

Sentimental Journeys, Adaptive Golf, and the Greatest Athlete You've Never Heard of



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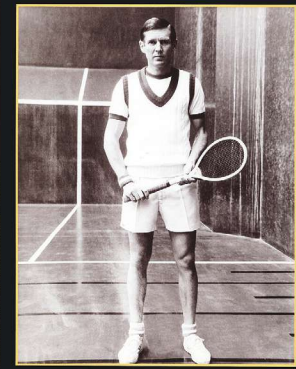
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2019



TOUGH TESTS

The most challenging holes in the Met Area

Hudson National Golf Club, 18th hole

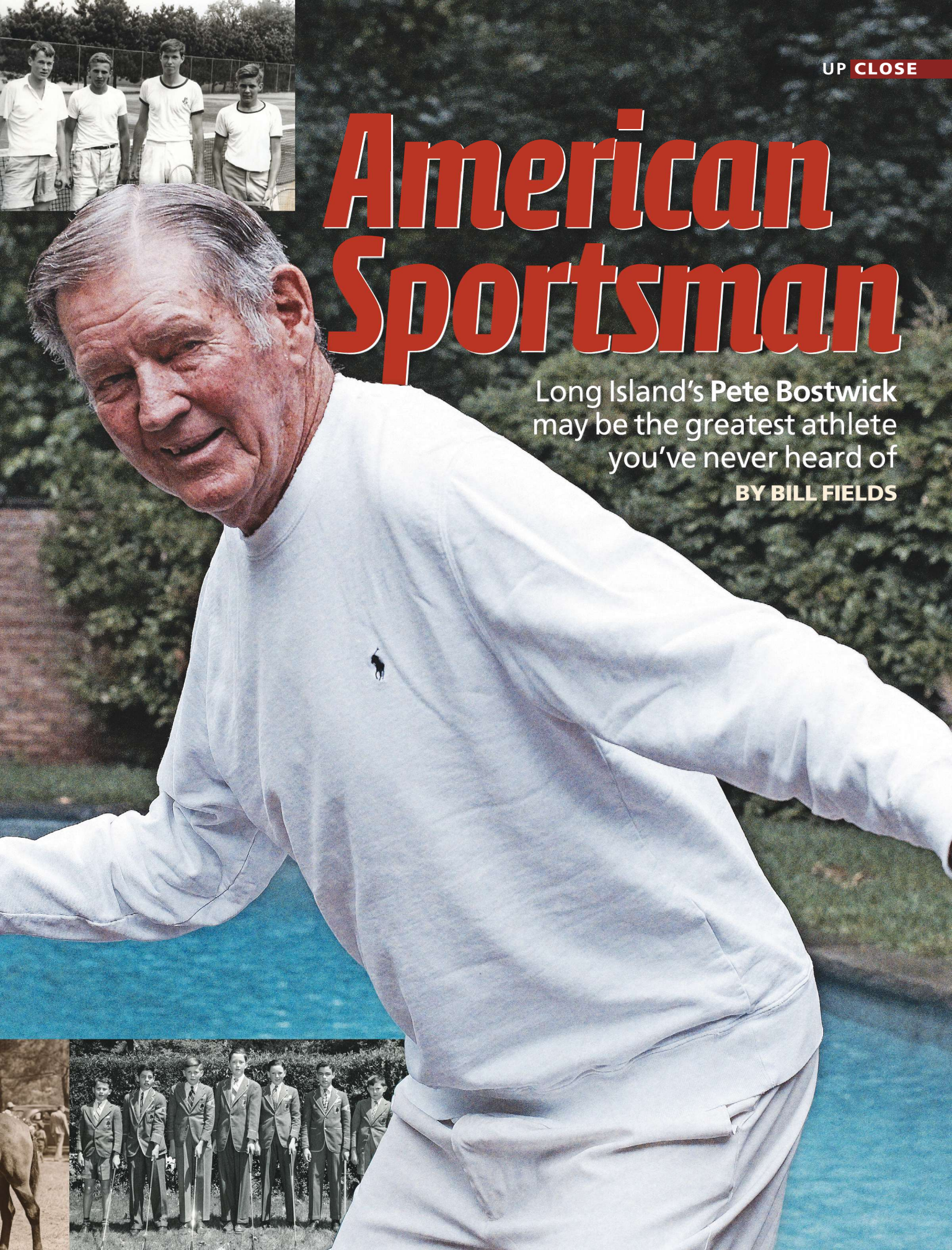


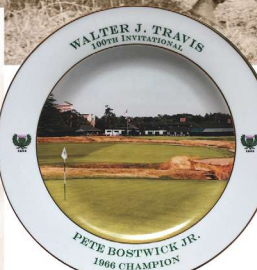
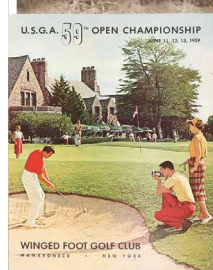
UP CLOSE

American Sportsman

Long Island's Pete Bostwick may be the greatest athlete you've never heard of

BY BILL FIELDS





COURTESY OF PETE BOSTWICK AND FAMILY

Clockwise from top left: Young Pete at Aiken Prep in 1944; at a Horse Show in 1939; on the cover of the *Daily News* for his Ike Team win with brother Jimmy in 1971; a plate presented to winners of the Walter J. Travis Invitational golf tournament; Pete on the cover of *Golf Magazine*, August 1967; a copy of the 1959 U.S. Open program.

Two months before his 85th birthday, G.H. Bostwick Jr.—“Pete” to the world and “Pap” to his family—was in his Long Island home talking about a lifetime of being good at many sports and how good those sports have been to him. It had been a June morning filled with matter-of-fact memories of people and games, but when asked about the joy those athletic pursuits provided him, Bostwick became emotional.

“I couldn’t have had a better life,” he says before having to pause to compose himself. “First of all, my kids are terrific. I have an unbelievable wife who supported me and cares about me. I played all those sports not because it was about winning, but because I just loved it.”

“Pete’s love of sports,” says his son-in-law, Harrison M. Wilson, “is as intense as anything I’ve ever seen.”

Although Bostwick’s polite and easy personality makes him the epitome of the gentleman-sportsman, he also was a prolific and versatile winner, his varied and durable talents a stark contrast to the current age of specialization. “I was kind of a jack of all trades, master of none,” he says, but the record reveals another story.

