

Black Ice Hockey

All the thrills of a highway spinout with much less personal danger



PHOTO COURTESY ST. PAUL'S ARCHIVES

PHOTO BY KATHIE FIFE

New Hampshire's love for outdoor hockey dates back to the late 1800s at St. Paul's School in Concord.

Not everyone is up for hiking into the wilderness to play hockey. For that matter, maybe you've never even laced up a pair of skates. For those who'd much rather play the role of spectator — and at a venue to which you can drive, no less — there's Concord's Black Ice Pond

Hockey Championship (January 24-27) and the New England Pond Hockey Classic in Meredith (February 1-3). These two major tournaments, and the enthusiasm for outdoor hockey in general, tap into a rich tradition here in New Hampshire. It's said that the first hockey game in the US was played on November 17, 1883, on the Lower Pond at St. Paul's School in Concord.

Both tournaments draw teams from all over and the competition is fierce (though it's all in good fun). So what's the deal with pond hockey? How is it different from games played in the relative warmth of an indoor ice arena? For one, pond hockey is played on a smaller surface, meaning the pace — which is already pretty fast — gets even faster. Though, with smaller teams, it's not crowded at all. In fact, it means that the game is actually much more open (and perhaps more challenging) with more passing, especially since there are no boards.

There's also something to be said for the old-fashioned feel of it all before fancy arenas and Zambonis. For every kid who raced outdoors to join friends for spontaneous pick-up games, there's also the sense of nostalgia and the chance to indulge your inner child.

The Black Ice Championship is also a winter festival with various events happening throughout the four days. It's one of the largest outdoor winter events in the state, hosting 98 teams and about 700 hockey players. It takes place in White Park, and there is a shuttle service to nearby parking areas. Visit blackice-pondhockey.com for more information.

Teams from all over North America travel to Meredith for the New England Pond Hockey Classic, which is celebrating 10 years in 2019. You can find more information at pondhockeyclassic.com.

— By Erica Thoits



The New England Pond Hockey Classic in Meredith