

A CLASH OF KINGS

This is not your
Grandpa's checkers.

by Jackson Lewis '13



U.S. checkers champ Richard Beckwith '91

**According to the International Mind Sports Association, draughts is an elimination game played between two players on a board with 100 squares. Checkers is a variant of draughts played on a 64-square board.*

The Barbados native, Ron “Suki” King, stares down his opponent, the young up-and-comer Lubabalo Kondlo, a poor man from South Africa who has torn through a forest of red tape just to be here. Now the only thing standing in the way of Kondlo becoming a world champion is the smug King across from him.

This is a game of precision, of great strategy and now a struggle between social classes. This is checkers.

The arena for this match is “King Me,” a documentary by Think Media Studios. In addition to following the match between the aptly named King and the underdog Kondlo, the film also explains little known facts about the game and the organizations in charge of these tournaments. The documentary premiered this March at the Cleveland International Film Festival and features Millikin’s very own U.S. checkers champion, Richard Beckwith ’91 (below).

Beckwith grew up in Decatur a mile from Millikin’s campus and started playing in local checkers tournaments in Macon County as a child. He debuted in state tournaments by age 15 and took first in the B division of the Illinois State Tournament by the time he was 16. “I started very young because my dad played. Some of the better players started taking me to state tournaments. From there I moved to Ohio and started

competing nationally,” he says.

State checkers tournaments usually award the winner with a cash prize of anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 and the national tournaments and world title matches offer \$5,000 to \$10,000 to the victor. These competitions are not about grown men huddled in a friend’s basement betting for pennies.

Beckwith is no minor contender in these events. In fact, he won this year’s U.S. national championship in February, as well as the San Remo (Italy) Open last October.

“Just about every household has a checker board,” Beckwith says. “[but] people just don’t understand the game at this kind of level.”

Beckwith is a senior scientist working in analytical chemistry with Ricerca Biosciences, where he tests trial versions of drugs for impurities.

“My time at Millikin provided the groundwork for my career,” he says. After Millikin he went on to Purdue to receive his doctorate in philosophy, and he started work with Ricerca straight out of graduate school.

But this mild-mannered scientist by day serves by night as the vice president of the World Checker and Draughts* Federation and players representative of the American Checker Federation, a position that is fairly time-consuming, he says.

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