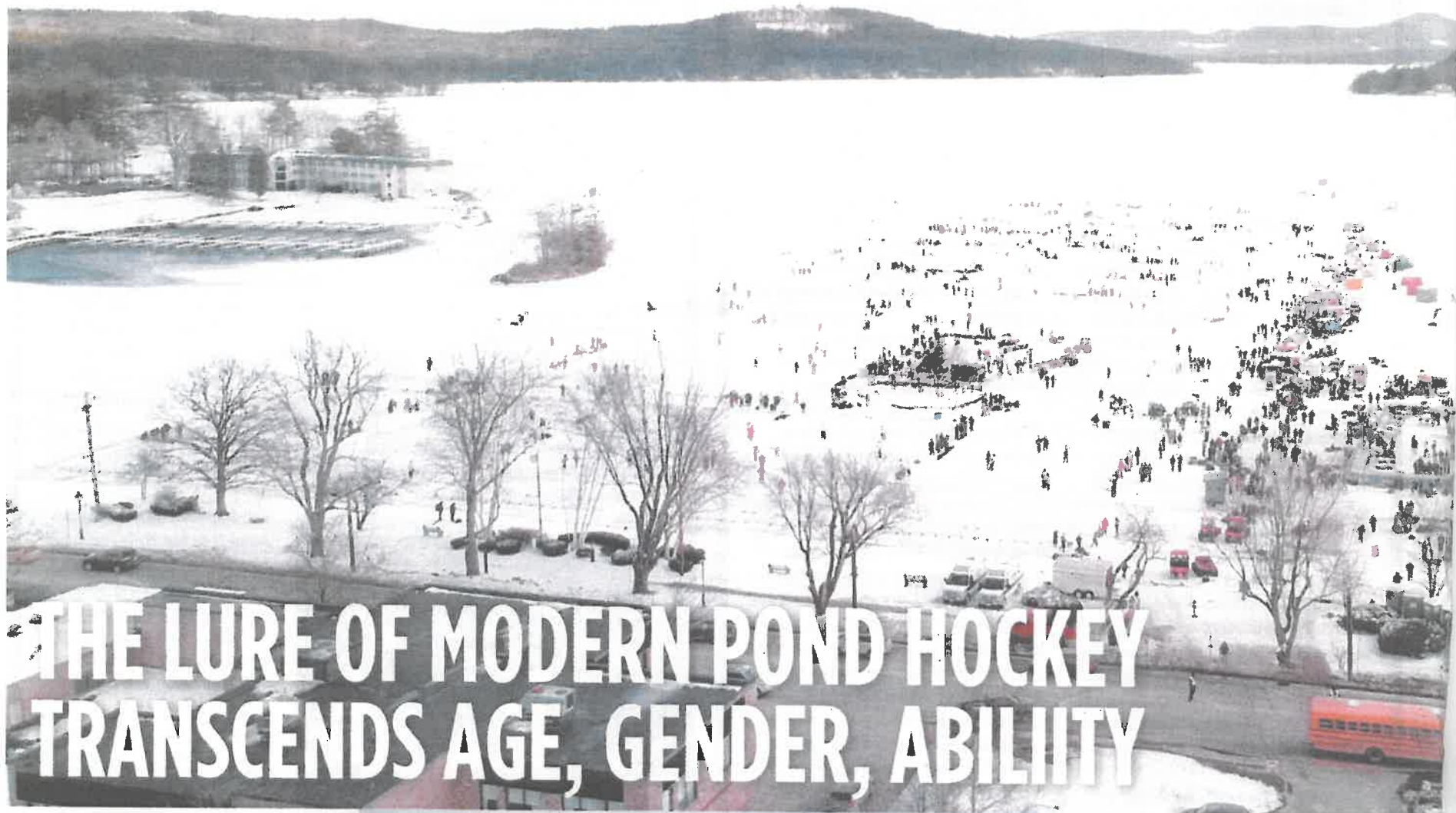


# HOCKEYSC

## ONLY NEW ENGLAND CA



## THE LURE OF MODERN POND HOCKEY TRANSCENDS AGE, GENDER, ABILITY

By Dan Guttenplan

**D**EREK ROMANO was in need of a feel-good experience after his Manchester, N.H., home went up in flames on Super Bowl Sunday in February 2017. So, five days after the fire displaced the Romanos and forced them into a hotel, Derek found that feel-good experience in the form of a pond hockey tournament.

