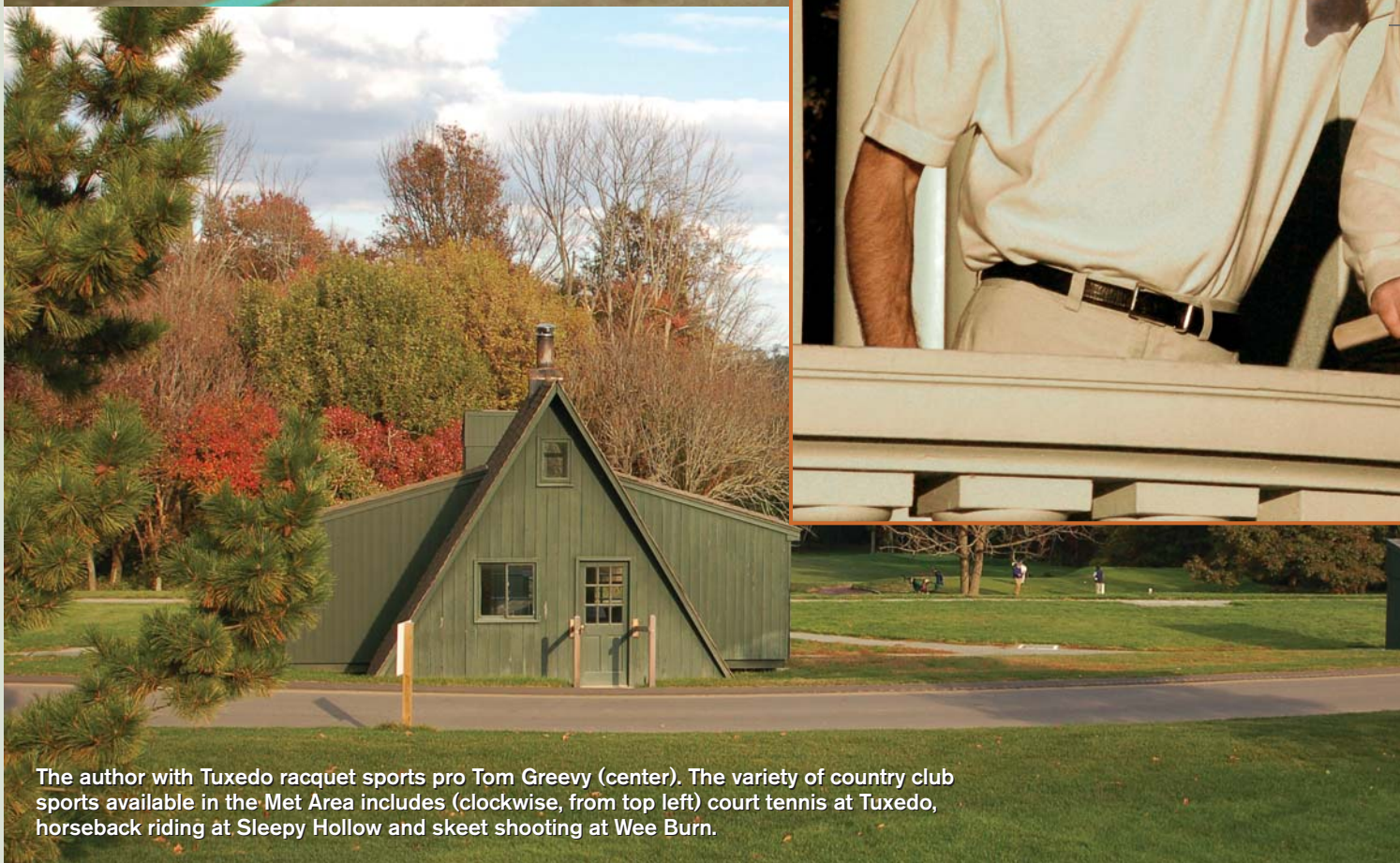
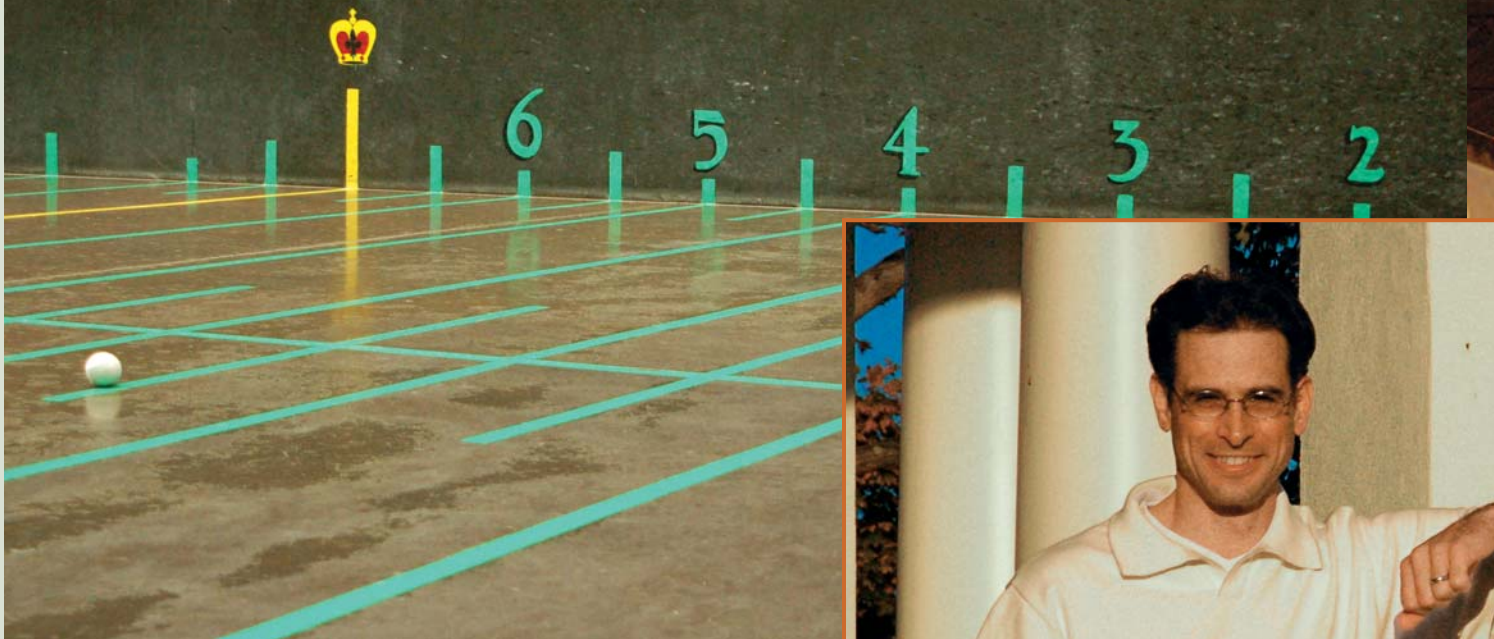
