

# Alumnus uses math to master poker

Anyone watching poker on television peers into a world of steely nerves, intense strategy ... and luck.

Michael Binger conquered that world earlier this year, placing third in the World Series of Poker and winning \$4.1 million.

Binger was known to friends and family as a “math whiz” since he was a small child. As a toddler, he counted money from his piggy bank almost every day. Later, he focused on baseball statistics, and was fond of strategy games.

He earned his BS in applied mathematics

COURTESY OF MICHAEL BINGER



**Michael Binger**

and both a BS and MS in physics from NC State—all in 1999. In 2006, he received his PhD in physics from Stanford University, where he studied theoretical particle physics at the Department of Energy-funded Stanford Linear Accelerator Center.

Binger developed his fascination for the mathematical strategies required to win at gambling while at NC State. On a trip to Las Vegas with a

friend, he became determined to master blackjack. After he figured out the secrets to blackjack, poker became the next challenge.

“I studied poker and read books about it. In early 2002, I tried some high-stakes games and got crushed,” he said. “That inspired me to study the game more seriously.”

After more study, he was better prepared, and his success eventually propelled him into bigger games.

“Two days after my PhD defense, I was in Las Vegas, preparing for the World Poker Series,” he said. Today, he’s playing on the professional poker circuit full-time, traveling around the nation and abroad.

Binger said he plans to keep playing poker, which will provide great financial freedom in continuing his research.

“I plan to do some research projects on my own,” he said. “I have a lot of ideas.” □