Romano and a group of childhood friends from Manchester played in the Pond Hockey Classic Lake Champlain in Vermont. The team — The Drunk Uncles — was one of 124 teams to compete.



► Crisp temps but warm spirits at the Pond Hockey Classic

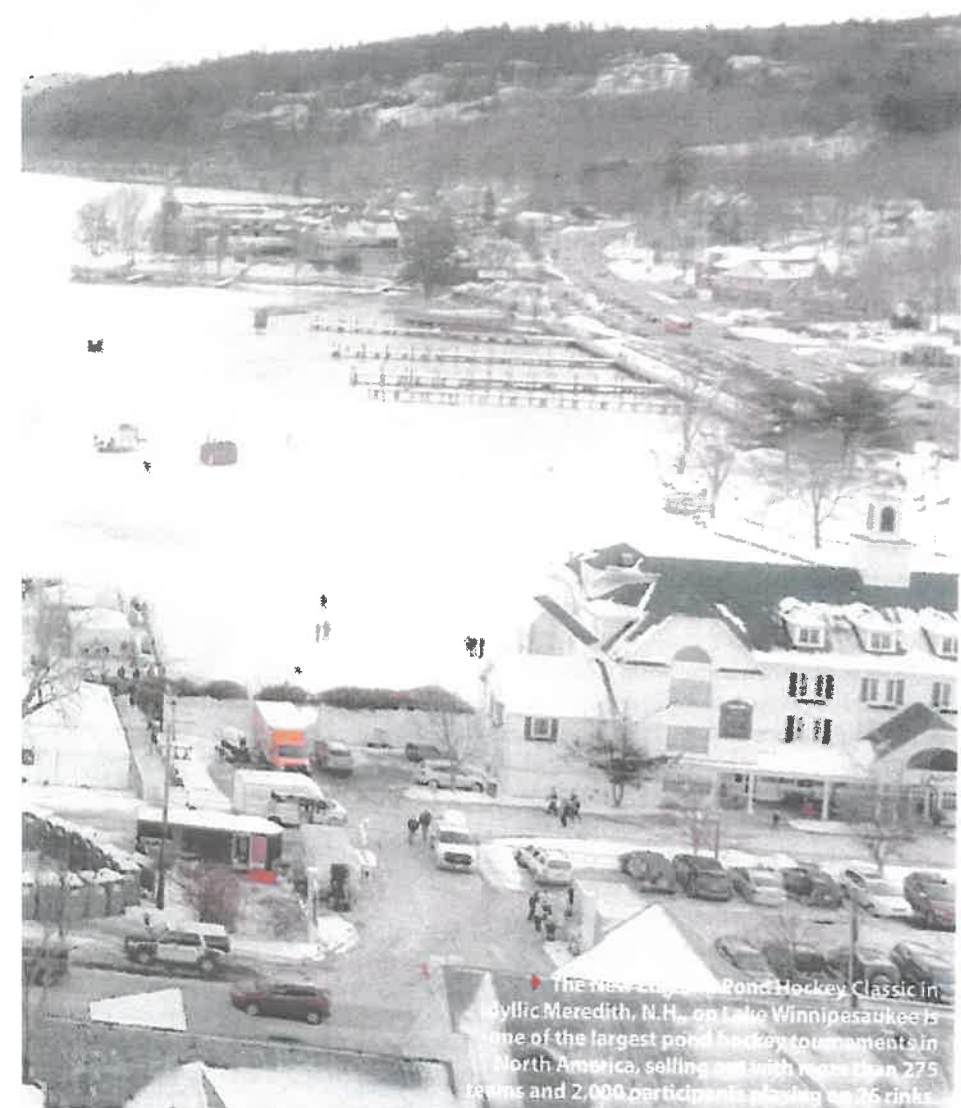
"I'm not sure how much my wife loved me that weekend, but she knew with everything that happened, I needed it," Romano said. "What am I going to do? Sit around in a hotel? She knows how much I love hockey and miss my friends."