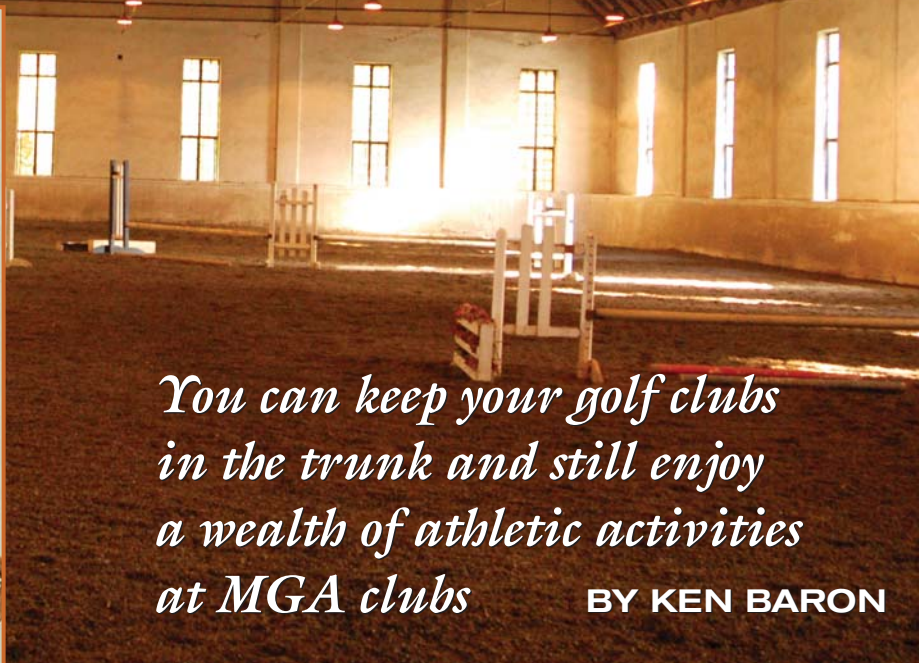


