



KAHLE BURNS: THIS AUSSIE POKER PLAYER WENT FROM PLAY CHIPS TO HIGH ROLLERS

By Tim Duckworth

Kahle Burns has been collecting tournament cashes across Australia and Macau for the last decade and has amassed more than \$3.4 million in live tournament earnings during that stretch. His first major result came in the 2013 *World Series of Poker Asia-Pacific* main event, where he pocketed \$211,392 for a fifth-place finish. In the summer of 2016, he won the *Sydney Championships* for \$226,295 and weeks later won the *Western Classic Poker Championship* in Perth for another \$55,674.

It was at that point that Burns started becoming a more familiar face on the high roller circuit. He closed out 2016 with a third-place showing in the *Asia Championship of Poker* in Macau for \$343,179, and then took fourth in the 2017 *PokerStars Championship Macau* for an additional \$415,395. After another win at the *Melbourne Poker Championships*, Burns finished his 2017 campaign with a third-place cash at the *Triton Poker Super High Roller Series* in Macau for \$1,300,035. Last year, he continued to post consistent numbers, making the final table of the *Aussie Millions* main event, the *Asia Pacific Poker Tour* super high roller, and the *MSPT Venetian* main event.

With a list of impressive high roller results, Burns found himself gaining some attention with a deep run that ended in tenth-place in the 2018 *Super High Roller Bowl*. However, for the 30-year-old poker pro based in Melbourne, Australia, tournaments have always been a second thought to cash games.

Burns has been a dominant cash game grinder, progressing up the stakes ever since he entered the poker world after high school. Traveling around Australia, or to Macau and the United States, Burns is always on the lookout for a good game and the opportunity to compete against high-level competition.

Card Player recently caught up with Burns to talk about how he got his start in poker, his evolution into becoming a high stakes cash game player, his results in high roller tournaments, and more.



Card Player: How did you get into poker?

Kahle Burns: I think the first time I played it was just after the high school. I remember a close friend of mine in high school was playing \$50 no-limit online. I think he was playing about eight tables of that and was making \$50 an hour, which obviously as a 17-year-old kid is a lot of money. He was quite a smart and mathematical guy, so when I heard that he was doing this I thought there must be something to this poker and I decided to check it out myself.

CP: How did you progress as a player? What were your next steps?

KB: Basically, what I did was I jumped into playing just play chips on the internet. On *PokerStars* I would just play for play chips and I ran up a few million. I also started to play some free pub poker events for fun with my friends. From there I progressed to playing the electronic *PokerPro* tables at *Crown Casino* that were \$50. I started to play those, and I had read opening ranges and that was enough

for me to just get in there and start winning straight away. I sort of progressed slowly up from the \$50 electronic [tables] to the \$100 electronic [tables]. Then I moved to the \$2-\$3 no-limit hold'em game, which was a \$200 buy-in at the time, and I started to make enough money where I was earning more money than I was working at a bar while studying civil engineering. When I realized that I could make more money in the casino than working at the bar, I just quit my job.

CP: What has been the key to you moving up stakes?

KB: It was a slow process of getting better and figuring it out on my own mostly by playing. I'm someone who learns a lot by doing, like a kinesthetic learner, so I definitely learned a lot by playing. In terms of study, I gotta be honest, I didn't do heaps of study. But the study I did do that was quite beneficial was I used to go on to the high-stakes threads online and see what was happening in the cash game action, and they would have notable hands that would be posted there.

I've always been of the opinion that the best players in the world are the people that are sitting at the \$200-\$400 games online and waiting. Because if they weren't the best people would be sitting with them. So those guys that were battling at those stakes, I would want to see what they're doing. When I used to read a lot of their hands, some of them I found that I didn't quite understand. Why are they doing this? Or, this is odd, and then over time with reflection I would start to figure it out and it would make sense. You can turn that into a good strategy. That was definitely the thing that helped me learn for sure.

CP: What was your poker activity leading up to your fifth-place finish in the 2013 *WSOP Asia-Pacific* main event?

KB: At that point I was already playing \$50-\$100 no-limit hold'em cash games. I just hadn't really had any tournament results. Overall, I've always been a cash game player who's put in a lot more cash game volume than tournaments.

CP: There's a gap in your results following *WSOP APAC*. Was this due to just focusing on cash games?

