

= American game show winnings records =

In the United States , a game show is a type of radio , television , or internet program in which contestants , television personalities or celebrities , sometimes as part of a team , play a game which involves answering questions or solving puzzles , usually for money and / or prizes . Since the genre began , many shows have offered prizes of large sums of money to contestants ; Teddy Nadler set the original monetary winnings record of \$ 264 @, @ 000 during his appearance on The \$ 64 @, @ 000 Challenge in 1957 .

Nadler was not surpassed until 1980 , when Thom McKee won \$ 312 @, @ 700 on Tic @-@ Tac @-@ Dough . In 1999 , John Carpenter won \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire , becoming the first person to win a seven @-@ figure prize on an American game show . Since then , many players have gone on to win that amount and even surpassed it . As of 2015 , Brad Rutter is the highest @-@ earning American game show contestant of all time , having accumulated a total of \$ 4 @, @ 555 @, @ 102 . He succeeded Ken Jennings as the highest @-@ earning contestant by virtue of his victory on May 16 , 2014 , in the Jeopardy ! Battle of the Decades tournament .

= = Daytime game shows = =

The single day record for shows in daytime television was set by Michael Larson in 1984 , who won \$ 110 @, @ 237 (equivalent to \$ 251 @, @ 000 in 2015) on Press Your Luck . Larson achieved his record by memorizing the show 's board patterns . He repeatedly hit the board 's squares that awarded contestants money and an additional spin . That spin would in turn replace the spin he had just used , effectively allowing him to spin the board in the second round as long as wanted . Because of this , his game had to be split into two episodes (which aired June 8 and June 11 , 1984) , as his turn caused the game to go well over the show 's half @-@ hour allotted time . In 2003 , Game Show Network produced a documentary about the event .

In 2006 , Larson was succeeded by Vickyann Chrobak @-@ Sadowski , who set the record by winning \$ 147 @, @ 517 on the 35th season premiere of The Price Is Right in 2006 . Chrobak @-@ Sadowski 's record has since been broken by Sheree Heil from her appearance on The Price Is Right in 2013 . She won \$ 170 @, @ 345 in cash and prizes on the episode that aired December 30 , 2013 , including an Audi R8 won in the pricing game " Gas Money " , \$ 10 @, @ 000 cash , and Prada shoes .

= = Overall winnings record = =

= = = 1950s ? 1999 = = =

While the 1950s had multiple big winners (Herb Stempel and Charles Van Doren of Twenty One being two of the most notable) , Teddy Nadler set the overall record during the 1956 ? 57 television season , who set a record that would stand for the next two decades by winning \$ 264 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 2 @, @ 298 @, @ 000 in 2015) on The \$ 64 @, @ 000 Challenge .

It was not until 1980 that Nadler 's record fell . During the summer of that year , a U.S. Naval officer named Thom McKee began a run on Tic @-@ Tac @-@ Dough that carried over into the following season . Since champions on Tic Tac Dough played until they were defeated , and games on the show could end in ties with the pot carrying over , McKee was able to keep building his total as long as he kept playing and winning . McKee won \$ 312 @, @ 700 (equivalent to \$ 898 @, @ 000 in 2015) in cash and prizes in 43 games , which included eight cars (on Tic Tac Dough and its sister show , The Joker 's Wild , a contestant automatically won a car after every fifth game they won) .

While McKee was the biggest solo winner until 1999 , nine couples on The \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 Chance of a Lifetime won the show 's top prize of \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 2 @, @ 083 @, @ 000 in 2015) , in a combination of prizes and a long @-@ term annuity , during the show

's run in syndication from January 1986 to September 1987 . However , this program had no solo players .

In 1999 , McKee was passed by Michael Shutterly , who was the biggest winner in the first airing of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire in the United States . Shutterly was the first contestant on the show to get to the 15th and final question , but elected to walk instead with \$ 500 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 710 @, @ 000 in 2015) , which made him the biggest winner in American game show history at the time . Shutterly had previously won \$ 49 @, @ 200 as a 4 day champion on Jeopardy ! in 1988 , making his career winnings total \$ 549 @, @ 200 .

= = = 1999 ? present = = =

During the second season of Millionaire in the United States , the show crowned its first million @-@ dollar winner . On November 19 , 1999 , John Carpenter won the show 's top prize without using any lifelines , save for a phone call on the final question to tell his father he was going to win the million dollars . After Carpenter answered the final question , which concerned Richard Nixon 's appearance on Laugh @-@ In in 1968 , host Regis Philbin proclaimed Carpenter the show 's (and worldwide format 's) first top prize winner .

Carpenter 's record remained intact until the following year . In early 2000 , Rahim Oberholtzer , a contestant on the revival of Twenty One , won four games in his appearances on the show , along with \$ 120 @, @ 000 in the show 's " Perfect 21 " bonus round , for a total of \$ 1 @, @ 120 @, @ 000 . For surpassing Carpenter 's mark , host Maury Povich proclaimed Oberholtzer " the TV Game Show King . "

Late in its run , the Fox show Greed brought back some of its previous winners to try for an extra \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 . Curtis Warren , who was part of the first team to win \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 on the show (of which his share was \$ 400 @, @ 000 , plus \$ 10 @, @ 000 for winning a terminator round) , was one of the contestants brought back to do so on February 11 , 2000 . Warren was given a question about TV shows that had been made into movies , with 8 choices (of which he had to identify the four correct answers) . He successfully did so , giving himself \$ 1 @, @ 410 @, @ 000 and the record for the time being .