Golf. Hockey. Tennis. Court Tennis. Racquets. Squash. Bostwick was accomplished in each and world-class in more than a few. A sample of his unique abilities: In a six-

month period of 1959, Bostwick competed in the U.S. Open at Winged Foot, advanced to the fourth round of the U.S. Amateur (one of five career appearances), and participated in tryouts for the United States hockey team for the ’60 Winter Olympics.

“If you have good hand-eye coordination, you can learn to play all those games, but you never play them as you would if you stuck to one sport,” Bostwick says. “I played four racquet games at a national level, but I think I could have played at a higher level if I stuck to one sport.”

Bostwick was one of the best amateur golfers in the Met Area during the 1960s and early ’70s. After starring at Middlebury College in tennis, hockey, and golf, he won the 1964 Richardson Memorial, 1966 Travis Memorial and Long Island Amateur, 1968 Northeast Amateur, and Hochster Memorial (1968-69). He won eight club championships at National Golf Links of America,

seven at Piping Rock Club, and one at Seminole Golf Club.

Pete partnered with his younger brother Jimmy, also a skilled multi-sport athlete, to win the Anderson (1970 and ’74) and Ike (’71) team titles. “Peter was really good because he seemed to have a way to hole important putts,” Jimmy says. “Being competitive came to him naturally. He loved competition and would go from one sport to the next.”

Bostwick had no trouble adapting to the nuances of the different court sports he played at a high level. He solved the quirks of court tennis in winning a world title and 16 American championships. He was a three-time U.S. squash champion and twice won the U.S. Open in fast-paced racquets with its longer bats and harder balls.

Bostwick’s experience in those sports allowed him to develop wicked finesse that transferred to lawn tennis. “I have more spin. No one has more spin than me,” he says. “It’s from all those racquet games I play.”

