

Ardsley Curling: All ages, all abilities

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Rockland/Westchester
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Several Winter Olympics ago, in a homey restaurant in Rye, patrons gathered by the bar TV in the early morning hours.

The U.S. was competing and everyone was rooting.

But the questions splicing cheers and occasional moans made it clear many knew little about the sport that involves ice, brooms, targets and 42-pound stones.

Curling hits many Americans' radar just once every four years with the Winter Olympics broadcast.

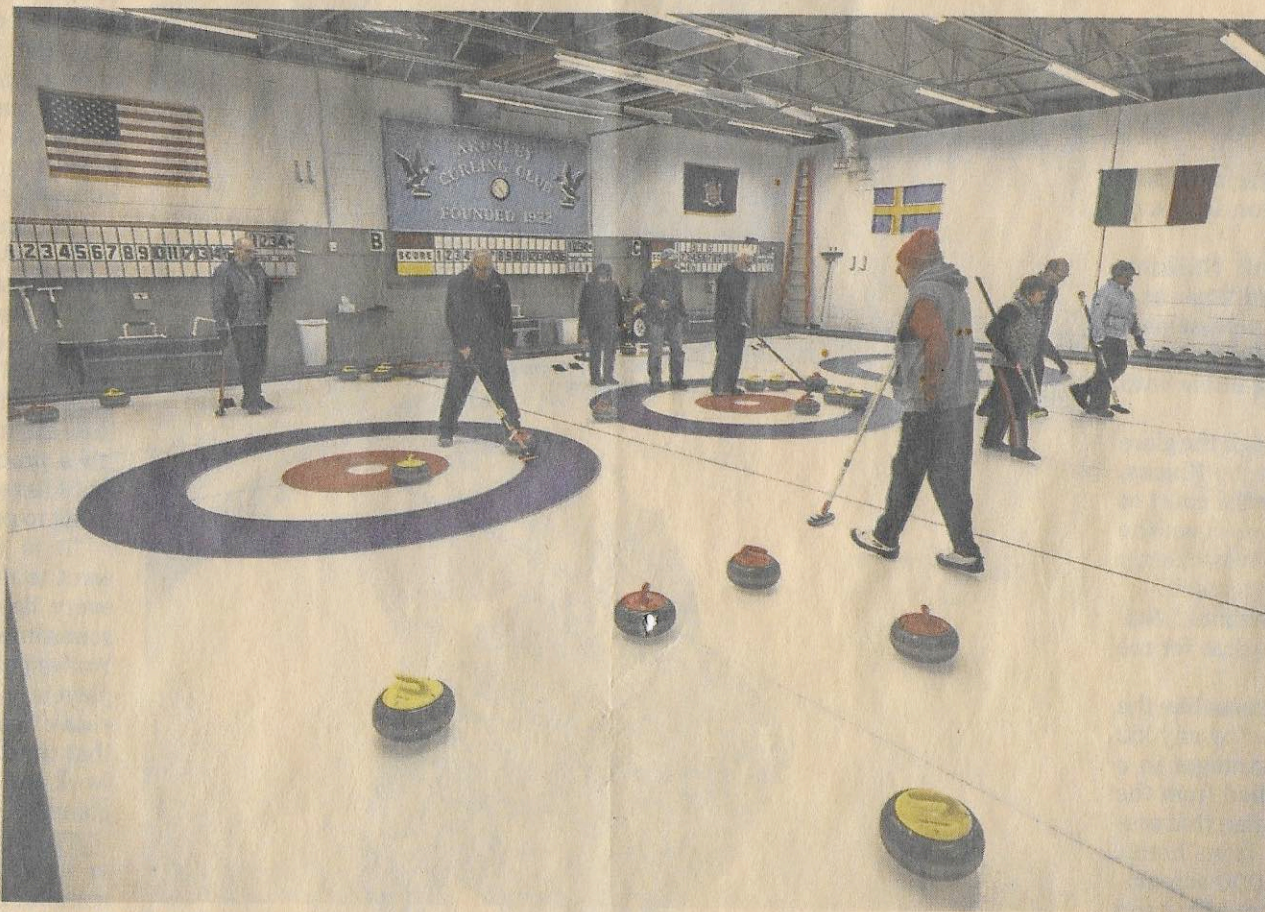
But, locally, it has had a passionate participant base since the 1800s, when Yonkers had an outdoor club.

In 1932, the indoor St. Andrew's Curling Club began in Hastings.

