

HIGH SCHOOLS

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CONCORD

It's old-time hockey

■ Black Ice tourney, shortened this year by warm weather, returns the game to its roots.

By Alex Hall
New Hampshire Union Leader

CONCORD — Around this time for the past four or five years, Bruce Gillies Jr. spends one weekend the same way he did so many as a kid: playing pond hockey with his friends at White Park.

The former Bishop Brady and

University of New Hampshire goaltender is one of numerous notable capital-area hockey figures who have made the Black Ice Pond Hockey Tournament an annual fixture in their calendar.

In the 10th edition of the tournament this year, Gillies played on the Frenchie Unplugged 50A division team that includes many faces he played with or against at the youth, high school and college level.

This year's tournament was canceled Saturday morning

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RICH MIYARA, NH SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

Nolin Walsh of the Concord Capitals skates toward a loose puck Thursday night at the opening of the Black Ice tournament in Concord.

Black ice

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due to high temperatures and poor ice conditions. It was originally scheduled to run through today.

"For a lot of us that are from this area, you hate to use the word nostalgia, which can be overused, but it really does bring back some really good memories — seeing some that we all played with, played against," Gillies said after Frenchie Unplugged's 8-6 loss to Morning Pickups on Friday. "It's just nice to have a throwback kind of weekend."

Gillies, who was inducted into the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey Hall of Fame in 2007, played at Bishop Brady from 1976-80 and UNH from 1980-85. Gillies and the Green Giants finished as the NHIAA boys' hockey runner-up to Concord in 1979 and to Manchester Central in 1980.

The now-South Portland, Maine, resident's son, Jon, is a goaltender in the Calgary Flames organization and played collegiately at Providence.

Dunc Walsh, who is in his 30th season leading the Concord High School boys' hockey team, has played in each edition of the Black Ice tournament and skated for the Concord Budmen, who also compete in the 50A division, this year. The Budmen, who share the same name as the team that competed in the New England Hockey League, consist entirely of Concord High and Bishop Brady graduates.



RICH MIYARA, NH SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

Bow High School coach Tim Walsh, wearing the blue gloves, is engaged from behind in a mild scrum as his team, Jack Edwards Teeth, takes on rival Mr. Rooter on Friday during the Black Ice Pond Hockey Tournament at White Park in Concord.



RICH MIYARA, NH SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

"There's two Brady guys (on the team) and the rest are Concord guys," said Walsh, who graduated from Bishop Brady in 1981. "That's the way a lot of these teams are. I have a bunch of teams out here (with) Concord High kids that played for me and stayed together from when they played together. It's cool seeing all those guys."

Walsh's current Concord players volunteered helping run the rinks Friday night and also helped break the rinks down when the tournament ended. Bow High School boys' hockey players volunteered helping with set-up preparations last week and also helped break down the site.

Like his counterpart at Concord, Bow coach Tim Walsh has also participated in the Black Ice tournament since its inception. Tim Walsh is an original member of Jack Edwards Teeth, which has won six 18-and-over elite division titles.

While he enjoys the competition, Tim Walsh's favorite aspect of the tournament is the camaraderie. Among his teammates on Jack Edwards Teeth are his former UNH teammate and Manchester native CJ Ficek, fellow UNH graduate Mick Mounsey, two of his assistant coaches at Bow (Corey LaRoche and Adam Lang) and Dunc Walsh's son, Dusty.

Concord High School coach Dunc Walsh turns and looks to make a pass during the Concord Budmen's game Friday. The Budmen is a team made up of Concord High and Bishop Brady High graduates.

"When you're playing with guys, you want to have good players but you also want to have good guys and fun guys to hang out with," said Tim Walsh after Jack Edwards Teeth defeated its tournament rival, Mr. Rooter, 10-9, on Friday. "Honestly, at this point, 90% of it is being in the tent afterwards and hanging out. Guys are telling stories and catching up. It's a lot of fun."

Tim Walsh played as a wing at Concord before moving to center during his career at UNH, which spanned from 1996-2000. He just missed playing collegiately with Mounsey, a 2004 UNH graduate and Concord native who serves as president of the Concord Youth Hockey Association.

The tournament's opening-night festivities Thursday included pond hockey games that featured youth teams like the Concord Capitals, New England Wildcats, New Hampshire Avalanche and New Hampshire Junior Monarchs.

"I think what they enjoy and what we enjoyed growing up playing on the pond is there's no structure," Mounsey said. "Kids can be kids. It's not a coach correcting them and they can

be creative. I think it's a big part of the growth of being a hockey player."

Mounsey, a former defenseman, played one year at Concord High and four years at Avon (Conn.) Old Farms in high school. His older sister, Tara, helped the United States win the inaugural Olympic women's hockey tournament at the 1998 Winter Games.

While most of them play together in a men's league during the year, the Black Ice tournament serves as an annual reunion for members of Concord High's 1992 state championship team. The Crimson Tide defeated St. Thomas Aquinas of Dover, 3-2 in overtime, in the state final that year.

Scott O'Donnell is among the players on that Concord team who have reunited to win three 35A division titles in the Black Ice tournament as members of the aptly-named CHS 92 team.

"We've been together since we were kids, which makes it that much more special, and then this whole thing ends up like a winter fest," O'Donnell said. "It's like a homecoming for everybody."

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