



Greg Schiano reacts to Rutgers' loss to UMass

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Game was invented in New Jersey in the early 20th century and remains popular



Four-year-old Anthony Rizzuto is cheered on by his sister Gianna, his mother Megan and aunts Roxane DiVuolo and Linda Spence as he plays a vintage 1948 Skee-Ball machine in Ocean Beach III in Toms River.

PROVIDED BY GERARD CHRISTENSEN

Skee-Ball became top game at Jersey Shore

David P. Willis

Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

POINT PLEASANT BEACH – Earlier this summer, the Bohler family of Readington — dad, Cody; mom, Allison; and 2-year-old son, Cooper — saddled up to a Skee-Ball game here at Jenkinson's Boardwalk.

"It's just fun," Cody Bohler said. "We used to play it when we were kids, so we like to come here and play it with our son."

You know what he's talking about. You've tossed that half-pound wooden or plastic ball up a ramp and tried to get the highest score you can. Maybe even dunk those 100-point holes in the top corners if you get it just right.

"Skee-Ball's as timeless on the Jersey Shore as it can be," said Robert Forsyth, assistant general manager at Jenkinson's Boardwalk. "There's two things



Skee-Ball has been a Jersey Shore boardwalk staple for over 100 years and still draws crowds at Jenkinson's Boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach.

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Skee-Ball

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that come to mind when you think of the Jersey Shore that are classics: pinball machines and Skee-Ball machines.”

Did you know that Skee-Ball was invented in New Jersey? Joseph Fournier Simpson of Vineland patented his new game in 1908. The name was a reference to how the ball flies over the bump at the end of the lane, something akin to a ski-jumper taking flight.

“The game of Skee-Ball was a breakthrough that was incredibly popular with players,” said Kevin B. Kreitman, who along with Jersey native Thaddeus O. Cooper co-directed the documentary “And the Balls Roll On ... The Real Story of the Beautiful Game of Skee-Ball.”

It’s exciting. It’s fast-paced. “It had the novelty factor and it really made an impact for a long time,” Kreitman said.

Simpson’s machine set the stage for features that are now found in other games. For instance, it didn’t need an attendant and it was the first game to have automatic scoring, Kreitman said. Skee-Ball was the first game with a ticket dispenser so you could gather up your tickets for your prize, she added.