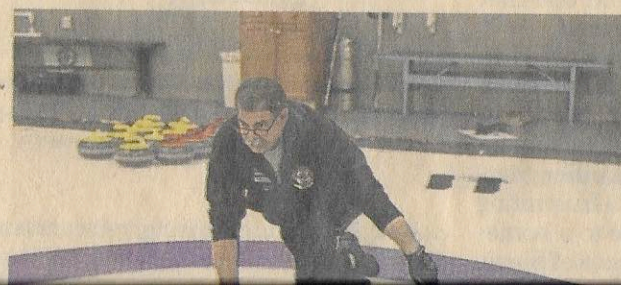
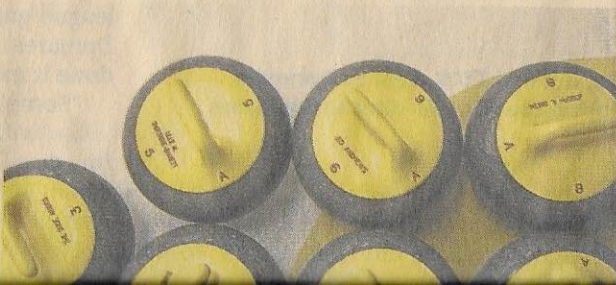
And in 1967, the Ardsley Curling Club, located on the grounds of the Ardsley Country Club, formed.

That club remains, operating seven days a week, September to April. It has 165 members.

Through \$50-a-head



Ardsley Curling Club members compete on Jan 13 during the Saturday Night Dinner League.



playing with my teammates and, every once in a while, you win. That's something that makes you feel good," said Ossining resident and former club president Pete McCuen of Ossining.

He's 83 and began curling 23 years ago.

"Who starts a sport at 60?" he mused.

But there are people well past 60 who play at very high levels.

Over the years, 16 members have played on national teams.

Last year, Andrew Stopera of Briarcliff led the U.S. team he skipped (captained, in curling lingo) to second place in the World Juniors Championship, playing in South Korea.

Stopera's squad was named 2017 U.S. Curling Team of the Year.

Last week, the 20-year-old Northwestern University student's team (which, in curling tradition, bears his name — Team Stopera) again won the U.S. Juniors title to earn another trip to the Junior World Championship. That will be early next month in Scotland.

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That club remains, operating seven days a week, September to April. It has 165 members.

Through \$50-a-head corporate events and things like open-house 30-minute instruction sessions scheduled Saturday and today, as well as Feb. 20, 21 and 26, the club hopes to see membership grow.

Curling is played with the thought and, to an extent, pace of chess.

About 50 club members travel each year to bonspiels (the curling word for tournaments)



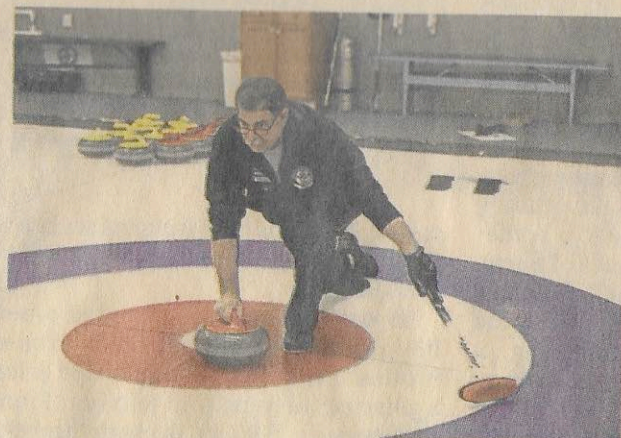
Members' names are seen on the stones at the club.

PHOTOS BY MARK VERGARI/THE JOURNAL NEWS

and the club sometimes hosts bonspiels, including for kids.

Twelve-year-olds curl at Ardsley, but so do people like Jean MacIntosh.

She curled until four years ago, when, at age 94, she found it difficult to slide the hefty granite stone along the pebbled ice.



Joseph Sablow, a board member with the Ardsley Curling Club, throws the stone.

But she still visits the club to watch games and dine with curling friends.

Years ago, MacIntosh, who initially belonged to the Hastings club and joined Ardsley in 1968 with her since-deceased husband, Herbert, curled in a women's Thursday morning group. Herbert curled at night with the men. And the two curled together in mixed couples games weekends, as well as went to other clubs to play in bonspiels.

They were so enamored with the sport they traveled to Europe and Scandinavia to watch the World Championships and curled themselves on the side during these trips.

MacIntosh was athletic — a softball player, swimmer, hiker and archer and four-year collegiate crew member.