KB: I was just playing all cash games. Maybe a little bit in Macau, but just around Melbourne and Sydney, and I might go to the States to play sometimes. I did go to Vegas those years, but I pretty much skipped every tournament except for the main event.

CP: What are your overall impressions of the cash games in Macau compared to anywhere else in the world?

KB: The cash games in Macau; they're good and they're bad. The part that's good is that they have a very fair system in a way that works for everybody. But they are also quite cutthroat, because you have to play against very good players and you have to be prepared to do long hours.

If certain people were in town and there is a really good game and the regulars get in, they'll flip for who gets sit on the table. Then you have two VIP seats, so they'll flip for who gets the good seats because you want to be in position on the two VIP seats as well. Generally, people will battle for like six hours and you might get a mark, or a fish will show up and then it will continue like that. If you want to play in Macau, you have to be prepared to play really good players and do long sessions at the higher stakes.

CP: In the second half of 2016 you won the *Sydney Poker Championships* and the *Western Classic* for back-to-back titles. How did that feel winning two titles after heavily focusing on cash games?

KB: It felt pretty nice. I hadn't really had a tournament

result for a while and then to just rip a couple of things off always feels good. Whenever you enter a tournament you have your buy-in and then whatever edge is your equity, so when you finish first, you've just ran really good. It definitely feels fantastic.

CP: From there it appears as though you have predominately transitioned into high roller tournaments. Was there a reason behind this?

KB: At this time when I had those tournament results, I was getting a bit bored with poker in general. I've always been passionate about the game, but I had been playing cash games for so long and it could become a bit monotonous. So it incited a bit of excitement with tournaments. I worked on my tournament game a bunch and played online a bit and started to do okay. I decided maybe I'll jump into some of these high rollers. I think I can sort of mix it up with these guys now, whereas before I had just been playing 95 percent cash games and I thought I don't really have any business playing the high rollers at that point.

CP: You have reached several high roller final tables, but how did it feel finishing in third-place in the *Triton Super High Roller* for over \$1.3 million?

KB: Obviously the result was fantastic. Whenever you make a final table and don't win it's sort of like a bittersweet feeling. I'm quite a competitive person so I was obviously trying to win, but it definitely felt good making the final table and playing with some of the best tournament players in the world. Playing against tough competition definitely feels good.

CP: What does it feel like playing against those high roller regulars that are arguably the best players in the world?

KB: It's definitely more exciting because you're sort of in the driver's seat to witnessing some great poker minds at play. I'm going to be concentrating a lot more because I might be able to learn something in the session as well. I might be able to pick up what some of these elite players are doing. Overall, I feel quite comfortable playing with those players especially towards the start of the tournament when the stacks are deeper, due to my cash game experience.

CP: You were one of the 48 players to partake in the 2018 *Super High Roller Bowl*. How did it feel playing the biggest buy-in of your career against some of the world's best?

KB: I thought the tournament itself is an absolutely fantastic event. It's greatly structured, and they don't skip any levels. There's no rake and a decent mix of amateur and elite players. I just thought it was a tournament that I would want to be involved in both for the experience and to obviously hopefully try to make some money. What actually happened with the *Super High Roller Bowl* was that I was in Macau and I had 20 minutes to register for the lottery. I didn't realize it was going to close out, so I was like a mad flurry of texting people that I needed someone to put down the \$30,000 deposit. Luckily Ben Lamb was nice enough to drop off my deposit for the tournament and then I just wired some money to Aria and paid the rest when I got there. I had come to terms that the \$300,000 buy-in was in there by the time I rocked up to Vegas. That was all she wrote.

CP: You were unfortunately eliminated in tenth-place and were just two spots shy of the money. What was the feeling like when you were eliminated by Stephen Chidwick?

KB: Maybe slightly disappointed because obviously when you come that far you want to make the money... and it's a lot of money. But I was more like, 'f@*k! I wonder if I

made some mistakes in this tournament.' I wasn't happy with a couple of hands I played so I was more anxious to go and review the hands I played that I was perhaps not happy with. Other than that, if I feel happy with how I played I generally don't get too attached to the results win or lose. I'm a big proponent of, if you make the right decisions the money just comes in the long run. So I try and go in with that attitude win or lose.

CP: Two weeks later you finished third in the *MSPT* \$5,000 main event at Venetian behind poker couple Alex Foxen and Kristen Bicknell. Three-handed play lasted a grueling four hours and came under some scrutiny. What are your thoughts of how it all unfolded?