Pond hockey seems to generate feelings similar to those of Romano for so many New Englanders who grew up skating wherever they could find ice. There is a certain freedom in playing outdoor hockey — without the benefit of boards or boundaries. The joy in pond hockey appears to come from the lack of structure; games can be played with as few as two people and as many as can fit on the pond.

Steve Allano, Portraitefx



# ADRENALINE N SERVE UP



► The new England Pond Hockey Classic in idyllic Meredith, N.H., on Lake Winnepesaukee is one of the largest pond hockey tournaments in North America, selling out with more than 275 teams and 2,000 participants playing on 76 rinks.

As is the case so often in New England winters, pond hockey players are at the mercy of the elements. Starting a game might require a share of maintenance beforehand, with players shoveling snow and conditioning the ice so that the surface is playable. Significant time might be spent searching for pucks in snowbanks or blocking off sections of the ice that are cracked or laden with air bubbles.

But the perfect pond hockey day? Well, that makes all of the high-maintenance days worth it.

"It's the open ice, breathing the fresh air," Romano said. "It reminds me of my childhood. I remember playing in the finals last year — one week after the fire

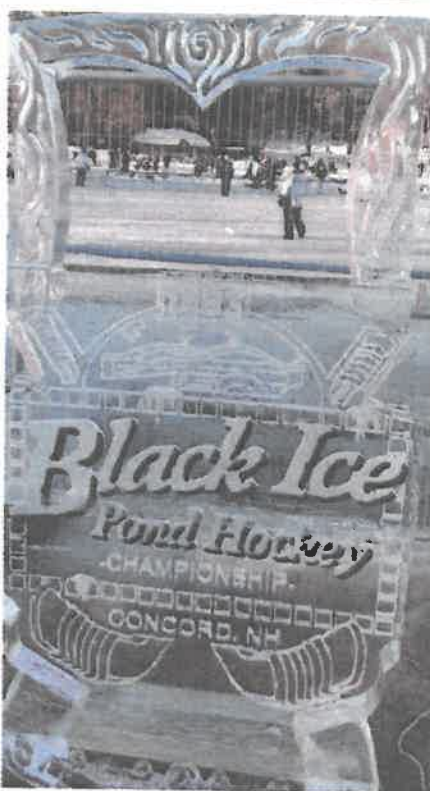
happened. There was supposed to be a snowstorm coming, and sure enough, it started snowing. What can you do? You're outside, so you have to play in all conditions. That's part of New England winters."

Madison, N.H., resident Erin Ohlenbusch, 13, grew up playing hockey on Pea Porridge Pond in the White Mountains. Every New Year's Eve, her parents host Pond-A-Palooza — a pond hockey game for family, friends and neighbors. Ohlenbusch also plays competitive indoor hockey with the Spartans Elite out of Exeter, N.H., but she prefers a good day on the pond over any day in a rink.

"There's more of a thrill to it," Ohlenbusch said. "There's the fresh mountain



► The Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship brings friendly ice action to White Park in Concord, N.H. The event features fireworks, bonfires, a heated viewing tent, food trucks, ice and snow sculptures and public skating.



air. You can push people into snowbanks. The pond we play on is smaller than a rink, so it's a tighter playing area. You have to learn to incorporate that style of play into your game."

Under the right conditions — like a 20-degree day with clear skies — ponds can actually offer faster skating surfaces than rinks.

"There are days when it's almost black ice on certain parts of the pond," Ohlenbusch said. "Those are the best days, when it's smoother than an actual rink."