# Uncommon



The author with Tuxedo racquet sports pro Tom Greevy (center). The variety of country club sports available in the Met Area includes (clockwise, from top left) court tennis at Tuxedo, horseback riding at Sleepy Hollow and skeet shooting at Wee Burn.

# Grounds



*You can keep your golf clubs  
in the trunk and still enjoy  
a wealth of athletic activities  
at MGA clubs*

BY KEN BARON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANJA ERDMANN

**I**t has become popular of late for certain clubs to boast of their golf-only credentials. They come across as dramatically hardcore for the golf purist, like a bar for serious drinkers that offers only single malt scotch. You want Chablis or a daiquiri, go to the Holiday Inn down the road. You want tennis or swimming, join a family club.

Well, we believe in the family club as much as we do the strict golf-only club. We also believe in the desire to be different, so we set out to find Met Area clubs with extracurriculars that stray far from the usual country club fare.

Having done our research, we have no doubt that letters will come in, bellowing, "You forgot us. We have paddle tennis." We did not. Paddle tennis is as common to Met Area clubs as a back-nine press bet. "You forgot squash." Please. We are well aware of your cutlines and tin. "You forgot chess, bridge, and billiards." Yes, in fact, we did, because we were after uncommon athletic activities.

So what did we find? We found rugged, spirited events, the kind that could leave the loser with a bruised ego – and maybe even a bruised bone or two.





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Safety is a priority for Wee Burn's Joe Remski (far right), who makes sure beginners have the proper training and equipment.

### Skeet Shooting

The sight of a man holding a 14-gauge shotgun at **Wee Burn Country Club**, in Darien, Connecticut, can bring many thoughts to the mind of a first-time visitor. Chief among them might be: Never fail to pay off a golf bet here. In truth, the armed gentlemen and ladies, tucked between the fifth green and the sixth tee at Wee Burn, are not collecting debts or training to be bounty hunters, they are enthusiastic skeet shooters.

Skeet, a game in which clay disks, called "pigeons," are flung into the air to mimic a fleeing bird, is actually found at a few area clubs, including Round Hill and Greenwich in Connecticut, and Sleepy Hollow in New York. But at Wee Burn, the club's golf course, its two skeet fields, and one trap field are all but intertwined. "At most clubs shooting is a summer sport," says Wee Burn General Manager Warren Burdock, "but due to its proximity to the golf, we do it from November to April. When there is a slight overlap in seasons, we move our 6th tee forward, otherwise there might be some shot falling down on the tee – or worse!" Cold weather and perils aside, these are heady days for the Wee Burn

Gun Club. "In the last three or four years, it's become very popular," says Burdock. "We have a list of 120 members who now shoot at least one round a year."

