

CONCORD MONITOR



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CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CONCORD

FROZEN MOMENT



JOHN TULLY photos / Monitor staff

Above: With stick in hand, Pete Mellen of The Silver Seven takes a break outside the rink as his team plays Scared Hitless during the first day of the 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship yesterday. **Below:** Derek Davidson and members of the Capital City Diner team wait for the start of the opening ceremony.

Black Ice tournament kicks off at White Park

By BEN LEUBSDORF
Monitor staff

Skaters from Concord and beyond took to the ice at White Park yesterday to kick off the first 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, a three-day tournament that organizers hope will be an annual celebration of hockey's past and future in the city.

"It's just really an opportunity to get out there, have some fun and celebrate hockey," said Gov. John Lynch, who dropped the ceremonial first puck and is playing in the tournament on a team named the Lynch Gang.

Some 50 teams and 350 players are participating, with games played yesterday and today and playoffs scheduled for tomorrow at six rinks set

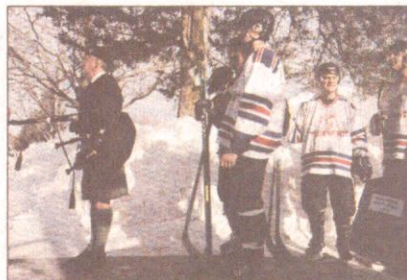
MORE on the tournament at blackicepondhockey.com

up on the pond. The National Weather Service has forecast highs in the 20s this weekend, with a 50-50 chance of snow showers today.

"You couldn't ask for anything better," said spectator Lynn Acres of yesterday's cold, clear weather.

Led by bagpiper Derek Davidson, the first shift of players leapt onto the frozen pond yesterday morning during an opening ceremony that included the playing of the national anthem and Lynch's puck drop.

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"It's just really an opportunity to get out there, have some fun and celebrate hockey."

Gov. John Lynch, who's also playing in the tournament

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The governor was joined by Mayor Jim Bonley, city councilors and other dignitaries who stood on the ice next to Pierce Bridge, under an American flag and flanked by the flags of Canada, New Hampshire, Concord and the tournament itself.

Also recognized were members of the famed Sacred Heart team, which played the U.S. Olympic team in 1952 before the Olympians traveled to Oslo, Norway. (The Concord team lost 8-6 but was leading 5-3 going into the third period, according to tournament materials.)

That's just one of many nods the tournament has made to Concord's hockey heritage. Its name refers to the 1883 match at St. Paul's School believed to be the first hockey game played in the United States, and winning teams will win a stick named after hockey great and St. Paul's alum Hobey Baker.

For players and fans, though, it was more about having fun — and the experience.

"It was a blast. It was a lot of fun," said Brett Houston, 32, who played on the Concord Boys & Girls Club team in one of yesterday's first games. "Unbelievable to be

able to participate in something like this. I had goose bumps coming down onto the ice."

Against Medical Advice, all employees of Concord Hospital's emergency room, played in scrubs and jerseys. Other teams adopted names like Babes of Glory, Galoots and Scared Hitless.

With fighting, checking and goaltending banned by tournament rules, the play yesterday focused more on precision than power. And some of the scores were lopsided: The New London and Wilnot firefighters beat the Boys & Girls Club team 18 to 3.

But fans loved it.

"It's just fun to watch, and there's some good hockey players," said Acres, 64, a Concord resident who said he came to watch friends and his daughter, who is playing on the Babes of Glory.

There weren't more than a few dozen spectators at the park for some of yesterday's early games, but Recreation Director David Gill said he expects today will be the tournament's big day, estimating several thousand people will turn out.

Chris Brown, tournament organizer and the president and chief operating officer of New Hampshire Distribu-

tors, agreed.

Today's festivities, he said, will bring in "local people just hanging out and watching games."

Merchandise for the tournament is being sold on site, along with \$1 coffee or hot chocolate and \$3 sausages or chili at a concession tent run by Cimo's South End Deli.

Team registration fees and corporate sponsorships have brought in money not only to hold and sustain the tournament, but also to improve outdoor skating areas in Concord, Brown has said.

Just about everything at the tournament, from the rinks to the shovels players use to clear the ice after games, is sponsored by local law firms, businesses and others. (*The Concord Insider*, published by the Monitor, is the media sponsor.)

The games will wrap up at the park about noon tomorrow. The pond will reopen for public skating Monday morning. White Street will remain closed between Blanchard and Washington streets until Monday.

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ON WHITE POND



JOHN TULLY / Monitor staff

Matt Swain (center), of Jack Edwards Teeth, chases after the puck with The 98's teammates Ryan Proulx (left) and Brendan Norton during 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey action on Saturday. The Jack Edwards Teeth team won the 18+ men's division. Championship results below.

BEST OF BLACK ICE

18+ MEN

Jack Edwards Teeth 8,
Team 82 5

18+ WOMEN

NEWTS 12,
Babes of Glory 9

35+ MEN'S A

Capital City Diner 16,
Concord Budmen 6

35+ MEN'S B

So Sick Swamp Rats 7,
MJA 6

50+ MEN

White Park Hockey Club 14,
Cheers Chiefs 5