

Poker champ shares loot with his buddies

WON \$100,000 PRIZE

Concordia graduate who loves philosophy has been playing since he was 13

XJAN RAVENSBERGEN
THE GAZETTE

He's a young Montrealer with a hot poker hand and – for the most part – a generally cool exterior demeanour, complete with an eyebrow ring worn since he was 15.

Jamie Klinger, now 23, is also a Côte St. Luc resident with a unique academic record.

After all, his John Molson School of Business bachelor of commerce degree from Concordia University last spring combined a marketing major with a philosophy minor. His offbeat combo required 99 credits to complete rather than the usual 90, yielding a final transcript he described simply as “pretty good, but nothing spectacular.”

Klinger recently parlayed his card smarts – and quite a run of luck mixed in with his cerebral style of play – into a splashy début in the high-stakes world of competitive poker.

He hit the jackpot big-time, all in a good cause. Against 507 other entrants, he walked away from the UB Starlight charity poker tourney in Montreal in November with a first-place finish – a \$100,000 win.

He's divvying up the top prize from the six-day Texas Hold-'Em



PHIL CARPENTER THE GAZETTE

Two old friends each put up one-third of Jamie Klinger's \$750 entry fee for the UB Starlight charity poker tournament, whose \$100,000 top prize he shared equally with them.

tourney three ways.

A one-third slice goes to him, with equal slices going to two high school buddies – “now very grateful old high school buddies,” Klinger chuckled – who each agreed to stake him to one-third of the \$750 entry fee.

Klinger had served as a dealer on the initial day of the tourney – with that number of entrants, “there were two Day Ones,” he explained.

That gave him an opportunity to judge much of the field, about 80 of whom were non-Montrealers.

When he wasn't needed to deal the following day, Klinger jumped in.

“It was on a whim,” he said. But before his spur-of-the-moment entry, he hedged his bets with cellphone calls to his two old buddies. And he forked over the buy-in only after he'd persuaded them to help cover it.

“I've been playing since I was 13,” Klinger said. “I chose my card shark email (address) when I was 13,” one of “five or six” regular email addresses he uses.

After “thousands of hours” of

poker play over the past decade – “I couldn't begin to tell you how many” – Klinger now has the luxury “of relaxing a bit and reading a lot” before he embarks on a marketing career.

He offers poker coaching at “\$50 an hour, but if someone wants to buy a lump of time, then it's flexible.”

Not that Klinger's needs are extravagant: he hasn't shucked the T-shirted student look of his Concordia days.

He still sports a Bart Simpson knapsack he bought for 50 cents at a

garage sale.

After his win, he made a relatively modest splurge – “a \$300 camera lens.”

Following a long-planned trip to Israel next spring, Klinger said he expects to stop off in Europe “to travel around for a couple of months – The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Greece, France, England, Italy. Asia is probably another trip, later.”

But always on a shoestring, looking to connect with kindred spirits as much as with the traditional sights: “I've verified myself with couchsurfing.org,” a worldwide network of young travellers.

Klinger's biggest passion since age 15 has been philosophy, he said. His favourite book? *I Am A Strange Loop*, a 2007 excursion into consciousness by Douglas R. Hofstadter, an Indiana University cognitive and computer scientist.

“He has a beautiful view of the world,” Klinger enthused, pulling the book from his Simpsons knapsack.

As for a steady job, that can wait for now. “I'm a huge Google fan. I'd love to work with them. ... I could never sell a product that I wouldn't 110 per cent believe in.”

During the tournament, Klinger “was well-mannered, he was always in good spirits ... didn't talk a lot of smack (intimidating and disrespectful banter) at the table,” said Samantha Ozbalt, the tournament's administrative director.

Klinger came across – at least to her – as “a very relaxed kid,” she added.

Not in the early going, mind you, of what was the biggest tournament he's ever entered.

“It doesn't matter if your hands shake,” Klinger confessed, “as long as they shake with every hand.”

However, “by the end of the second day, I was a lot less nervous.”

The event raised \$100,000 for Starlight Children's Foundation Canada, Ozbalt said. It is part of an international non-profit organization offering entertainment, education and family activities to seriously ill children and their families.

“We are going to Las Vegas in mid-February with the final 10 players” – led by Klinger – “to film the final part” of a poker show that Ozbalt said “should air for the first time in March or April.”

What does a weekend in Vegas offer this 23-year-old with a bit of a bankroll?

A chance, Klinger grinned, “to hang out and party out.”

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