

# GOING FOR A RECORD

By Will Shortz

For several years now I've been telling friends and acquaintances my modest table tennis goal — to play at more U.S. table tennis clubs than anyone else in history.

People always ask, "What is the record number of clubs you are trying to beat?" I have no idea, since as far as I know no one else has been keeping track. My count, as I write this, is 60 U.S. clubs in 19 states, with 24 additional clubs in foreign countries. If anyone can beat my number of U.S. clubs, I'd like to hear.

This all started inadvertently in December 2001, when I was planning an after-Christmas car trip from Indiana, where I was visiting family, back home to Pleasantville, N.Y. I was newly fired-up with enthusiasm for the game. Wouldn't it be fun, I thought, to play at a couple of table tennis clubs along the way?

Using the handy club locator map on the USATT website, I found the Table Tennis Club of Indianapolis, where I played on the evening of Dec. 27, and the Allentown/Lehigh Valley (Pa.) TTC, where I played on Dec. 28. Both clubs have many tables, good playing conditions, and some excellent players. The atmosphere was friendly. I had a terrific time... and have returned to both sites several times since.

As the crossword editor of the New York Times, I travel frequently around the country for speaking engagements and puzzlers' conventions. Soon after the above trip, wherever I went, I started trying to find a local club to play at. Whenever I traveled long-distance by car, I tried to find a club (or two) along the way. And living near New York City, I had a large number of clubs within easy driving distance from home.

At first my goal wasn't to set a record. I just wanted to see how different clubs operated, to meet other players, to practice against different styles of play, and to stay in shape while I was on the road.

By the end of 2004 I'd played at 10 different U.S. clubs. By the end of 2006 the number had grown to 20. Then I got serious. In 2007 I played at 13 new clubs, bringing my total to 33. In 2008 I played at 21 more, for a total of 54. So far this year I've played at an additional 6 clubs.

One of my favorite table tennis experiences occurred in September 2007 in Cleveland, Ohio, where I had a speaking engagement. Fortunately, the Cleveland Table Tennis Association was open on the one night I was in Cleveland. Unfortunately, my talk was scheduled to go past the club's closing time. The director, Vincent Turner, whom I called in advance, couldn't have been nicer. He held the club open for me until 1 a.m. and even invited some top local players to arrive late to play me.

Another favorite experience happened last fall in New Albany, Ind., where the Southern Indiana Table Tennis Association plays. This club, by the way, holds the record for playing at the same facility (a recreation center) longer than any other U.S. table tennis club — since at least 1935. I took part in a friendly intra-club tournament held on the evening I visited. Afterward, as per custom, a dozen or so members went to a local brewpub for beer and pizza, which was a great way to round out the evening.

I'd like to think that my home club, the Rivertowns TTC, in Westchester County, N.Y., is the friendliest table tennis club in the country. But after the hospitality I experienced with the Kokomo (Ind.) TTC, where I played in 2007, I might have to give the laurel to them. I was invited to participate in an intra-club tournament and party, everyone present was friendly, food and drink were plentiful, and Don McCreary, the director, refused to accept any payment. Then when I won a small prize in the tournament, they offered me money! It was over-the-top niceness.

Perhaps the most unusual club I've played at is the East Northport TTC on Long Island, about 45 minutes east of Manhattan. Steve Camas, a restaurant owner and table tennis enthusiast, has built a club under his house, smack in the middle of a suburban neighborhood. The club room is about 40 feet long by 25 feet wide -- enough space for three tables, comfortably. A three-minute video on the club's website (www.enttc.org) shows the place being built, starting with earthmovers digging a giant hole under Steve's house. How Steve's wife agreed to this I have no idea. She must be a saint.

The craziest table tennis-related thing I've done is a road trip to Toronto last December with Robert Roberts (USATT-rated 2574), a friend from my home club. We played at the Greater Buffalo TTC on the way up and then nine more clubs in five days in and around Toronto. The Buffalo

club's website (gbttc.com) has a five-second video clip running continuously on its home page of Robert making an amazing shot behind his back.

On second thought, that's only the second craziest table tennis-related thing I've done. The very craziest was in Kingston, Jamaica, in January last year, when I was the best man at Robert's wedding. During my four days in Jamaica we played table tennis three times, missing only his actual wedding day — and we almost played then.

The largest U.S. club where I've played is the Atlanta Georgia Table Tennis Association, which has 14 tables spread out in a gym. Even larger, though (much larger), is the Canadian-Chinese Table Tennis Association in Markham, Ont., with 38 tables — which were all in use when I was there.

