Poker’s Newest Face

Professional life began typically enough for Jonathan Dimmig ’05, ’06S (MBA). After earning two degrees at Rochester, he returned to his native Buffalo to take a job as a financial analyst. For 10 years he worked in the field, while pursuing a hobby he’d been introduced to by one of his roommates at Rochester: poker.

In 2012, Dimmig took a dramatic step. He left his job and moved to Las Vegas to make a go of it as a professional poker player. “It was obviously a big risk,” he says.

And a worthwhile one, apparently. In June, he prevailed over nearly 8,000 competitors around the world to win the six-week-long 2014 World Series of Poker—and take home more than $1 million in winnings.

A lifelong hockey enthusiast and diehard fan of the Buffalo Sabres, Dimmig says the World Series of Poker is “like the Stanley Cup”—except in this contest, a Buffalonian came out on top. About 15 of Dimmig’s friends traveled to Vegas to watch him play at the final table, where he wore a Buffalo Sabres shirt with pride.

According to Alex Weldon, a game designer and poker player writing on the website pokerforums.org, “Dimmig came out on top of the second largest field in live poker history.” Yet, “Dimmig would not have been anyone’s pick when the final table first kicked off.”

He began the final table in sixth place. Moreover, while the final table is called the “Millionaire Maker,” Dimmig, a relatively young player, had never won more than five figures.

Dimmig says his poker prowess comes down to math. “It’s a heavily math-based profession. So if you don’t have a background in math, you’re at a slight disadvantage. At Simon, they definitely teach you a math-based approach to solving problems. So that approach has given me a leg up on the competition.”

Las Vegas is the world’s center of professional poker. But London is another hot spot, and Dimmig hopes to travel there and elsewhere in Europe to play.

“Looking forward from a poker perspective,” he says, “I definitely want to play in some more tourneys. But one of the things I’m most looking forward to is, I’m actually writing a book.”

“I have no background in writing whatsoever,” he says. But he had an unusually vivid dream, and it became an idea for a novel. He’s completed several chapters. “I think it can be very successful,” he says.

—Karen McCally ’02 (PhD)