Warren 's record was even shorter lived than Oberholtzer 's had been , lasting only four days . Three days before Warren 's win , David Legler , who also appeared on NBC 's Twenty One , began a run as champion on the show . Four days after Warren 's win , the run continued , with Legler having earned a grand total of \$ 1 @, @ 765 @, @ 000 in six wins to surpass Warren 's record and become the third contestant in two months to top \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 on a game show .

Legler held the record for well over a year . As 2000 ended and 2001 began , the producers of Millionaire decided that it had been too long (71 games over a five @-@ month period) since their top prize had been won , and instituted an accumulating jackpot which added \$ 10 @, @ 000 to the grand prize amount for each game it was not won . Kevin Olmstead claimed the top prize on April 10 , 2001 , winning a jackpot of \$ 2 @, @ 180 @, @ 000 . Olmstead became the first contestant to top \$ 2 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 in total winnings on a game show and supplanted Legler as the all @-@ time leader . Olmstead has previously been a 2 day champion on Jeopardy ! in 1994 , winning \$ 25 @, @ 901 there , making his career total \$ 2 @, @ 205 @, @ 901 .

In 2004 , ABC launched an ultra high @-@ stakes version of Millionaire entitled Who Wants to Be a Super Millionaire , with a \$ 10 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 top prize . Two separate Super Millionaire series aired , one in February and one in May of that year . However , despite the higher stakes and the potential for someone to top the all @-@ time record for winnings , the largest prize awarded was \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 won by Robert Essig .

One week after Super Millionaire came to an end , Ken Jennings of Salt Lake City , Utah , became the new champion on Jeopardy ! The episode , broadcast on June 2 , 2004 , was the first in a long winning streak for the software engineer , made possible due to a change at the beginning of that season (the show 's twentieth on air in syndication) , eliminating the longstanding rule limiting consecutive appearances for a champion to five . With no limit to his appearances , Jennings began to break many game show records . As his streak continued deeper into the 21st season , Jennings

was inching closer and closer to Olmstead 's record . Jennings topped Olmstead 's Millionaire winnings with his 65th consecutive win , finishing the day with \$ 45 @, @ 099 and a new cumulative total of \$ 2 @, @ 197 @, @ 000 , while Olmstead 's career winnings (counting his Jeopardy wins) were toppled in Jennings ' 66th game .

Jennings won nine more games before his streak came to an end on November 30 , 2004 . He had extended his record total to \$ 2 @, @ 520 @, @ 700 at the time of his defeat , after which he was awarded an additional \$ 2 @, @ 000 for finishing in second place per Jeopardy ! rules . Shortly after Jennings ' defeat , Jeopardy ! decided to see how he would fare in tournament play . On February 9 , 2005 , the show launched its Ultimate Tournament of Champions , inviting back 144 other past champions to compete over the next three months in a five @-@ round single @-@ elimination tournament with a \$ 2 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 grand prize . The field included the highest @-@ winning five @-@ time champions and winners of some previous tournaments , though not all invitees were able to participate . Jennings received a bye into the finals of the tournament , where he faced semi @-@ final winners Jerome Vered and Brad Rutter in a three @-@ game , cumulative total match . Vered had set a single @-@ day scoring record during his appearance on the show in 1992 , while Rutter had won the 2001 Tournament of Champions and the 2002 Million Dollar Masters tournament and was the show 's highest @-@ earning contestant of all @-@ time before Jennings .

In the tournament 's three @-@ day final , Rutter defeated Jennings and Vered to win the tournament and \$ 2 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 , and in the process he supplanted Jennings as the winningest all time American game show contestant . Including the \$ 1 @. @ 18 million he had won in his previous Jeopardy ! appearances (five regular season games , a Tournament of Champions win , the Million Dollar Masters win , and three matches in the earlier rounds of the Ultimate Tournament of Champions) , Rutter 's total stood at \$ 3 @, @ 255 @, @ 102 , while Jennings was now second with \$ 3 @, @ 022 @, @ 700 having gained an additional \$ 500 @, @ 000 for his second @-@ place finish in the tournament .

Jennings slowly began to chip away at Rutter 's record , first by winning \$ 714 @. @ 29 in 2006 as part of the Mob on NBC 's 1 vs. 100 . A year later , Jennings won the Grand Slam tournament on Game Show Network and the \$ 100 @, @ 000 top prize by defeating Ogi Ogas in the final round . Finally , on October 10 , 2008 , Jennings passed Rutter by winning \$ 500 @, @ 000 on Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader ? . He extended the record by winning \$ 300 @, @ 000 in The IBM Challenge , where he and Rutter took on IBM supercomputer Watson in a special 2011 Jeopardy ! event . Rutter won \$ 200 @, @ 000 in the challenge , in which both he and Jennings pledged half of their winnings to charity . He then added \$ 100 @, @ 000 more later in 2011 when he appeared on Million Dollar Mind Game , raising his total to \$ 3 @, @ 555 @, @ 102 , second only to Jennings ' \$ 3 @, @ 923 @, @ 414 @. @ 29 .

In 2014 , Jennings and Rutter were both invited to play in the Jeopardy ! Battle of the Decades , a tournament conducted by the producers of Jeopardy ! to celebrate its thirtieth season in syndication . Both men advanced to the two @-@ day tournament final with Roger Craig filling the third position . Needing a win to reclaim his record , Rutter took the top prize in the tournament after Jennings , who needed to answer the second day 's Final Jeopardy clue correctly to win (after making a sufficient wager) , failed to do so . Rutter won the top prize of \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 while Jennings won the \$ 100 @, @ 000 second prize .

Jennings later appeared on Millionaire in November 2014 . Winning the top prize was the only way he could have reclaimed the record from Rutter ; however , Jennings finished with only \$ 100 @, @ 000 , leaving him in second place .

= = Top ten winnings list = =