



Frigid Fun

While you might expect Madison's parks to host abundant sports activities in the summer, you might be surprised at how many area residents brave the cold to keep active outdoors all winter. It's especially true for the three hundred or so Madison Nordic Ski Club members, which runs a series of social events, races and youth activities for beginner and expert cross-country skiers, including a volunteer squad deployed to the Winter Festival. The goal is to create a community of cross-country skiers while spreading love for the sport.

"Cross country skiing is a family-oriented sport and a social sport," says Elver Park programming coordinator Yuriy Gusev. "It enhances family values. We want to expose cross-country skiing to everyone. It encourages people to get outside in the winter and exercise."

The ski club has a proud history of community service, from free ski lessons to coats and gear donations to disadvantaged youth. Its most recent endeavor is a unique partnership with the city and area organizations on the new Elver Winter Park

CAPITOL KIDS: Winter Festival (Feb. 13–15) on Capitol Square has quickly become a favorite for kids of all ages.

Program. Understanding that winter is a difficult time to keep kids active and learning, the ski club, the city and the Madison Community Foundation decided to do something about it by donating money to purchase snowmaking equipment.

"This neighborhood was sort of on the cusp and we wanted to do something," says Tom Linfield, MCF vice president of grant making and community initiatives. "We really believe parks are an asset."

Another local group, Wisconsin Youth Company, will provide the programming and educational structure, getting help along the way from the ski club.

"I'm really excited to get our youth out and active in the winter," says WYC executive director Nancy Goodell. In addition to the ski club's programming, Elver Park will be bustling with sledding, tubing, ice skating, and snowshoeing. Kids also will get some job skills training by running the park's equipment rental facility and food stand. The highlight of

HOW MADISON RANKS

Top 10 Outdoor-Oriented Towns

Yahoo! Real Estate, Fall 2007

Best Farmers' Market in Nation

EatingWell, August 2007

Top Medium-Sized Metro in the Arts

Creative Class Group, May 2007

#1 Walking City

Prevention, April 2007

Top 20 Children's Museums in America

Grand Magazine, March 2007

Best Road Biking Town in America

Outside, August 2006

#1 City for Cycling

Bicycling, March 2006

Most Romantic U.S. City

USAWeekend.com, February 2006

Top 10 Places to Live the Athletic Life

geezerJock, Fall 2005

Top 10 Places for Outdoor Activities

Sperling's Best Places, Fall 2005

2005 Award for Garden Excellence, Olbrich Botanical Gardens

American Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta, Summer 2005

Best Game-Day Atmosphere

Sports Illustrated on Campus, September 2005

the year will be a series of weeklong, family-orientated competitions culminating in the Winter Festival and WYC's annual Celebrating Youth event.

While there are enough outdoor winter sports to go around, there's plenty to do at indoor rinks all around the city. A unique game on ice—or "sheet," as this group calls it—curling might be a niche sport but it's players and fans are passionate about the game. What started out in 1921 outside and underneath the bleachers of Camp Randall stadium has continued as an active and social Madison Curling Club with a million-dollar facility in McFarland that hosted the 2006 U.S. Curling Olympic Team Trials.

Several Madison athletes have competed on Olympic teams.

Often referred to as “chess on ice,” curling is a game of strategy, where teams on opposite sides of the sheet, which resembles a shuffleboard game, take turns delivering stones across the ice to the center circle, or tee. After eight turns each, whichever stone is closest to the target wins the round. As the game progresses, a curling brush fine-tunes each shot.

Where the real chess is played—and won—at the competitive level might surprise you. Brian Luo, a sixth-grader at Jefferson Middle School, competed in his first game of chess at age six. His big sister, now at UW–Madison, taught him the game while babysitting him one summer. He has been ranked first or second in the nation in his age group since he was seven, and is currently classified as an expert, adult-level player (the next highest classification is master). And if that’s



Madison Curling Club athlete Kathy Pielage

not impressive enough, West High Assistant Chess Club Coach Neil Gleason says he’s also a math and piano prodigy. “He’s a fabulous kid, very, very sharp and a wonderful sense of humor,” says Gleason. **LAURA SALINGER**



Madison Gay Hockey League players Tammy Champion, Paul Waller, Joe Rhodes, Simon Ross, Dick, Michelle Watkins

Sports Bar None

There may be the misconception that bars and discos are at the center of gay social life. Increasing numbers of lesbians and gay men are participating in organized athletics as a way to meet other people. This trend is national as well as local. What is perhaps different in Madison is that many of these LGBT sports are more integrated—lesbians, gay men and even some who identify as straight—playing together on the same team.

It began here with the formation of the **Bette Davis Bowling League** in 1984. Today known as **Bowling Out Loud** (Bette Davis’s estate asked them to change the name), its keggers compete every Sunday at the Bowl-A-Vard Lanes during the fall and winter. Each year, the season culminates in a gay bowling tournament between Madison and Milwaukee. Alternating between the two cities this event, called MILMAIDS, is a benefit for AIDS Network and AIDS Resource Council of Wisconsin.

For the past fifteen years, **Different Spokes** has been the bicycle club in south-central Wisconsin for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and their friends. Different Spokes coordinates bike rides of varied lengths (some include camping) for riders with diverse abilities and interests.

Started in 2004, SSBL (originally stood for Saturday Softball League) Madison is the city’s official LGBT softball league with eleven co-ed teams. In cooperation with SSBL, Madwomen Softball has five all-women teams. Both play games each summer as part of the Madison School and Community Recreation softball series. SSBL will host the 2009 Women’s Softball World Series here in Madison September 1–5.

The **Madison Gay Hockey Association** debuted in 2006 and has six teams with one hundred skaters, male and female, plus another fifty or so members who support them. It is one of the largest organizations of its kind in the country, has attracted national media attention and has an enthusiastic following.

Volleyball is the only sport that continues year-round. **Madison Gay Volleyball** just celebrated its first anniversary and has seven teams. With similar groups in other communities, it is launching a Wisconsin Gay Volleyball Association affiliated with the North American Gay Volleyball Association.

The **Madison Minotaurs** rugby club formed last March with help from their counterparts in Minneapolis and Chicago. The Minotaurs, a member of the International Gay Rugby Association and Board, play teams from around the state during the fall and spring, and their official clubhouse is Woof’s, 114 King St. **DAN CURD**