## 'I think of having fun with friends'

As much as ice and weather conditions are a part of pond hockey, there seems to be a level of camaraderie between players that surpasses that of indoor hockey. Andover, Mass., resident Lou Shipley has played in the

Pond Hockey Classic New England on Lake Winnepesaukee in Meredith, N.H., since the tournament's inception in 2010. That year's tournament included 77 teams, with 40 more on the waiting list. The 2017 tournament had 275 teams.

"When I think of pond hockey, I think of having fun with friends and being outdoors on a great winter day," Shipley said. "The best ice is pristine — better than any internal ice. It's really a special thing; it's like skating on glass. But even when Mother Nature doesn't cooperate, hockey players tend to like beer."

Beer seems to be the secondary draw for hockey players at the adult pond hockey tournaments. Shipley remembers that during Pond Hockey Classic New England's inaugural year, the town of Meredith sold out of beer in bars and liquor stores.

Pond Hockey Classic commissioner Scott Crowder (Nashua, N.H.) has ensured that players are never lacking for beer as the tournament has grown in recent years. The tournament now has sponsors like Labatt Blue as well as a beer garden.

## 'We want to stay true to the game'

The growth of the Pond Hockey Classic also has caused some pond hockey traditionalists to question whether the Pond Hockey Classic can still, in fact, be considered pond hockey. Last year, Crowder's crew designed 26 rinks on Lake Winnepesaukee for the New England Classic and 12 in Malletts Bay for the Lake Champlain Classic. That means the tournaments now have plastic boards separating each game.

Continued on Page 30



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In December, our panel of judges will select the best nominee in each AHL market, plus three Wild Cards, and then from January-March we'll open it up to a public vote. The rink with the most community support combined with the highest score from our judges will win the Ephesus state-of-the-art LED lighting system.

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## POND HOCKEY The Great Outdoors

Continued from Page 29

"A traditionalist might say it's not pond hockey," Crowder said. "We're offering a pond hockey tournament. When you're outside playing with buddies, you might clear the pond for two-and-a-half or three hours to play for a half-hour. There's a lot of labor. We're not asking them to pick up shovels or maintain ice. We want to stay true to the game they grew up playing outdoors while offering a turn-key experience."

As the son of a college hockey coach, Crowder grew up playing pond hockey before going off to UMass-Amherst to study sports management. Now the commissioner of three pond hockey tournaments (Montana, New England, Lake Champlain), he has found a generational split when it comes to pond hockey interest.

"There's an older base that played more outdoor than indoor, and they're nostalgic about bringing back what they did as kids," Crowder said. "The younger generation grew up playing in indoor rinks at camps and showcases. This is more novel for them. It's something they've heard about and they're eager to try it."

St. Lawrence University defenseman Ben Finkelstein (South Burlington, Vt.) grew up about 10 minutes from Lake Champlain. Some of his best childhood memories came on the outdoor ice.

"The experience is the best feeling in the world — playing the game you love outside," Finkelstein said. "The sheet is way bigger. It's that hard, crisp feeling of natural ice under your skates. Once in a while, an odd inner bubble will trip you up, so you have to look out for those. But those outdoor NHL games are the most-watched games for a reason. Everyone can relate to playing hockey outside."

### 'A way to bring back our youth'

Chris Brown, commissioner of the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship in Concord, N.H., has made more of an effort in recent years to include a younger generation of players in his tournament, which takes place in White Park, right in the center of one of the most historic hockey towns in the country.

Brown has added Learn-to-Skate sessions and Mite practices for Concord Youth Hockey players as well as a game between the New Hampshire Avalanche Junior Monarchs and the Concord Capitals.

