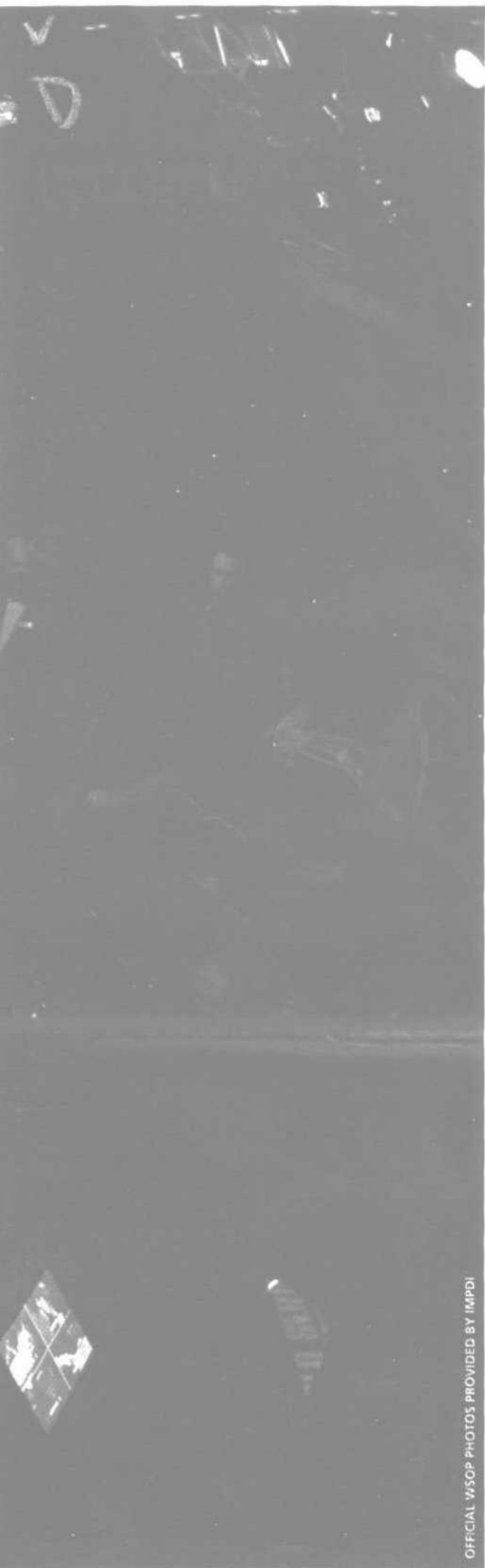




# ONE-MAN SHOW



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**S**UPERSTITIOUS POKER players are a little leery of holding a chip lead early in a multi-day tournament. Leading late is a good thing, and being well above average in the chip counts early on is certainly nice, but traditionally, in the World Series of Poker Main Event, those who hold the lead early rarely make it to the end. It's almost like a curse.

Apparently Jamie Gold isn't superstitious. He was toward the top of the chip count from the get-go and led everyone from the end of Day Four of the eight-day tournament on, without interruption.

It's almost unheard of to hold onto a lead like that for so long and ultimately win it all, but then again, not everyone has 10-time bracelet winner Johnny Chan for a tutor. Gold, a former Hollywood talent agent and current producer, had approached Chan in Los Angeles several years ago about doing a reality show. As they began to work together, Chan was happy to answer a few poker questions here and there. And before he knew it, Johnny Chan had a protégé.

Gold took Chan's valuable advice, along with his own experience having cashed in 15 major poker tournaments, and headed to Vegas. As Gold's stack multiplied, popular pros fell by the wayside.

One of them was the reigning champ, Joe Hachem, who made an impressive run all the way to 238th place, out of a record-crushing field of 8,773. It might not sound so impressive, but consider the fact that he had to outlast over 50 percent more competitors than he did to win the whole thing in 2005. It wasn't quite as spectacular as Greg Raymer's run to 25th place last year in his effort to defend his title, but it was proof of Hachem's ability just the same.

Just ahead of Hachem, superstar

Daniel Negreanu had one of his best Main Event showings in a while, finishing 229th. Annie Duke broke the top hundred with a great run to 88th place. And Costa Rica's Humberto Brenes skillfully worked his way all the way up to 36th.

Italian Jeff Lisandro, who final tabled one event and cashed in the top 20 in a few others, got all the way up to 17th. But by 2:17 a.m. on Wednesday, August 9, when Fred Goldberg was eliminated in 10th place, there was only one well-known pro left: Allen Cunningham. Cunningham is not Mr. Charisma, but he has been one of the most consistently successful younger poker players in the world.

If Cunningham, last year's WSOP Player of the Year, could win The Big One, it would give hope to hundreds of pros that it wasn't just a lottery, a luckfest, a big crapshoot. But Cunningham found himself in a tough spot at the final table: second in chips, at a huge deficit to the leader, and with seven other opponents who'd be more than happy to see Cunningham's seat vacant.



# Jamie Gold didn't just win the 2006 World Series Main Event—he dominated it

BY SCOTT THARLER