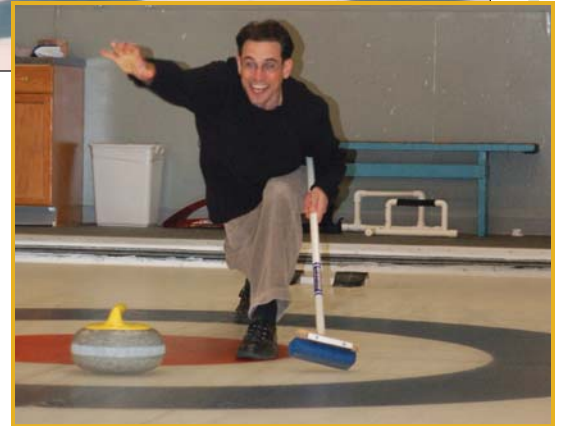
Part of the renewed interest can be attributed to the friendly but serious competitions against Round Hill and Greenwich. The teams compete for a trophy called the Hick Cup. "It's the ugliest looking trophy I've ever seen," says Burdock. "It looks like an iron cup with two pieces of plumbing on the side





Those who use the curling rink at Ardsley have a great time both on and off the ice.

for handles.” But perhaps the real reason for the surge in shooting can be attributed to Wee Burn’s shooting professional, the affable Joe Remski (envison Santa Clause minus the beard but plus a gun), who has been with Wee Burn for 15 years, though only the last five at the gun club. How did Remski get into skeet at Wee Burn? “One day,” he says, “a guy at the gun club asked me if I’d like to give it a try. He handed me his \$8,000 Perazzi [shot-gun]. I took out my \$400 gun instead and shot 25 out of 25. He said to me, ‘Oh, you know what you’re doing.’”



*“In addition to the three sheets, the curling shed houses a bar that lets players perform a completely different type of curl.”*

Remski also knows to stress what he calls “the two main rules” of shooting: Be safe and have fun. Indeed, no one has ever been injured at Wee Burn, even when the club proposed a husband/wife shoot, which prompted one member to chime in, “the only problem will be who gets to hold the gun.”

### Curling

To the uninformed, the sport of curling brings to mind Olympic coverage of frenetic Canadians and northern Europeans attacking fields of ice with colorful brooms while large objects resembling your grandmother’s iron slide by. In other words, better not to ask. And yet the game is not only the oldest continuously-run organized sport in the U.S., it lives and flourishes just 20 minutes or so from Manhattan at **Ardsley Country Club**.

Housed in a shed-like building off the clubhouse parking lot since the 1930s, the curling club boasts three regulation curling “sheets,” or playing fields. Here, teams of four participate in “bonspiels” while listening to

their “skip” as they push off the “hack” and guide a 42-pound granite “stone” past a “hog line,” bending or “curling” it with a broom toward a target. If that sounds complicated, it’s actually not. Beginners are teamed up with experienced players so that, in no time, everyone is contributing and cheering.

And drinking. In addition to the three sheets, the curling shed houses a bar that lets players perform a completely different type of curl. “There’s no drinking during the matches,” says Ardsley Curling Club president Alice Yeh, “but after the matches, it’s tradition that the winner buys.”

The tradition is alive and well. Andy Garcia, the curling club bartender, put it this way, “I saw one particular team of four drink 100 beers over 50 hours. That’s a case each. They were Canadians.” Teetotalers need not be put off – the atmosphere is also very friendly and sophisticated.

The pristine bowling lanes at Scarsdale have been a popular draw for members since the 1930s.



Though the curling club is set at Ardsley, it is actually a separate entity, leasing the building from the country club. This means that non-members can join – and the curling club (roughly 180 people strong) is currently accepting applications. It also rents out the rinks for corporate use. See sidebar for more information.