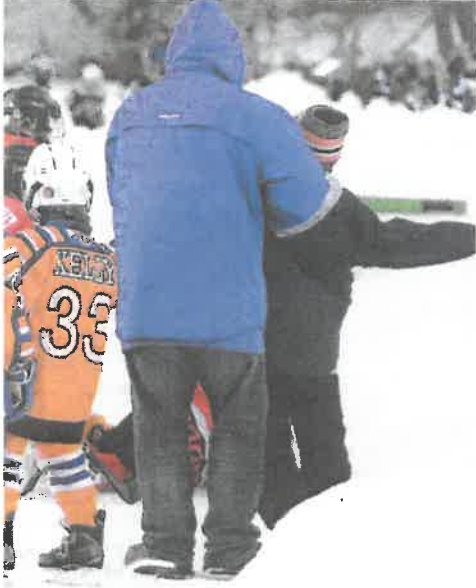
"Ten years from now, those are the people who will be playing in our Open division," Brown said. "We've never really had a problem drawing interest for adult teams. I looked at the youth part



► Playing in the elements adds to the allure of outdoor hockey, as shown above at Black Ice in Concord. Below, kids are rarin' to go at the Laura Foundation's Youth Pond Hockey Festival at Purity Spring Resort/King Pine in Madison, N.H.







Rich Miyazaki/NH Sports Photography (Black Ice Pond Hockey); Ellen Ohlenbusch (Laura Foundation Youth Pond Hockey)

with a goal for families to bring their kids and create a pond hockey atmosphere."

Pond hockey aspirations in New England occasionally result in boot hockey instead. Two years ago, the Black Ice Pond Championship was played under the backdrop of 55-degree weather in the end of January.

"We beat the ice up so bad on Friday, we played boot hockey on Saturday," Brown said. "On Sunday, we had to rent ice at a local hockey rink. It's pond hockey in New England. You have to roll with Mother Nature."

"What people love about pond hockey is it's where they learned to play. Maybe the first time they skated was on this pond or that outdoor rink. That's where you have memories, but on the other hand, if you grew up playing pond hockey, you probably made the natural progression to boot or street hockey because the weather didn't always cooperate."

A year of bad hockey weather doesn't appear to have affected the popularity of the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship. The tournament started in 2011 with 35 teams. Last January, the tournament drew more than 100 teams. Last year, Brown's crew constructed nine temporary rinks in White Park for the tournament.

"When all of the pond hockey tournaments started popping up, I thought, 'We can do something like this in town.'" Brown said. "Now we have a giant scoreboard, an announcer, sponsors, light towers and nine hockey rinks. It's very structured."

It's the dichotomy of organizing a pond hockey tournament. Pond hockey is so popular that it seems that just about every New England tournament grows so fast that it eventually sacrifices some of the charm and freedom that is the essence of pond hockey.

For a traditionalist, pond hockey is at its core not "very structured." It's a game played without boards and lights. In fact, the glare of the sun on the ice can be a player's toughest opponent. The players referee themselves, and the only set-in-stone rules are often that every player needs to bring a shovel, a water bottle and be home by sundown.

Through her experience playing in her parents' New Year's Eve Pond-A-Palooza, Ohlenbusch has recognized that no two pond hockey experiences are alike.

"If we get a ton of snow the night before, part of pond hockey is prepping by shoveling," Ohlenbusch said. "If you plow out a space that is too bumpy, you have to move to a different part of the ice. It's a really good way to get to know your teammates better. Even if the pond hockey doesn't work out, we might go

Continued on Page 32



## January 26th-28th, 2018

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## [www.blackicepondhockey.com](http://www.blackicepondhockey.com)

















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To learn more about this RFI and the requirements for submission, visit our website at [evpacfo.uconn.edu](http://evpacfo.uconn.edu)

The University of Connecticut is seeking innovative solutions to development of a hockey arena on its main campus in Storrs, Connecticut. The University has identified two potential sites that are owned by the University for the development, or the Respondent may propose their own property for the development. By this Request for Expressions of Interest, the University requests submissions of proposed terms, conditions and site plan design from parties who will be considered to provide such development and construction, and possible operation, of the facilities.

Responses due by 4 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 16, 2017



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## POND HOCKEY

Continued from Page 31

tubing or skiing. If someone doesn't know how to ski, we can learn to do that together."

