “Ah yes, here we are. Congratulations on your satellite win Mr. Brann.”

“Thank you.”

“Here are your starting chips and you will be seated at table seventy-eight to start today. Good luck.”

“Thank you.”

Jack takes his chips and with his parents goes into the poker room to find his assigned table.

“A lot of people here Jack,” his mom points out.

“I realize that Mom,” Jack says.

“I’m just saying they all want the same thing you want.”

“Mom, can you at least pretend that you are happy for me?”

“I’m very happy for you son, I just don’t want you to feel disappointed if you don’t do well.”

“It’s not going to happen, OK Mom?”

“OK dear.”

As they walk into the poker room they could hear the sound of shuffling chips and cards. *This is the single greatest thing I have ever seen.* Rows of tables are lined up as far as the eye can see. Professional players that Jack has seen on TV are now right in front of him. Players from dozens of nations are represented. Canada, Finland, Mexico, and Australia are among some of the countries represented. Jack strains to see the numbers above each of the tables. He finally finds his table about half way back off to the right.

“There’s my table,” Jack declares.

“Alright honey, good luck,” his mom says.

“No matter what happens kid, just remember that you won your seat here. No one can take that away from you,” his dad replies.

“Thanks Dad.”

Jack hugs his parents and makes his way towards his table. It’s so crowded it takes Jack about ten minutes to finally get to his table where he sees that a couple of people have already sat down. They don’t appear to be too tough. One of them is having trouble shuffling his chips, a true sign of an amateur. Jack sits down at the table and the man who is not shuffling his chips introduces himself. He is an older man, probably late fifties early sixties. He doesn’t seem as excited as everyone else is about the Main Event, he’s probably done this quite a few times.

“Hi, I’m Bob,” the man says.

“Jack.”

“This your first World Series Jack?” Bob asks.

“Yep, just turned twenty-one a couple of months ago,” Jack says.

“Wow, a young gun.” Bob says “This is my tenth one I have been playing for about twenty-five years now, but I didn’t do too well last Main Event.” Bob turns to the guy who is having trouble shuffling his chips. “How about you, is this your first time?”

“Wha...me? Oh yeah, my first time...I mean first time,” the man says. *Wow really? I never would have guessed.*

“Whoa! Take it easy there son no need to be nervous, just poker,” Bob tells him.

“Yeah, yeah, just poker,” the man says quietly.

“Well, good luck to both of you,” Bob says.

“Thanks, you too,” Jack replies.

Eventually a voice comes over the loud speaker.

“We are ready to begin play, good luck to everyone and dealers....SHUFFLE UP AND DEAL!!”

The room erupts with applause and the 2007 World Series of Poker Main Event is underway. Jack’s first hand is dealt and it is two kings. *Couldn’t ask for a better start.* Jack is first to act and puts in a nice-size raise. Everyone folds to the dealer who calls the raise. The two people behind the dealer fold and the flop has two players. The flop comes queen of spades, four of hearts, and three of spades. Jack is first to act and puts out a bet of about half the pot. The other player calls and the turn card is a seven of clubs. Jack again bets about half of the pot and the player calls. The river card is an ace of hearts. *Not a good card.* Jack checks and the other player checks. Jack shows the two kings and the other player mucks his hand and Jack takes down the pot.

“How does it feel to win your first pot in the Main Event son?” Bob asks.

“Feels pretty good if I can do that about five thousand more times, then I got a shot,” Jack jokes.

Next hand is dealt out and Jack receives a ten of diamonds and a six of clubs. Five of the nine players call and since no one raised the pot, Jack has the option to check which he takes advantage of. The flop comes king of hearts, six of diamonds, and eight of spades. *No way my six can be good here.* Jack checks and one of the players puts in a small raise. Everyone folds around to Jack who decides not to risk it and folds his hand. The player turns his cards to show a seven and a deuce, the worst starting hand in Texas Hold ‘em.

“How does it feel to be bluffed for the first time in the Main Event?” The guy asks.

Yeah whatever, I’ll get you later.

The loudspeaker comes on again.

“Congratulations everybody, you have made it past one person!”

Everyone stands up to see who the first person knocked out is and it happens to be the winner of the Main Event last year, Jamie Gold. *I knew he wasn’t that good. Hard to win when you don’t have the cards every time huh Jamie?*

A few hours go by and Jack has slowly doubled his chip stack to twenty thousand. The guy who had bluffed Jack earlier is short stacked and looking desperate. *Alright I’m taking you out right now.* The hand is dealt and Jack receives an ace of clubs and a ten of spades. The guy puts in a small raise and Jack calls. Two people see the flop: queen of diamonds, king of hearts, and a jack of diamonds. *Flopped the nut straight, I bet if I check, he’ll go all-in.* Jack checks and sure enough the guy utters the two most important

words to any tournament player, “All-in”. Before he can even put his chips into the middle, Jack calls and flips over his straight. The guy looks devastated as he shows his pair of Jacks for three of a kind. The turn and river both fail to improve his hand and Jack knocks out his first opponent. *How does it feel to lose in the Main Event sucker?*

The next hand is dealt and Jack receives a four of clubs and a nine of hearts. *I’ve been showing a lot of strong hands, I think it’s time for a bluff.* Jack puts in a raise and gets one caller. The flop comes six of hearts, two of spades, and a ten of clubs. The player puts out a small raise. *Nope you don’t got it, this one’s mine.* Jack re-raises the pot and the player quickly folds. *Yes, nothing better than pulling off a good bluff.*

The day finally comes to an end and Jack manages to gain a total of about thirty thousand in chips. While he’s not the chip leader, he is not doing badly either. He finds his parents and they head to the hotel room for some much needed rest.