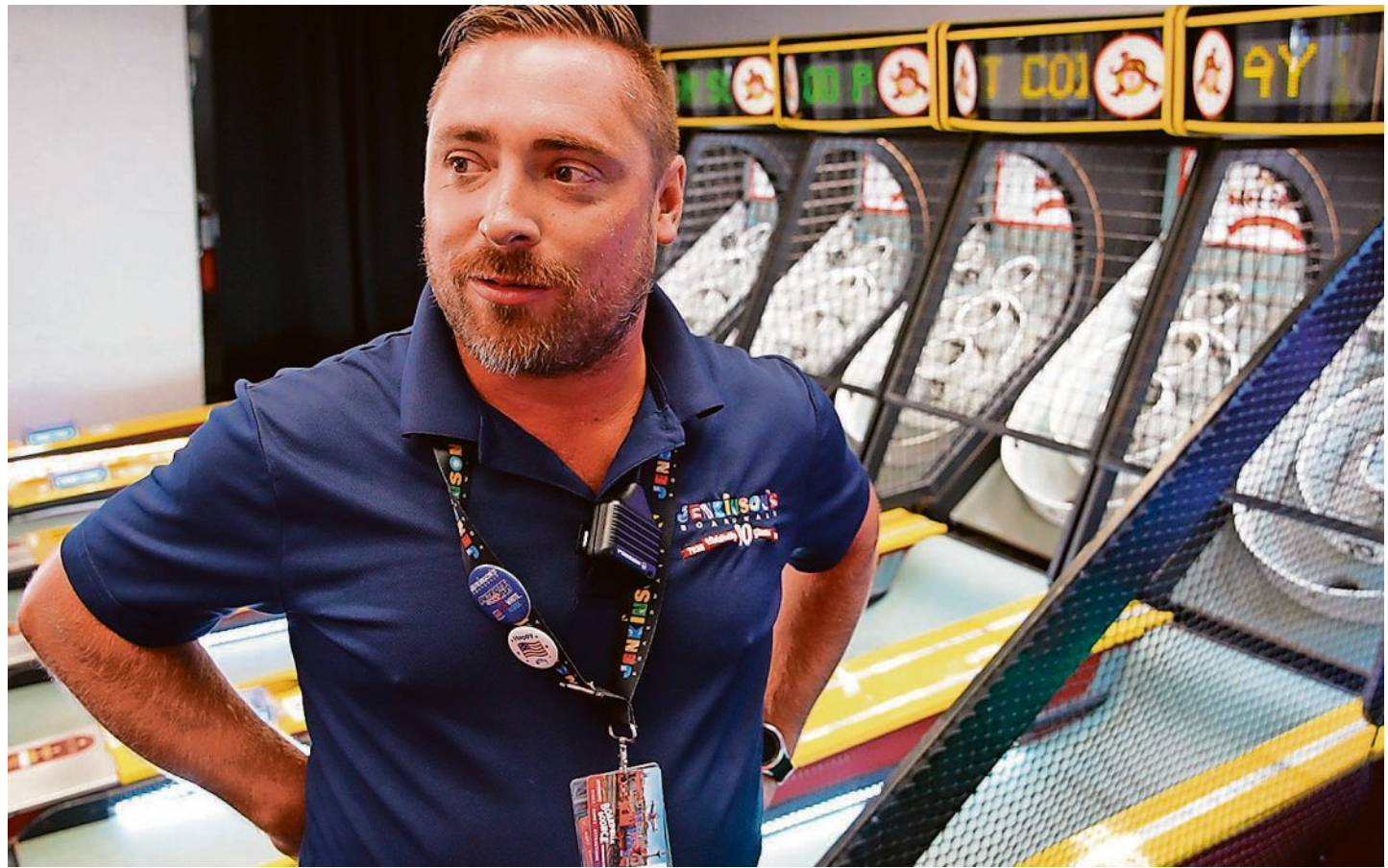
And it’s survived the rise of arcade video games and electronic pinball machines. There are no algorithms involved. You hold the ball and roll.

“It’s tactile,” Cooper said. “You have direct control over the ball. Whether you do it well or badly is a matter of experience, and maybe, if you’re like a kid, luck.”

Simple, yet difficult to perfect

Sayreville resident Elan Footerman knows something about the challenges of Skee-Ball. Playing since he was a kid, he’s improved and perfected his game and now he’s a champion, a five-time winner of the world championship held each Labor Day weekend at Ed’s Fun-cade in Wildwood. (His dad, Rafi, is a past winner too.) “There’s somewhat of a satisfying element of throwing the ball, seeing it go in the hole, but I think the thing for me that keeps me playing is that I always want to continue to improve and perfect,” Footerman said. “And as simple of a game as it is, it’s really, really difficult to perfect so it kind of keeps you locked in.”

Next weekend, he’ll be at Ed’s Fun-



• Robert Forsyth, assistant general manager at Jenkinson's Boardwalk, talks about Skee-Ball.

DOUG HOOD/ASBURY PARK PRESS



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cade for another championship.

“Skee-Ball has kind of always been like a heartbeat of the East Coast and specifically of the Jersey Shore,” Footerman said. “I think for a lot of people growing up, Skee-Ball is kind of something that reminds them of home, that

people are from this area.”

It’s about memories.

Toms River resident Gerard Christensen had his own Skee-Ball game for about 30 years after he bought it from some college kids in Coney Island. He later donated it to Ocean Beach III, and

the machine, made in 1948, now sits in the community’s clubhouse.

Unlike newer machines, which may have lights and a card reader, it doesn’t need to be plugged in. It only needs a dime and a pull of a lever to go.

“That’s the game my grandparents played, that my parents played, that’s the one I remember as a kid,” Christensen said. “You put that dime in, you pull that lever and it makes that beautiful little ratcheting sound and then the sound of the nine wooden Skee-Balls dropping down into the rack.”

“There’s not another arcade game that’s 100 years old that’s still popular like this,” he said.

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