On the other end of the go-with-the-flow spectrum regarding pond hockey structure is Tony Barnea, who serves as the general manager of The Drunk Uncles in the New England Pond Hockey Classic. According to Barnea, he "handles all of the stuff no one else wants to handle," which doesn't include playing in the tournament. Barnea is there for the pond hockey experience — not so much the hockey.

"I see pond hockey as a way to bring back our youth," Barnea said. "We might see each other twice a year, but we always pick up right where we left off. It's created

an amazing camaraderie. The bond that we've formed in two years is unbelievable. We book that February weekend like it's a family vacation that we have penciled in every year. Everyone lines up childcare, and we relive the glory days and reflect on childhood memories."

Barnea's interpretation of pond hockey poses an interesting question about pond hockey. Is it a sport or an experience?

It depends on who you ask. **H**

[feedback@hockeyjournal.com](mailto:feedback@hockeyjournal.com)



► From top, the New England Pond Hockey Classic; two scenes from the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, including UNH NCAA champ Tina Carrabba showing she still can dangle; the Youth Pond Hockey Festival at Purity Spring Resort/King Pine.

Rich Miyara/NH Sports Photography (Black Ice Pond Hockey); Steve Alfano, Portraitix (Pond Hockey Classic)



# OUTDOOR TOURNAMENTS GUIDE

## 8th annual Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship



**Hosted by:** 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Association  
**Tournament director/contact:** Christopher A. Brown  
**Address:** PO Box 3653, Concord, NH 03302 | **Phone:** 603-410-1824  
**Email:** cbrown@nhdist.com **Web:** www.blackicepondhockey.com  
**Tournament location:** White Park, Concord, N.H.

**Tournament costs:** \$700 per team | **Application deadline:** Dec. 1

**Ages:** 18+, 35+, 50+ | **Teams/levels:** Men's Elite Open (18+, all players played competitive high school, college, pro hockey); Men's Open (18+ all players at least played high school hockey, could have a wide range of age); Recreational A Division (wide range of age and ability). Recreational B Division (rec hockey only); 35 Elite, B and C; 50 Elite, B; Women Elite, Recreational.

**Features:** Family fun event: fireworks, bonfire, heated viewing tent, food trucks, ice and snow sculptures, public skating.

## Buffalo River Outdoor Classic



**Hosted by:** Hockey Time Productions  
**Tournament director/contact:** Marko Prpic  
**Phone:** 216-325-0567  
**Email:** marko@itshockeytime.com  
**Web:** www.itshockeytime.com

**Tournament location:** Buffalo River Works

**Tournament costs:** \$785 Mites, \$1,225 Squirts, \$1,250 PeeWee, \$1,275 Bantam, \$1,495 Midget

**Ages:** 8-U (half-Ice), 10-U, 12-U, 14-U, 15-U, 16-U, 18-U

**Teams/levels:** AAA, AA, A, MD, AE, BB, B, House Select, House, Non-Contact

**Features:** Home of the "Buy One, Get One Free." HTP's objective is to provide an optimal environment for teams and families to gather, compete and enjoy the great game of hockey. What to expect: competitive divisions, timely schedules, quality officials, great accommodations and excellent cities. It's Hockey Time!

## Frostbite Face-Off



**Hosted by:** Croninja Conventions  
**Tournament director/contact:** Eric Cronin  
**Address:** 1 Clubhouse Rd. Fairlee, VT 05045  
**Phone:** 781-454-8203 **Email:** info@frostbitefaceoff.com  
**Web:** www.frostbitefaceoff.com  
**Tournament location:** Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee, Vt.

**Tournament costs:** \$550

**Application deadline:** No deadline. 60-team limit.

**Ages:** 21+ **Teams/levels:** A/B/C/D

**Features:** The tournament guarantees five games over three days. It also includes two hosted parties, including one themed party. There are items to be raffled as well as contests hosted by our sponsors that players can win prizes from.