But she explained,

quires a "tremendous amount of focus, energy consumption, finesse and strategic analysis."

But the game is played at different levels of intensity.

Some Ardsley members are casual curlers. They enjoy the camaraderie (post-match potluck dinners and adult beverages are often integral parts of the scene) as much or more than the competition.

Club Board of Directors member Joe Sablow, 63, of Ardsley, whose wife, Gudrun, also plays, calls the camaraderie "addicting."

He went from someone skeptical he'd like curling to competing in Scotland, Italy and Iceland.

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team (which, in curling tradition, bears his name — Team Stopera) again won the U.S. Juniors title to earn another trip to the Junior World Championship. That will be early next month in Scotland.

Stopera's a rising star. But he appreciates curlers decades his senior.

"The fact people 70, 80, 90 can still play is really special," he said.

He grew up in the club's junior program. He first recalls curling at 7 or 8.

"It's a really cool thing they do. If you're just starting out you get to meet and hang out with a lot of kids," he said.

His dad, Bill, 49, nearly made the U.S. Olympic team four years ago and has been both a gold medalist (2016) and bronze medalist (2015) at the U.S. men's club championships. Andrew, who sometimes subs on the team, captained the bronze medal team.

The team also includes Austin, a Briarcliff resident; Austin's son, Peter, who lives on Long Island; and Dobbs Ferry resident Martin Sather, a former junior national champion.

This week, with his dad unavailable, Andrew's curling with the others at the national club championships in northern Minnesota.

George Austin is closing in on 77 but remains "really good," according to the young Stopera

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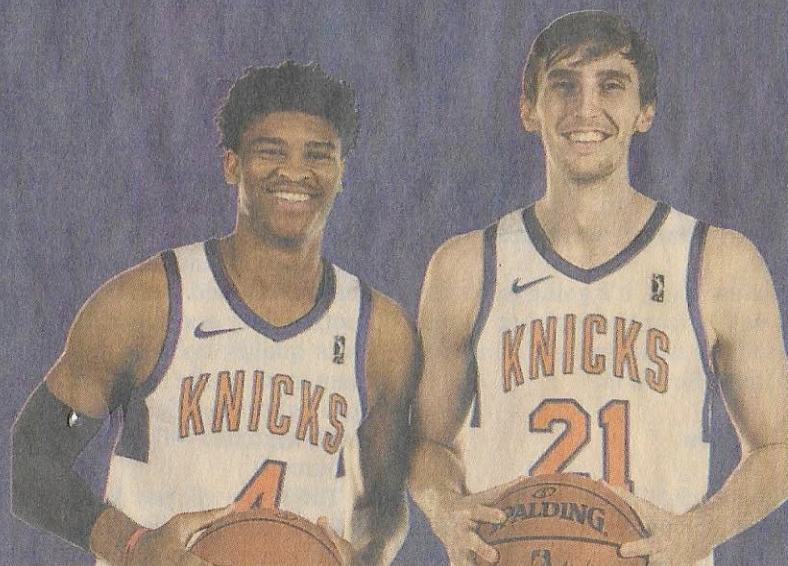
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and curled themselves on the side during these trips.

MacIntosh was athletic - a softball player, swimmer, hiker and archer and four-year collegiate crew member.

But she explained, "Once you learn how to curl, you really don't have to be an athlete. But you have to have the proper technique."

To get good, member George Austin said, re-

He went from someone skeptical he'd like curling to competing in Scotland, Italy and Iceland.

"If you join a curling club, you have 200 different friends from all different walks of life. You could have a corporate president next to a plumber. It doesn't matter. It's all about the game," Sablow said.

"I just look forward to coming down here and

Andrew's curling with the others at the national club championships in northern Minnesota.

George Austin is closing in on 77 but remains "really good," according to the young Stopera.

A baseball and basketball player in his younger years, Austin loves competing, especially with his son by his side.

"The gold medal in 2016 was definitely the highlight of my curling career," Austin said.

That win made him the oldest person to ever become a U.S. national curling champion.

McCuen, who has been out with a bad back but has been nagging his doctor to hurry up and let him resume playing, will probably never become that. But that doesn't matter to him.

"I've gotten an awful lot out of the game," McCuen said, smiling. "I'm a relatively average curler but I have as much fun as the best curlers."

(Open house curling costs \$20 for 30 minutes. Registration is online and questions should be emailed to openhouse@ardsley.com.

Membership costs vary based on age and experience. Rates for first-year members are \$200 for three months or \$375 for six months. The most costly membership is \$735 per year.)

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