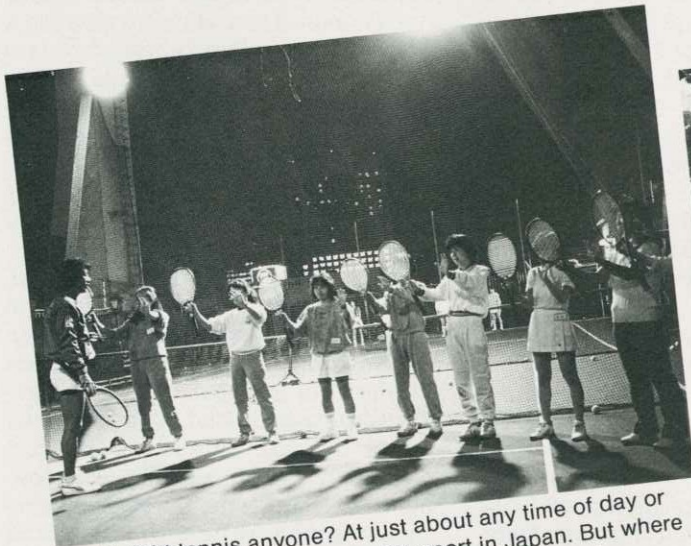


Getting Physical

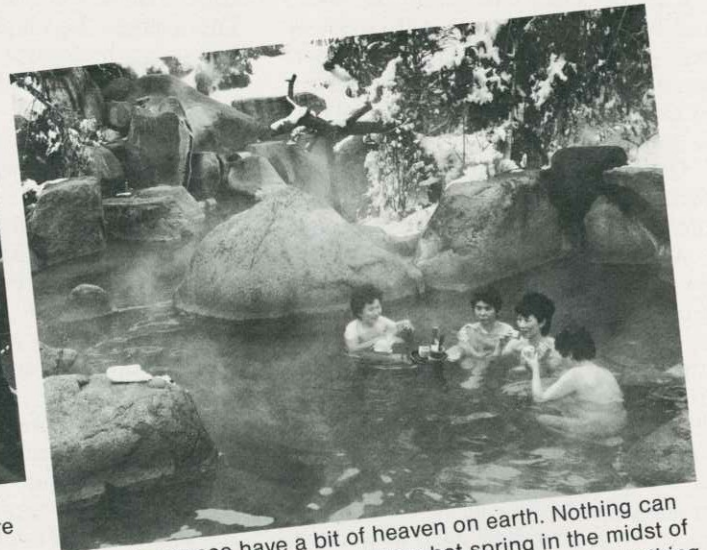
Photos by Lucy Birmingham



Move over sumo! Baseball is now the most popular sport in Japan. With 12 professional baseball teams (six Central League, six Pacific League), more than 280 college teams and approximately 3,800 high school teams, the fans have plenty to cheer about. They love it!



Midnight tennis anyone? At just about any time of day or night, tennis is a very popular sport in Japan. But where do they find space for the courts? Look up. Perched conveniently on building rooftops, one can even find a court in crowded Ginza.



The Japanese have a bit of heaven on earth. Nothing can compare to a dip in an outdoor hot spring in the midst of winter. Leave your inhibitions behind (as well as your bathing suit), sip a bit of hot sake, relax and you're almost in paradise. Bathing in Japan is a pure delight.

Lucy Birmingham is a freelance photographer living in Tokyo.



It looks easy but don't let them fool you. It's not. Gateball is the most popular sport among senior citizens in Japan. It takes a lot of skill and, yes, endurance. It may be all in good fun, but the players have a competitive edge. It keeps them fit and spectators well out of the way.



You won't see acres of golf practice ranges in Japan. Simply put, there's no room. What to do with all the golfers? Just stack 'em up.