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## Pond hockey tournaments across New England draw fans

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Icing call

Travel

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Generations of kids growing up in Massachusetts have scored the winning goal in game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals.

Of course, the puck may have sailed between two boots placed about 4 feet apart on the frozen surface of the neighborhood pond, but the victory was no less glorious.

Now, thanks in part to the success of the NHL Winter Classic, the focus on the outdoor version of the game is returning. A number of pond hockey tournaments have sprung up around New England, and while they may give former players a chance to relive past glories — and would-be players an opportunity to create some — they're also a perfect weekend getaway for fans of the game.

Wide open lakes become hubs of activity. Games follow games throughout tournament weekends as players buzz across the frozen surface. Yet for many spectators, it's the off-ice community that draws them. Vendor tents, hot food, coffee and even a little history welcome visitors to these now-annual winter meetings. Players and fans bring coolers, grills, lawn chairs and fire pits, making for quite a scene if the weather cooperates. There are often skills competitions and an on-ice tournament village where people can indulge in some hot drinks, chowder, sausages and other warm goodies.

### **Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, Concord, N.H., Jan. 24-26.**

Players and fans will gather at the first of the larger pond hockey tournaments of the season at White Park Pond in Concord, at the intersection of White and Washington streets. Now in its fourth year, the tournament will see teams competing for the coveted "Hobey Stick," named for legendary athlete/hockey player Hobey Baker —

who attended the nearby St. Paul's School, where it is said the first hockey game in the United States was played. With such lineage, the Black Ice tournament has history going for it, as well as a thriving spectators' community.

A welcome reception is scheduled for Wednesday at 5 p.m. at the B-Lounge at the Barley House (132 N. Main St., Concord). Vendors will be slinging rinkside food and drinks throughout the weekend, but organizers are going the extra mile by offering a shuttle bus to take players and fans to several downtown restaurants. There will also be special promotions and discounts for tournament participants at a number of these eateries and watering holes.

Where to stay warm: The Comfort Inn (71 Hall St., Concord, 603-226-4100) has a special Black Ice rate for a standard room at \$69. The Residence Inn by Marriott (91 Hall St., Concord, 603-226-0012) is offering Black Ice attendees a special rate of \$129 a night for rooms sleeping up to four people. Mention the tournament when booking.

To help with parking, free shuttles will run from the Hall Street area hotels to White Park. Concord is about an hour drive from Boston.

Best team names: Pond Jovi, Dogs on Linoleum.

(Go to [blackicepondhockey.com](http://blackicepondhockey.com).)

### **Pond Hockey Classic, Meredith, N.H., Jan. 31 to Feb. 2.**

Players, fans and families fly in from across North America to take part in this tournament on Lake Winnepesaukee — arguably the granddaddy of them all with 222 teams participating.

After finishing his hockey career at the University of Massachusetts — and earning a degree in sports management and marketing — Scott Crowder, executive director of Restore Hockey and organizer of the New England Pond Hockey Championship, began putting together what would become the Pond Hockey Classic. Judging by the response, it was the right move.

"People are embracing how it all started," he said. "It's taken off so well. It gives people the opportunity to play the sport the way it was originally played."

Crowder is the son of former college hockey coach and Boston Bruin Bruce Crowder — who spent his formative years playing the game outdoors.

"Anybody who ever put on a pair of skates knows it's special doing it outside," Crowder said. "People my father's age — he grew up in Canada playing on frozen ponds and rivers for hours and hours every day."

By the afternoon of Feb. 1, there could be as many as 4,000 people on-hand, taking part in and watching the spectacle in Meredith, N.H.



The weekend starts with a skills competition under the lights across from Lago restaurant along Route 25. Games continue through the weekend until champions are crowned in several age and skill levels on Sunday.

Where to stay warm: Sun Valley Cottages (686 Endicott St. North, Laconia, 603-366-4945, [sunvalley.com](http://sunvalley.com)) has several cabins available for tournament weekend, starting at \$125 a night; Cedar Lodge suite at the former Brickyard Mountain Ski Resort is \$225 a night.

The Ballard House Inn (53 Parade Road, Meredith, 603-279-3434, [ballardhouseinn.com](http://ballardhouseinn.com)) is a convenient spot just a mile from the tournament site, and has singles starting at \$139. The two-room Squam suite starts at \$189.

Shuttle service will take visitors from event parking at Hart's Turkey Farm (223 Daniel Webster Highway) and Laconia Harley Davidson (239 Daniel Webster Highway) to the tournament site. Meredith is an hour and 45 minute drive from Boston.

Best team names: Angry Yeti, Guys on a Couch, Your Mom.

(Go to [pondhockey.classic.com](http://pondhockey.classic.com).)

### **New England Pond Hockey Festival, Rangeley, Maine, Feb. 1-2.**

Set a little farther north than the rest, even this tournament — now in its eighth year — draws teams and players from every New England state, but also from as far away as North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania and Michigan. Originally the plan of three friends who play hockey in the Portland area, the tournament was designed to be “hockey the way it was meant to be played.” Tucked into the small town of Rangeley — hub of the Rangeley Lakes Region — visitors will find themselves near both Saddleback Mountain and Bald Mountain. So when the hockey's over there's plenty to do.

The women's division of the Rangeley tournament this year is named in honor of Kristen Cameron — a former Bowdoin College hockey standout, and graduate student and assistant coach at Mercyhurst College, who was paralyzed after being struck by a drunken driver while cycling. Friends and teammates of Cameron will be on-hand at the tournament this year. Rangeley is a four hour drive north of Boston.

Where to stay warm: A block of rooms has been set aside for tournament attendees at the Rangeley Inn (2443 Main St., Rangeley, 207-864-3341) with king rooms still available at \$140 a night — including continental breakfast.

The Rangeley Saddleback Inn (2303 Main St., Rangeley, 207-864-3434, [rangeleysaddlebackinn.com](http://rangeleysaddlebackinn.com)) is close to the action, but also puts visitors close to Saddleback Mountain. Snowmobile, skiing and hiking trails are just steps from this pet-friendly, newly renovated inn. Rates start at \$135 for a single queen, and \$145 for a double queen pet room.

Best team names: Huhuweettweet, Butt Ends

(Go to [newenglandpondhockey.com](http://newenglandpondhockey.com).)

Similar tournaments are popping up throughout the country, including more New England contests such as the Pond Hockey Classic ([pondhockeyclassic.com](http://pondhockeyclassic.com)) in Colchester, Vt., on Lake Champlain, Feb. 14-16; and the Maine Pond Hockey Classic ([mainepondhockey.com](http://mainepondhockey.com)) in China, Maine, on China Lake, Feb. 8-9.

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