

‘The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters’ is Tour de Force For Arcade Dweebs

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CHICAGO – There’s nothing more boring than sitting at a bar and watching someone manhandle the joysticks of classic arcade games like Ms. Pac-Man or Donkey Kong.

On the other hand, Seth Gordon’s feature-length documentary “[The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters](#) [11]” about obsessive arcade gamers could possibly be the most entertaining thing you could do on a Saturday night.



Billy Mitchell (center) in “The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters”.

Photo courtesy of Picturehouse

According to experts in the world of video games, Donkey Kong is the tour de force. Only three people in the history of the game have reached the kill screen, which is the point on the final level of the game where the machine runs out of memory and kills Mario.

One of these is the so-called greatest gamer of all time: Billy Mitchell. He holds a record-perfect score on Pac-Man, the highest recorded score on Donkey Kong Jr. and, since 1982, the highest unchallenged score on the original Donkey Kong.



Steve Wiebe with his son in “The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters”.

Photo courtesy of Picturehouse

Enter Steve Wiebe. He’s the Rocky of the story to Mitchell’s Apollo Creed.

A middle-school science teacher who is described as a “perpetual loser,” Wiebe is humble and sweet in every way that Mitchell is boisterous and arrogant. With the support of his family, Wiebe dedicates himself to conquering Kong.

While most people play these games for recreation, this documentary studies the subculture of people who measure their worth by the ability to master them. In that, the film is about the very nature of competition and sportsmanship.



Walter Day (left) and Steve Wiebe in “The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters”.

Photo courtesy of Picturehouse

The people – most of whom look like candidates for “The 40-Year-Old Virgin 2” – give the picture its warmth and humor.

You see the sincerity of referee Walter Day (who compares video games to a Zen lifestyle), the questioned motives of Roy “Mr. Awesome” Shildt (who doesn’t want to see Wiebe get “chumpatized”) and the patience and understanding of Wiebe’s wife (the “First Lady of Donkey Kong”).



Steve Wiebe in his garage in “The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters”.

Photo courtesy of Picturehouse

Masterfully portraying the competitive tension comparable to any great sports movie, the audience hangs on to the emotional roller-coaster as the underdog goes for the glory of a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records.

While the picture won’t make you want to leave the theater and head for the arcade, it will make you question how hard you would work to make your dream – no matter how silly – a reality.

By [Dustin Levell](#) [12]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com

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Publisher's note: This film's rating of 4.5 ties for the highest recorded on HollywoodChicago.com. It has a short run in Chicago through Aug. 30 at [Landmark Century Centre](#) [13].

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