The smallest U.S. club I've played at is the Ossining (N.Y.) TTC, which has just two tables. Expect to wait if you ever visit. Even smaller is the club in Goa, India, with just one table.

The hottest club? That would be a tie between the Allentown/Lehigh Valley TTC in June 2008 and the Princeton University TTC in July, both in un-air-conditioned gyms. Brutal. Still, Goa was much, much worse. I probably lost five pounds in sweat during my hour and a half there.

Most cramped? That would be a tie between the New York TTC (the rear area) and Wang Chen's TTC (downstairs), both in New York City. Hardly room enough to play. But we all know space is at a premium in New York.

And the highest-altitude club where I've played is the Aurora (CO) TTC, at 5,470 feet above sea level. For a while all the balls I hit flew off the table, until I realized why, and adjusted.

You know how every club seems to have places where balls disappear — under sofas, behind bleachers and soda machines, etc.? It's a rule, I think, that clubs must have hard-to-reach spots like this. My worst experience with losing balls was in Epernay, France, where the man who ran the club was also a used book dealer. Around the complete perimeter of the club were stacked boxes of books, providing countless places for balls to vanish.

If, like me, you decide to visit other table tennis clubs, here are some tips and advice:

First, go to the USATT website (www.usatt.org), select "Clubs" from the menu bar at the top, then "Locations." On the map of the U.S. that appears, click a state. Currently about 270 clubs are affiliated with the USATT. With luck, one or more of them will be in or near a place you're interested in.

Another good source of clubs is the National Collegiate Table Tennis Association website. For a list of the NCTTA members, see www.nctta.org/teams.html

Bear in mind that many active table tennis clubs have not, for whatever reason, become members of the USATT. You can find some of these by doing a Google search on "table tennis + club + [name of city or area]."

Before visiting, always call or write ahead. Information on the USATT or club website may be out of date, or the club may have a change in schedule you should know about.

In case you'd like to challenge my record, here are my rules as to what constitutes a table tennis club that may be counted:

1) It must be a club that has a name, whose members play regularly, and that is open to the public. Playing informally at a school, church, recreation center, company, or private home doesn't count. 2) A tournament sponsored by a club counts only if the event is held at the club's usual place of play. 3) If a club has multiple locations, or if it moves, it counts only once.

A full, list of the clubs where I've played, with dates, appears at www.rivertownsttc.org/will

If your club isn't listed yet, it's probably only a matter of time before you see me!

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Will Shortz is the crossword editor of the New York Times and puzzlemaster for NPR's "Weekend Edition Sunday."

## CLUBS I'VE VISITED

<b>U.S. Clubs:</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Foreign Clubs:</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>U.S. states:</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Foreign countries:</b>	<b>13</b>



## TABLE TENNIS CLUBS WHERE I'VE PLAYED

### Arkansas

Arkansas Independent TT Association (Sherwood) — May 30, 2007

### California

Gilbert TT Center (Los Angeles) — July 11, 2005  
Westside TT Center (Los Angeles) — July 10, 2007

### Colorado

Aurora TTC — July 13, 2008

### Connecticut

Fairfield TTC — Sept. 29, 2007  
Greater Hartford TTC — May 17, 2008

Lower Naugatuck Valley TT Center (Shelton) — June 5, 2008

### Georgia

Atlanta Georgia TT Association — March 28, 2004

### Illinois

Killerspin TTC (Chicago) — Aug. 2, 2003

### Indiana

Indiana University TTC (Bloomington) — May 2, 2008  
Kokomo TTC — Dec. 26, 2007

Southern Indiana TT Association (New Albany) — Sept. 24, 2008

Table Tennis Club of Indianapolis — many times beginning Dec. 27, 2001

Three Rivers TT Center (Fort Wayne) — Dec. 27, 2005

### Maryland

Baltimore TTC (Randallstown) — May 18, 2006  
Club Joola (Rockville) — Aug. 15, 2008

Maryland TT Center (Gaithersburg) — April 1, 2008  
Potomac County TTC (Cabin John) — June 10, 2005

### Massachusetts

Academy of Table Tennis (Newton) — April 27, 2007  
Bay State TTC (Springfield) — Aug. 12, 2008

Boston TT Center (Medford) — April 28, 2007,  
March 14, 2009, and others

Northeastern University TTC (Boston) — April 4, 2009

Tufts TTC (Medford) — April 5, 2009  
Waltham TTC — March 15, 2009

### New Hampshire

Nashua TTC — March 14, 2009

### New Jersey

Hoboken TTC — Sept. 22, 2007  
New Jersey TTC (Westfield) — May 20, 2006, Oct. 20, 2007, Oct. 23, 2008, plus several tournaments