The Bostwick boys—great-grandsons of Jabez Bostwick, a wealthy 19th century businessman and founding partner of Standard Oil—come from a family of athletes. Their father, Pete, a Hall of Fame polo player and jockey, was on six U.S. championship polo teams and a six-time leading steeplechase rider prior to becoming a successful

trainer. Their mother, Laura Curtis Bostwick, was fine golfer. The siblings' great-aunts, Harriot and Margaret Curtis, were champion amateur golfers who founded the Curtis Cup Matches, a biennial competition between the best women amateurs from the U.S. and Great Britain & Ireland.

"I never played golf with my great-aunts but had lunch with them in Massachusetts a couple of times," Pete says. "They were characters."

Although his family had deep New York roots, Pete and Jimmy spent much of their childhood in Aiken, S.C., where Pete Sr. rode and trained from fall through spring. The

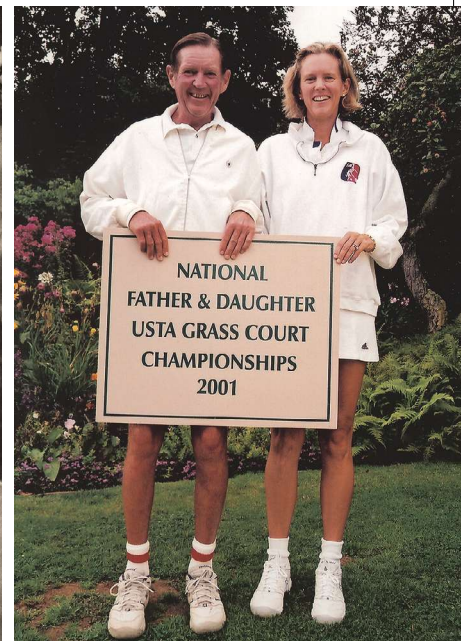
until January when we got back from Christmas break. They put cleats on two big horses who pulled a shaver. The ice was like glass."

Although Pete had only ice-skated a few times before arriving in New England, he took to hockey quickly and improved each season, ultimately playing right wing at Middlebury College. From 1958–1983, Pete was a fixture on the Manhattan-based St. Nicholas hockey club, the oldest amateur hockey team in the country; in the mid- to late-1970s, when he was in his 40s, Pete scrimmaged with the New York Islanders during pre-season camp.

"I was still in pretty good shape and got

ers I've seen," says Gene Mayer, a former World No. 4 in singles who has known Bostwick for 30 years. "He was certainly not a power player, but in terms of control and spin and touch—everything to do with ball feel—he may have written the book. His shot choice and creativity is almost unparalleled. He downplays everything, but I do not know a better athlete."

Bostwick's innate gifts helped him advance through U.S. Open sectional qualifying 60 years ago to earn a spot at Winged Foot. Paired with "Lighthouse" Harry Cooper, Bostwick shot 74-70 at Baltusrol Golf Club despite having never seen the Upper or



Left: Pete with Sam Snead at the 1962 Thunderbird Classic Invitational at Upper Montclair. Center: At Winged Foot competing in the Anderson Memorial in the late 1960s. Right: Pete teaming up with his daughter Catherine Bostwick Wilson in 2001.

brothers attended Aiken Preparatory School, their lives filled with lots of sports and a little mischief.

"One of the best things we had down there were BB gun fights in the woods when we were 10, 11, 12 years old," says Jimmy. "You had to shoot below the waist, but those BB guns aren't that accurate. One kid got hit in the finger and told a teacher how he was injured. We got suspended and couldn't go home that weekend."

But before he had even started school, Pete was on target in the multiple sports he pursued. On weekends in South Carolina, Pete and Jimmy usually played 27 holes at Palmetto Golf Club. After he entered St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H., in the ninth grade, hockey became a passion.

"The rinks were on the ponds," Pete remembers, "and they weren't frozen enough

a lot of ice time," Bostwick says. "I played with Bryan Trottier, Clark Gillies, Bobby Bourne—those kind of guys. The difference between a good college player and a good pro is they do everything a little better than you. They're a little faster, a little stronger. They shoot a little harder, move the puck a little quicker. I could do all those things at a college level fairly well."