## 46th annual Gene Harrington Tournaments



**Dates:** Jan. 19-21, 2018, Winter Ice Experience and AAA Cup Challenge; Feb. 23-25, 2018, Falls Classic and AAA Cup Challenge

**Hosted by:** Gene Harrington Tournaments

**Tournament director/contact:** Bob Harrington

**Address:** 14 Rock Dove Lane, Orchard Park, NY 14127 | **Phone:** 781-710-6560

**Email:** bh@nahockey.com | **Web:** www.nahockey.com

**Tournament locations:** Buffalo and Niagara Falls, N.Y. | **Tournament costs:** \$500-\$1,500

**Application deadlines:** Dec. 31 for January tournaments; Jan. 31, 2018, for February tournaments

**Features:** Features vary for each tournament. Offering checking and non-checking divisions; three- to five-game guarantee; outdoor games; sanctioned by USA Hockey; mementos for all players; onsite professional photography; individual trophies and team trophy for champs and runner-ups; NCAA Division 1 and Buffalo Sabres hockey nearby.

## Maine Pond Hockey Classic



**Hosted by:** Alford Youth Center  
**Tournament director/contact:** Patrick Guerette  
**Address:** 126 North St, Waterville, ME 04901  
**Phone:** 207-873-0684 | **Email:** mepondhockeyclassic@gmail.com  
**Web:** mainepondhockey.org  
**Tournament location:** Snow Pond Center for the Arts, Sidney, Maine  
**Tournament costs:** \$345-\$495

**Application deadline:** Jan. 9, 2018 **Ages:** 18 and older

**Teams/levels:** Open A, Open B, Women's, 35+, 50+, Recreational, Just For Fun

**Features:** Fun pond hockey tournament for all experience levels. Conveniently located minutes from I-95 at the scenic Snow Pond Center for the Arts. Amenities include: beer garden, food, warming tents, fire pits and warming lodge.

## PHC 7th annual Lake Champlain Pond Hockey Classic



**Hosted by:** Pond Hockey Classic

**Email:** info@pondhockeyclassic.com

**Web:** www.pondhockeyclassic.com/lakechamplain

**Tournament location:** Feb. 9-11, 2018, Lake Champlain, Colchester, Vt.

**Tournament costs:** \$750 per team

**Application deadline:** Sold out

**Ages:** 21+

**Teams/levels:** Eight sub-divisions: Open, 30+, 40+, 50+, Shinny U35, Shinny 35+, Twig and Women's

**Features:** The Lake Champlain Pond Hockey Classic on Malletts Bay in Colchester, Vt., has been providing its participants with an unparalleled tournament experience since 2012. This sold-out tourney is specifically tailored for the players, with an on-ice beer garden and the infamous Friday night Labatt Blue pub crawl on Church Street in Burlington.

## PHC 9th annual New England Pond Hockey Classic



**Hosted by:** Pond Hockey Classic  
**Email:** info@pondhockeyclassic.com  
**Web:** www.pondhockeyclassic.com/newengland  
**Tournament location:** Feb. 2-4, 2018, Lake Winnepesaukee, Meredith, N.H.  
**Tournament costs:** \$750 per team

**Application deadline:** Sold out

**Ages:** 21+

**Teams/levels:** Eight sub-divisions: Open, 30+, 40+, 50+, Shinny U35, Shinny 35+, Twig and Women's

**Features:** The New England Pond Hockey Classic on Lake Winnepesaukee is one of the largest pond hockey tournaments in North America. This sold-out event features more than 275 teams and more than 2,000 participants playing on 26 rinks including the Labatt Blue Zone, live music and great food.

## PHC Red Bull Open Ice



**Hosted by:** Red Bull North America

**Email:** info@pondhockeyclassic.com

**Web:** www.pondhockeyclassic.com/redbullopenice

**Tournament location:** March 24, 2018, Boston, Mass.

**Tournament costs:** Qualifier necessary

**Ages:** 21+ | **Teams/levels:** Open

**Features:** Eight of the top pond hockey teams in the Northeast take to the ice in Boston for a winner-takes-all Red Bull Open Ice tourney. Teams qualify by placing top four in the Red Bull Open Ice Division at the New England and Lake Champlain Pond Hockey Classic tournaments.