Passaic TTC — Feb. 6 and Mar. 6, 2009

Princeton University TTC (Princeton) — July 16, 2008

### New York

Big Apple TTC (Astoria, Queens) — Nov. 17, 2007

Binghamton University TTC (Binghamton) — April 26, 2008

Brooklyn Nison's TT School — Sept. 5, 2008

Burke TTC (White Plains) — often beginning July 23, 2001

East Northport TTC — May 2, 2009

Friendship TTC (Flushing, Queens) — several times beginning Aug. 23, 2008

Greater Buffalo TTC (Tonawanda) — Dec. 11, 2008

Lost Battalion Hall TTC (Rego Park, Queens) — home club during the mid-1980s beginning April 24, 1985

Manhattan TTC (New York City) — several times beginning Oct. 29, 2003

New York International TTC (Flushing, Queens) — many times beginning June 18, 2007

New York TTC (Flushing, Queens) — many times beginning Nov. 9, 2006

New York TT Federation (Chinatown, Manhattan) — Sept. 17, 2007

New York TT Inc. (Flushing, Queens) — several times beginning May 8, 2008

Ossining TTC — Mar. 22, 2008

Rivertowns TTC (Hastings, Ardsley, Tarrytown) — home club beginning May 1, 2001

Wang Chen's TTC (New York City) — several times beginning June 20, 2005

West Side TTC [Marty Reisman's] (New York City) — many times circa late 1970s

### Ohio

Akron TTC — Aug. 17, 2004

Cleveland TT Association — Sept. 27, 2007

Columbus TTC — Dec. 23, 2007

### Oklahoma

Oklahoma TTC (Oklahoma City) — July 31, 2006

### Pennsylvania

Allentown/Lehigh Valley TTC (Allentown) — Dec. 28, 2001, Dec. 21, 2004, and June 5, 2008

Chicken House TTC (Gordonville) — Oct. 11, 2008

Manor TTC (Lancaster) — Oct. 10, 2008

Nanticoke TT, Inc. — July 15, 2008

Newtown TTC — April 10, 2006

Pottsgrove TTC (Pottstown) — Oct. 18, 2007

### Rhode Island

Rhode Island TT Association (Manville) — May 18, 2008

### Utah

Wasatch Front TTC (Salt Lake City) — Aug. 5, 2005

### Vermont

Champlain Valley TTC (Burlington) — Aug. 13, 2008

### Virginia

University of Virginia TTC (Charlottesville) — April 2, 2008

## FOREIGN

### Belarus

Klub Nastol'nogo Tennisa Atlant (Minsk) — Oct. 28-30, 2008

### Brazil

Olaria Atlético Clube (Rio de Janeiro) — Oct. 8, 2007

### Canada

Canadian Chinese TT Association (Markham) — Dec. 14 and 16, 2008

Centrum TTC (Mississauga) — Dec. 15, 2008

Matty Eckler Community Center TTC (Toronto) — Dec. 14, 2008

My TTC (Markham) — Dec. 13, 2008

Pickering TTC — Dec. 16, 2008

Play for Fun and Fitness TTC (Toronto) — Dec. 12, 2008

Progress TTC (Toronto) — Dec. 17, 2008

Top Spin TTC (Vaughan) — Dec. 16, 2008

Toronto TTC — Dec. 13, 2008

### Croatia

Stolnoteniski Klub Koprivnica (Koprivnica) — Sept. 24, 1997

Stolnoteniski Klub Opatija (Opatija) — Oct. 13-15, 2004

### Czech Republic

Sportovní Klub Stolního Tenisu Brno (Brno) — Oct. 9, 2001

### France

Club de Tennis de Table d'Epernay — June 14, 2003

Club de Tennis de Table d'Is-sur-Tille — May 21 and 22, 2005

### Hungary

Eger Asztalitenisz Szövetség (Eger) — Oct. 11 and 12, 2005

### India

Goa TT Association (Panaji) — April 15, 2008

### Italy

Lucca Tennis da Tavolo (Lucca) — March 10, 2006

### Jamaica

Kingston YMCA TTC — Jan. 3 and 4, 2008

### Netherlands

Tafeltennis Centrum Amsterdam Keizersgracht 209 (Amsterdam) — Oct. 13, 1996

Universitaire Sportvereniging TTC (Amsterdam) — Oct. 13, 2003

### Poland

Warsaw [club name not known] — Sept. 28, 1985

### Slovakia

SKST Centrum Zilina (Zilina) — April 25, 2009