As an 18-year-old ranked junior tennis player, Bostwick competed in the 1952 U.S. National Championships at Forest Hills, losing to Charlie Masterson in the first round. He is one of only three men—joining Ellsworth Vines and Frank Conner—to participate in both that event, which became the U.S. Open in 1968 when professionals were allowed for the first time, and the U.S. Open golf championship.

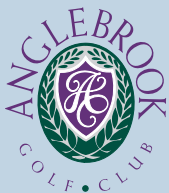
"Pete is one of the most gifted ball-strik-

Lower courses. He shot 78-75 in the U.S. Open, missing the cut by three strokes but finishing a shot ahead of Jack Nicklaus.

Over time, Bostwick would get to play golf and tennis with the Golden Bear—"He has three of the finest grass courts I've seen," Pete says—and golf with Ben Hogan and Sam Snead. During the early 1960s, Bostwick had the privilege of half a dozen rounds with Hogan at Seminole in March as the legend prepared for the Masters.

"The first time, I probably hadn't hit a golf ball since October," Bostwick says. "He gave me four shots. Not enough. We were playing a \$10 Nassau, and he collected my money."

While Bostwick shot a rusty 81, Hogan went around in 66. "I have never seen anybody hit a ball with the precision of Ben Hogan," Bostwick says. "It was unbelievable.



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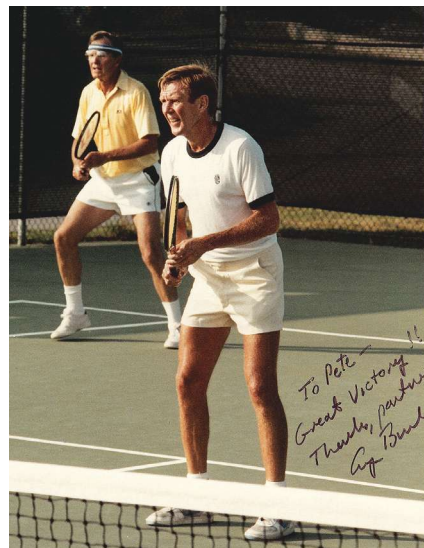
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Top: Pete (center) as Captain of the St. Nicholas Hockey Club. Bottom left: With his Middlebury coach at the 1958 New England Intercollegiate Golf Championship. Bottom right: Playing tennis with then-Vice President George H.W. Bush in 1984. The message on the photo reads: "To Pete – Great victory!! Thanks, partner."

Every ball took off like a rifle shot, hit absolutely perfectly."

Bostwick was no ball-striking slouch. He didn't overpower a course but hit plenty of fairways and greens, his reliable swing shaped from childhood lessons with renowned teacher Ernest Jones. (He wrote the foreword in a re-issue of one of Jones's classic instruction books.)

"He was all about swinging the clubhead from start to finish with your hands," Bostwick says. "Hit the ball as hard as you possibly can as long as you don't destroy the swing motion. And he taught a good grip – if your grip is good, it increases the chance of coming into the ball in a good position."

Throughout his life, Bostwick has been known as much for his character as for his athletic achievements. Wilson says his father-in-law never competed "with aggression, but with relentless precision, perseverance,

and a positive spirit, along with impeccable sportsmanship."

Vinny Giles, 1972 U.S. Amateur and 1975 British Amateur champion, calls Bostwick "a sweetheart of a guy" and admires his lifelong love of sports. "An amazing guy who is still trying to get better," Giles says. "That's a real tribute at his age."

Indeed, despite multiple joint replacements and revisions and current mobility issues, Bostwick is still working on his tennis game with hour-long sessions four times a week. Although he can't run around, he remains an adept striker and is hopeful of one more appearance in the grandfather-grandson nationals. He also plays nine holes weekly at Piping Rock and has sessions with a trainer and a physical therapist.

"I don't know if I'm ever going to get a bit more mobile, but I'm working on it," Bostwick says, an athlete once and forever. ■

COURTESY OF PETE BOSTWICK AND FAMILY