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Nostalgia the goal of Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship this weekend



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They come from down the road and across the country to play in the 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championships in Concord's White Park. But for many of those lacing up the skates this weekend, it's really a celebration of where they grew up and learned to skate.

Make no mistake. This tournament is about the hockey. A trip to the action on the frozen pond starting tonight will tell you it's also about the community, and it's definitely about the memories.

"Most teams have at least one person with a former connection to White Park," said tournament organizer Chris Brown. "People move on in their lives and move to other parts of the country, but still come back for this tournament. A team might come from California but has a member who grew up in the Concord area,

who learned to skate on White Park. They'll be back every year carrying that legacy. The nostalgia of the game, and being outdoors with close friends is something teams look forward to all year."

This year's tournament will feature another element of nostalgia as funds from previous years have resurrected the old White Park skate house.

"Getting the funds together to put this skate house back on the map after it had been closed for almost 15 years is a renovation that will make many people happy." Brown said. "So many stories are of going down to the old skate house, putting on a game of pond hockey and warming up with hot chocolate inside. It's great to have the new skate house up and running."

More than just hot chocolate will be on the table in this week's tournament. A number of concessions, live entertainment and bonfire activities are scheduled throughout the weekend.

"I think if they've gone to any other tournament they can see we take great pride in keeping the conditions as good as they are," Brown said. "But at the end of the day, we're playing pond hockey. The time that people have to spend time with their buddies is really it. That's the greatest attraction. Players rehashing the stories of their career in the heated spectator tent is where most a lot of the enjoyment comes from. You get to see men and women who have played together all their lives get together with their buddies and play the game they love."

Among those is Jack Forward, a Concord resident.

"We've been an original team since year one," Forward said. "A couple of guys on the team grew up here skating on White Park. It's an enjoyable experience for hockey players in general to be surrounded by friends."

The fraternity hockey players from all around join in the tradition of competing on outdoor rinks. Over 700 players among the 95 teams will venture to White Park for the event.

"Even though you might not know their names," Forward said, "you know their face from seeing them around the rinks. A large number of men's league players cross paths here after playing against each other or with each other."

Also competing and carrying on the legacy, Forward's son Alex plays defense for the Concord Crimson Tide and shovels off the rinks with his team in preparation for the tournament.

"The sense of community you see with all the banners they put on Main Street and how they bring in the youth teams to skate does a great job of bringing people together," said Forward. "Chris Brown, and the guys from the New Hampshire Distributor do a great job every year putting it on and making it better."

The first puck drops Thursday night at 6 p.m. Concessions will be open as well as the heated spectator's tent for the first night of pond hockey between local youth teams.

Tournament schedule

Thursday, Jan. 23

5–8 p.m.: Heated spectator tent open - w/family interactive games, merchandise sales & silent auction

5–8 p.m.: Concessions open at White Park

6–8 p.m.: Thursday Night Lights - pond hockey games w/ Concord Capitals, NE Wildcats, NH Avalanche, NH JR Monarchs at White Park

Friday, Jan. 24

9 a.m.–8:20 p.m.: Black Ice Pond Hockey games

9 a.m.–8 p.m.: Heated spectator tent open - w/family interactive games, merchandise sales and silent auction

9 a.m.–4 p.m.: Public skate on White Park pond rinks & RBC rinks

10 a.m.–8 p.m.: Black Ice shuttle bus

Noon: Ice sculpture

5 p.m.: Bonfires

5:30-7 p.m.: Concord Youth Hockey Dynamites & NH JR Monarchs practice on White Park pond rinks & RBC rinks

7:15 p.m.: Atlas Fireworks show

Saturday, Jan. 25

7 a.m.-8 p.m.: Concessions open

8 a.m.–7:20 p.m.: Black Ice Pond Hockey games

8 a.m.–8 p.m.: Heated spectator tent open - w/family interactive games, merchandise sales and silent auction

9 a.m.–5 p.m.: Youth hockey tournament on White Park pond rinks & RBC rinks

10 a.m.–7 p.m.: Black Ice shuttle bus

3 p.m.: Bonfires

Sunday, Jan. 27

8 a.m.-1 p.m.: Concessions open

9 a.m.-noon: Black Ice Pond Hockey games

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