KB: I've copped a lot of flak for not taking a deal here. I don't regret my decision with the information I had. I still haven't spoken to those two people and I'm planning to do that quite soon to sort of clear the air and hear their thoughts.

I don't feel bad about not taking the deal, I feel like I started three-handed as quite a short stack. I ended up taking the chip lead several times having Foxen all in three times with the worst hand and then losing all three times. In terms of the scrutiny, I would like to speak to them first before I can give my thoughts on that. I've definitely looking at the footage and I wouldn't say that they went in there with a plan like to collude or soft play like some people said. But watching the footage it definitely looks like there's several hands that were played that were not in the best interests of their own stack. Some of these hands you either have made big fundamental errors or you're soft playing each other. I believe these players are pretty solid players so they

shouldn't really be making these fundamental mistakes.

I don't necessarily think they're bad people or they went in there with the intention of colluding or anything like that. I don't envy their situation either. They're boyfriend and girlfriend and they love each other, and of course they're going to root for me to bust right? It's only human, you want me to bust. If I was in that situation, I'm just playing my stack straight up and I'm trying to win selfishly because I think that's what is in the spirit of the game. I thought I was sort of protected by not dealing because it's on a livestream, and if you do anything dodgy there's inevitably going to be a bunch of scrutiny right. So obviously they've dealt with all that scrutiny now and I guess it is what it is.

CP: What does the future hold for your poker career? Do you have any specific goals in mind or benchmarks you're trying to hit? What's going to keep you motivated going forward?

KB: I'm not going to lie, I'm not super motivated to put heaps and heaps and heaps of time into play anymore. I'm sort of someone now who plays sporadically really hard. What I'll do is when the games are good or I'm overseas and I'm playing high-stakes, I will work myself very hard. I will play up to 100 hours a week sometimes and I've done 30-hour sessions. Stuff like that. But when the games aren't so good and I'm in Melbourne or whatever, I'll just chill. I would happily take a month off or six weeks off and just hang out with my friends and see my family. In terms of what I'm actually going to do, I don't have any goals. I'm definitely going to play more cash games primarily in Macau. I think that's the best situation for me right now to be playing a lot more cash games. ♠

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2019 U.S. Poker Open \$100,000 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Martin Zamani
765,000 chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 25.0%
After Flop: 9.0%
After Turn: 7.0%



David Peters
480,000 chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 70.0%
After Flop: 73.0%
After Turn: 70.0%



PREFLOP

With nine players remaining and blinds of 10,000 – 20,000 with a big-blind ante of 20,000, Martin Zamani limped in from the small blind. David Peters checked from the big blind.



Zamani checked.
Peters checked.



Zamani bet 40,000.
Peters called.



Zamani bet 145,000.
Peters raised to 395,000.
Zamani called.

ANALYSIS

Getting maximum value from your strong hands is crucial to being a winning poker player. Living in fear of the monster under the bed can be horrible for your bottom line if you let that fear drive you to leave value on the table. In this hand, 2016 *Card Player* Player of the Year award winner David Peters takes advantage of a bit of a cooler situation to nearly double his stack. At the start of the hand Peters was one of the shortest stacks of the nine remaining players, with four eliminations still needed before the money bubble burst. Martin Zamani elected to limp in from the small blind with 6-4 offsuit, taking a weak hand into a heads-up pot, out of position against arguably one of tournament poker's most accomplished players. Peters checked his option and both players flopped bottom pair, with Peters holding the superior kicker. With this middling showdown value, both likely decided their hand was too good to turn into a bluff at this point, but not strong enough to value bet. When the turn brought a third six for both players Zamani made a bet of two-thirds the size of the pot. Peters flat called, which would help keep as many bluffs and weaker value hands in Zamani's range as possible. Zamani fired an over bet 145,000 into the 140,000 pot. Peters likely ruled out a lot of the very strongest value hands that Zamani might hold. Since he limped in from the small blind and checked the flop, it just isn't all that likely that he has something like pocket kings, jacks, tens, or A-Q. Peters' queen kicker with his trips is the second best possible, and the likelihood that Zamani has A-6 is also lessened given that he limped in. Peters raised to 395,000 to extract value with his strong hand and Zamani made the call, only to find that he was outkicked. Peters climbed to third in chips after the hand, while Zamani crashed down the leaderboard.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-Holdem