Since so many people are playing in the tournament, the first four days are broken up into four separate groups. Once the number of participants is down to seven hundred people in each group, there will be a day off, and then all the participants will play in the same room the next day. Jack makes it to the first day of all participants in the same room with about one hundred thousand dollars in chips. He is starting to get a little nervous as he knows that the top one thousand people will win money this year and Jack is inching closer and closer. Jack will be seated at the feature table today: the table that will be shown on television later in the year. After Jack sits down at his table he could not believe who sat down next to him. It was none other than his favorite professional player Daniel Negreanu. Daniel was doing quite well as usual. He was most definitely the chip leader at this new table. The first hand is dealt out and Jack receives a deuce of spades

and a four of hearts. *Great, everybody gets to watch me fold.* He folds his hand. Next hand is dealt out and Jack gets a pair of tens. Jack is the dealer and after everyone folds around to him Jack puts in a small raise. Daniel calls behind him and the big blind folds. *Wow, I'm playing poker with Daniel Negreanu, this is a dream come true.* The flop comes ten of spades, ten of hearts, king of spades. *Quads, no way.* Daniel is first to act and checks. *If I check, he might try to bully me on the turn.* Jack checks. The turn is a four of spades. Daniel puts out a pot-sized raise and Jack pauses in an attempt to make Daniel think he has a tough decision on his mind. Eventually Jack just calls and the river card is a nine of diamonds. Daniel puts in another big bet and again Jack pretends to contemplate. Jack decides to re-raise the pot. Now Daniel is the one who looks confused.

“What do you have?” Daniel asks rhetorically.

Jack just stares at the pot in order to not give away any information. Daniel eventually calls and Jack flips over the two tens. Daniel mucks his card.

“Good hand,” Daniel says.

“Thanks,” Jack replies.

Whether he meant it or not Jack doesn't know, but he was able to take a lot of chips from his favorite player. Jack was feeling great.

A few hours later, the voice comes on the loudspeaker again:

“Congratulations to everyone in the tournament, you have all made the money!!”

The casino erupts with roars and applause. Everyone congratulates the other players at their table. *Well, I've done my job; I have made more money than I have lost.*

The day ends and Jack has added to his chip total bringing it to about one hundred and seventy-five thousand. *I'm winning this thing for sure. Nobody can stop me now.*

Jack manages to survive the next two days as well. However he only has a chip count of two hundred and fifty thousand. This is somewhat small compared to the rest of the field where the average chip count is about four hundred thousand. The day starts and since leaving the spotlight table, Jack is now seated with Daniel again. Jack goes a couple of hands without playing but finally receives a playable hand, two jacks. *There's my lucky hand.* Jack puts in a raise and again, Daniel is the only one to call. The flop comes ace of clubs, ace of diamonds, and a jack of hearts. *Quads first and now a full house, this is amazing.* Daniel checks and Jack puts in a bet of half the pot. Daniel looks confused. *Yes, I got him again.* Daniel eventually calls and the turn card is a nine of spades. Daniel again checks and Jack puts in another raise. Daniel calls after some time passes and the river card is a two of clubs. Daniel decides to put in a small bet this time and Jack utters those two important words. "All-in". "Call," Daniel quickly says. *I didn't want to hear him say call that quickly.* Sure enough after revealing his jacks full of aces, Daniel turns over his two cards: jack of diamonds and an ace of hearts. Daniel has the better full house, aces over jacks. Jack is stunned; his tournament is over, just like that. The other players and crowd applaud Jack on his tournament run which ends in ninety-eighth place. Jack stands up to shake Daniel's hand, as they shake hands Daniel whispers into Jack's ear:

"You played really well; you will go far if you continue to play that well."

Wow, Daniel Negreanu said that I played really well.. That alone is as good as winning the tournament. Jack ended up with winnings of about one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, which would be more than enough to pay for his education.

Jack finds his parents and gets a hug from his mom.

"Very good dear, I'm proud of you," his Mom says.

“See, I told you you would say that,” Jack states.

“You were right Jack, you are really that good,” his Mom admits.

“Thanks Mom, that means a lot to me,” Jack replies.

“Well done son, think I could borrow a couple thousand?” His dad asks.

“Sure Dad,” Jack answers. “I’ll buy you something great.”

Jack decided to stay in Las Vegas and come back to the casino on the final day to see who the winner would be. In the end, it was Bob who had won the tournament and won over eighteen million dollars.

“Hey Bob, congratulations,” Jack says.

“Thanks Jack, I heard you didn’t do too bad yourself,” Bob says.

“Well, one hundred and twenty thousand it’s not \$18 million but I’m happy.”

“You should be kid; you got many more of these ahead of you. As for me, I think this is gonna be my last one.

“Well I’m glad you could end it by going out on top.”

“Yeah me too.”

Jack and his parents walk towards the exit. Jack looks back to see Bob surrounded by his friends and family celebrating. *That’s gonna be me next year* he thought again. *I won’t settle for anything less.*