

# Straus eyes world title defense

By MURPHY JAMES

They've been drifting into Las Vegas for the past couple weeks now. The "big one" is coming up — the 14th Annual World Series of Poker, held each May at Bunkin's Horseshoe Hotel and Casino.

And as they check in from California, Alaska, Peru and mostly from Texas, they look for "the big guy" — Jack "Treetop" Straus.

Bearfoot, six-foot-six Straus commands the respect of many simply because of his height. But among world class poker players, he's respected because he's the champ, the best there is.

## Finalists

In May 1982, the playoffs had been eliminated from the championship event. It was down to Straus and Dewey Tomko, a former kindergarten teacher from Winter Haven, Fla. Straus had \$810,000 in chips in front of him. Tomko had \$230,000.

At several points in the tournament, Straus had slipped to below \$2,000 in chips. At one time he was

down to a single \$500 chip. But he came back time after time.

Tomko won two hands in a row, bringing him back into contention with close to \$500,000.

Then, Tomko went "all in." He bet his last dollar on a pair of fours. Straus called. His pair of tens won the hand and Straus was the world champion.

## First prize

Straus prize was \$520,000, half of the total of 104 \$10,000 entry fees. The rest was distributed among other top finishers: Straus tipped the dealer \$20,000 and pocketed half a million dollars for his efforts.

When asked what the title means to him, Straus replies, "your peers consider you the best and for this year, I am. It really is a good feeling."

It's now 1983 and Straus just took second place, with \$42,000 in prize money, in the lowball tournament, a preliminary event.

"It's a disappointment," he says. "ya hate to come that close and lose."

The competition has sized him up

— as tough in '83 as he was last year. A very big man, indeed.

Straus grew up in San Antonio and traveled the world to see where he wanted to live. He settled back in San Antonio.

Today he lives on Jackson-Keller Road with his wife of 28 years, Jo. Their two children are grown.

Straus says, "I first played poker in high school, trying to win about four dollars. I learned 'hold'em poker,' the game that decides the World Series of Poker, at Texas A&M, where I majored in physical education. Then I honed my game in the 'animal clubs' (Elks, Eagles, etc.)."

## Coaches a year

After graduating from college, he coached for a year in Lafayette, La. But Straus was hearing the beat of a different drummer and he quit the safe, salaried life of a high school coach to be a travelling gambler.

He joined the Texas circuit, where a troupe of poker players, some of whom were later to become World Series champions as well, would drift from town to town, look-

ing for big hold'em, no-limit games. Sometimes they had to worry about the law busting up the game. Sometimes hijackers would try to make money at poker without playing it.

When Straus bagged a lion in Mozambique he had a piece of jewelry made from a claw. Around it, inscribed in Spanish, is the saying that governs his life: "Better to live one day as a lion than 100 years as a lamb."

## Most aggressive player

How does it carry over into poker? "I am the most aggressive poker player in the world," says Straus. "I don't play according to the books at all. I'm far more aggressive than that. According to the books, I play too many hands, I raise too much and I bluff too much. But my opponents tell me my style is very intimidating. And I win a lot of money."

One tradition Straus has not followed is the publication of a book following a World Series victory. "I won't do a book," he says. "I'm tired of reading about hero stories. If I

ever do one, it'll be amusing stories, usually where I was the goat."

The Las Vegas "line" puts Straus at 12-1 to retain his crown. He worries about a trio of Texans who are also pursuing the title. Three-time winner Johnny Moss, from Marshall, the "grand old man" of poker, is at 20-1. Two-time winner Doyle "Texas Dolly" Brunson, from Longworth, is also at 12-1. And Betty Carey from Houston, dubbed "the best woman poker player in the world," is at 35-1.

Also putting up the \$10,000 entry fee for the World Series hold'em event are San Antonio realtor Crandall Addington, publisher Larry Flynn, comedian Gabe "Kotter" Kaplan and Abilene's Jack Grimm.

So Straus is in Las Vegas. You can see him in the area that is closed off for poker play at Bunkin's Horseshoe Hotel and Casino in "Glitter Gulch" on Fremont Street in downtown Las Vegas.

Look for the hold'em tournament. Hold'em is where two "hole" cards are dealt face down to each player. Bets and raises are made. Then three cards are turned up on



JACK STRAUS to defend poker title

the table. This is called the "flop." The players remaining in the game bet and raise again on the strength of their "hole" cards in combination with the cards in the "flop."

A sixth card is turned face up on the table. This is called "Fourth Street" in poker jargon. Bets and raises are made once more.

Then a seventh and last card is turned face up. This is called "Fifth Street." A final round of betting and raising takes place.