### Bowling

It’s hard, at first, to reconcile the fact that bowling – a game associated with the Archie Bunkers and Ralph Kramdens of the world – is actually a mainstay at a few very fine clubs in the Met area. Yet, clearly these clubs understand the value of competitive sport when outdoor activities shut down. **Woodway Country Club**, in Darien, Connecticut, certainly gets it. When it built a new clubhouse some five years ago, it made sure that the four bowling lanes in its old home would live on in its new dwelling. Today, men’s and women’s leagues thrive, as do children’s

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IT'S AS IF  
THE  
**GREEN**  
ROLLED  
OUT A GIANT  
**WELCOME**  
**MAT.**

birthday parties, where it's not uncommon to turn off the lights and bowl at glow-in-the-dark pins.

At **Scarsdale Golf Club**, golf is not the only sport whose history and tradition are captured by plaques on the clubhouse wall. The six bowling lanes at this 108-year-old club are graced by the names of the club's past and current bowling champions, dating back to 1932. One can also find a list of names of those in the illustrious "300" club – bowling's equivalent to the "hole-in-one" club. Should you find yourself invited by a member to roll a few frames at Scarsdale, we suggest you partner up with a Mr. G.S. Thompson, who, as the wall duly notes, is Scarsdale's bowling club champion from 1996 to 2005.

**Wee Burn** doesn't draw the line at skeet. In addition to shooting, as well as paddle tennis and sailing, the club offers its members four bowling lanes, and has done so since 1939 when the lanes were put in beneath the clubhouse ballroom. At that time, the pins



## Suit Up For Winter

**T**hough some of the activities in this story are only for members of the host club, others offer the public a chance to come in out of the cold and get in the game.

**Ardsley Curling Club** is taking members. There is a five-week trial period for \$125, then \$200 more for the rest of the season, which runs from October to April. Members compete against themselves and in curling leagues – newcomers at Ardsley are teamed up with experienced players so that everyone can participate and have a good time. Ask about the kids' leagues as well. For membership information or corporate rental, call 914-591-9800, or

visit [www.ardsleycurling.org](http://www.ardsleycurling.org).

Budding figure skaters and hockey players needn't belong to Huntington Country Club to join **The Winter Club**, however, one does need to be sponsored by a Winter Club member to be considered for membership. For information, call the club at 631-421-3889, or visit [www.winterclub.net](http://www.winterclub.net).

Though a number of members of **Sleepy Hollow Country Club** board their horses at the Sleepy Hollow Riding Academy, you don't have to own a horse or even belong to Sleepy Hollow to mount up, receive lessons, and hit the trails. For information, call 914-941-6620.

were handset and the club's original pinsetter, Bill Thomas, was known as "The fastest hands in the west." Today, the club has automatic pinsetting, yet Thomas, who has been with Wee Burn for over 60 years, can still be found working here as a caddie.

One need only visit the website of **Brooklawn Country Club**, in Fairfield, Connecticut, to know these folks take their bowling very seriously. Under the heading "Bowling League Rules," one finds 22 items written up in a crisp manner suitable for a legal council. Under "Etiquette" there are 11 more points of order, including the grumbling, "Play should begin at 7:30.... Too often play starts near 8:00 PM making it a longer night for the bowlers and staff." But rules and etiquette aside, this is a fine operation worth its weight in ten pins, with a men's, women's, and mixed league.

### Court Tennis

Here's a trivia question to challenge your friends: What is the only club in the country to offer five different racquet sports? The

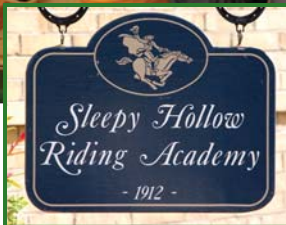
**Tuxedo's Tom Greevy** shows our author the basics of court tennis (opposite page, top), and he catches on quickly (left).

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answer is **The Tuxedo Club**, in Tuxedo Park, New York, which has tennis, paddle tennis, squash, hard racquets, and court tennis. If you know what those last two games are, then chances are you've been to Tuxedo. Hard racquets, an antecedent to squash, is played with

a racquet long enough and a ball hard enough to inspire great fear in first-timers and great respect in its proficient practitioners. The ball can whiz around at speeds well over 100 miles per hour. But if hard racquet play is for the brave at heart, court tennis is for the traditionalist at heart. There are only a handful of courts in the U.S. (Philadelphia, Newport, Boston), with the majority found in England. A throwback to a game played in monastery courtyards (bouncing it off sidewalls and roof-like eaves is allowed) and enjoyed by royalty in England and France (Henry the VIII played), court tennis is an indoor game that can take a Ph.D. to understand and a deft forehand to master. "Swing like you are in a phone booth," explains Tom Greevy, racquets sports pro at Tuxedo, who has been with the club since 1968. "I came to Tuxedo for six months and lost my car keys. I'm still here!"

About 70 Tuxedo members currently play court tennis – "either you really like it or you don't play," says Greevy – and one of the most accomplished is Greg Van Schaak, who was introduced to the game by Greevy at the New York Racquet and Tennis Club on Park Avenue. "Tom threw me into a match," says Van Schaak, "and I was hooked." Today, Van Schaak, who is Tuxedo's reigning club champion, competes internationally, and recently a finalist in the over-55 world singles championships. Still, Van Schaak is humble about his accomplishments. "There are 560 court tennis players in our national association, of those 350 actually play," he says, adding, "there's a joke that if you pick up a racquet, you are nationally ranked."

### Equestrian

The next time you find yourself at **Sleepy Hollow Country Club**, in Scarborough, New York, be sure to say hello to three of its most popular members: Sporty, Shakespeare, and Junior Mint. No, these are not cigar-smoking veterans of the club's card room; they are ponies – beloved by children at the Sleepy Hollow Riding

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Colorful saddles wait for riders at Sleepy Hollow (opposite page), while at Navesink in New Jersey, kids face off on the club's outdoor rink (left).

Academy. Made up of indoor and outdoor riding rings, numerous paddocks, a 100-year-old stable that houses almost 50 horses and perhaps the only barn in the world that has a working fireplace in its lounge, the Academy is no country club afterthought – it's one of the best riding facilities on the east coast. Some 100 of Sleepy Hollow's 600 or so members regularly use the full-service facility, which is run by Simonetta Meisels, whose gentle and supportive demeanor inspires confidence among riders and horses alike. "The facility is very family-oriented," says Meisels. "We have parent/child rides, pony rides. It's great for kids as it develops responsibility, courage, and independence. We also have programs that get kids involved with saddling, grooming and cleaning." But Sleepy Hollow's Riding Academy is by no means a kids-only operation. In addition to taking lessons, boarding horses, and galloping the fenced rings, adults can ride in the neighboring Rockefeller Preserve, some 300 acres of glorious trails near the Hudson.

### Hockey

In 1910 legendary golf course designer Devereux Emmet carved a lovely golf course out of a Long Island forest to create **Huntington Country Club**. Imagine Emmet's surprise if he telephoned the club today and heard a recorded voice say, "Select 2 for ice conditions." Actually, such a call would go to a large out-building on Huntington's grounds that has been leased to The Winter Club for the past 50-plus

years. Inside the building? An ice rink the same size as the one found in the old Boston Garden. A members-only operation, The Winter Club offers hockey and figure skating for kids and adults, with some 40 Huntington CC members claiming membership in both clubs. Junior hockey players, of which there are about 100, compete in leagues with such infectious names as MiniMites, Mites, and Squirts, while 60 adults suit up for Senior league events. Club manager Tom Fehrs says that there are also some 80 people in the figure skating program. To date, no fights have ever broken out on the ice during a hockey game at the club. We'll assume that goes for figure skating as well.

**Navesink Country Club** in Middletown, New Jersey also offers hockey and figure skating, and in fact has a winter-only membership for those wishing to forego golf privileges. ■

**Ken Baron** writes about golf from his home in New York City.

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