

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

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Today, partly to mostly cloudy, hi 34. Tonight, snow, windy, low 27. 1 morrow, snow ending, total 6-inches, clearing later, windy, high 33. Weather map is on Page A20

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**'This is not necessarily about hockey. It's about a community.'**

CHRIS BROWN, an organizer of the first 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship to be played this weekend in Concord, N.H.



ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL ARCHIVES, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Lower School Pond at St. Paul's School in the late 1800s. It is said to be the site of the first organized hockey game in the U.S.

## On Frozen Pond: Playing Up a Hockey Legacy

By BRION O'CONNOR

CONCORD, N.H. — When Chris Brown, 40, laces up his skates and pulls on his Concord Budmen jersey on Friday, he will be re-connecting with the hockey gods who have smiled on New Hampshire's capital for almost 130 years. The Budmen are among 50 teams, more than 30 of them from this city of 42,000, that will participate in the first 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, a celebration of Concord's singular ties to hockey played in the elements.

"When I was growing up in Concord, there used to be areas flooded in most of the parks," Brown, a tournament organizer, said. "Then, over the years, those just slowly went away, whether it was lack of interest or the city not having the funds to do it."

The tournament at White Park, just up the road from the Capitol, is a fund-raiser to give new life to outdoor hockey in the city. For players and spectators, it promises a tableau resembling what many hockey historians think was the first organized game played in the United States, on Nov. 17, 1883.

It happened two miles away, on Lower School Pond on the campus of St. Paul's, a boarding school whose students have included Astors and Vanderbilts, future United States senators and at least one N.H.L. player-to-be, Don Sweeney, the former Boston Bruin and now the team's assistant general manager.

The term black ice was coined at St. Paul's, in reference to the smooth-as-glass surface that set when temperatures first plummeted, leading to "black ice holidays," when classes would be canceled so students could skate. According to the school's archives, hockey was played on campus as early as the 1860s, the modern game taking hold in the 1880s with the arrival of two Canadian students — George Perley of Ottawa and Arthur Whitney of Montreal.

"When I was a student here, there were eight rinks on that pond," said the school's rector, Bill Matthews, a former player and coach at St. Paul's. "Every afternoon, you'd hear the pucks banging against the boards."

St. Paul's is also where Hobey Baker

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ABOVE, JIM COLE/ASSOCIATED PRESS; ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL

More than a century later, students are still playing hockey on the Lower School Pond. The annual award for college hockey's best player is named after Hobey Baker, who played at St. Paul's in the early 1900s.





# On Frozen Pond: Concord, N.H., Playing Up a Hockey Legacy

From First Sports Page

learned the game in the early 1900s. Baker, whose name is on the award given each year to the best college player, took his skills to Princeton, but St. Paul's continued to make headlines. On Dec. 15, 1913, The New York Times trumpeted a game between Baker's Princeton squad and the "famous St. Paul's School team" at St. Nicholas Rink in Manhattan. The article refers to St. Paul's as a "little preparatory school, tucked away in the New Hampshire hills."

"Unless they really know hockey, most people don't even know where Hobey Baker came from," said Jim Hayes, 57, a Concord native and the director of the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey, the state's Hall of Fame.

But pond hockey at traditionally blueblood St. Paul's is only part of the Concord story. The sport here has strong blue-collar roots, too, and these have produced Olympians and numerous college stars and pros, including one N.H.L. veteran, Kent Carlson, an enforcer with the Canadiens in the mid-1980s.

"The competitiveness and the drive to succeed in Concord was just amazing," said Lee Blossom, 51, who attended St. Paul's before leading Concord High School to the state title in 1977.

Blossom went on to captain Boston College and play in the International Hockey League. He noted that the season in Concord ran six months, from November to April. "When you grow up in a culture like that, it's easy to hone your skills," he said. "Hockey was a way of life."

Concord's hockey culture mirrors a strong appetite here for sports in general. For a small city with a climate that can be inhospitable, Concord has left an outsize footprint in arenas around the world. In addition to its hockey stars, who include the 1998 Olympic gold medalist Tara Mounsey, Concord has produced Matt Bonner of the San Antonio Spurs; Red Rolfe, an All-Star third baseman on Lou Gehrig's Yankees teams of the 1930s; Bob Tewksbury, who finished third in the 1992 National League Cy Young Award voting; Joe Lefebvre, who homered in his first two games as a Yankees rookie in 1980; and Brian Sabean, the general manager and architect of the World Series champion San Francisco Giants.

And yet no sport has captured the city's imagination quite like hockey.

"It's one of those places where you go to the park and the pond will be plowed and people will be playing hockey on it," said Bonner, who stands 6 feet 10 inches and said he stopped playing hockey when he was 12 and could no longer find size 13 skates to

Howard Beck contributed reporting from San Antonio.



JIM COLE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

White Park in Concord, N.H., where the first 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, featuring 50 teams, will be held.

rent at the skate shack.

## Shinny Town

Teams playing pond hockey, or shinny, began appearing in Concord 100 years ago. The famed Sacred Heart squad, formed in 1929, played on an outdoor rink alongside the church. The Sacred Heart, as the team from the then largely French-Canadian parish was known, was made up of local players and St. Paul's teachers, said Tom Champagne, 81, who played at Concord High and worked at St. Paul's for 35 years.

So formidable was Sacred Heart that the United States Olympic team stopped by in Concord on its way to the 1952 Games in Oslo.

"The Sacred Heart group was up, 5-3, after two periods but ended up losing, 8-6," said Hayes, who will play for the White Park Hockey Club in the tournament.

Champagne, one of five surviving members of that Sacred Heart team, said, "As far as I'm concerned, when I was still playing for Sacred Heart, Concord had the top team for hockey next to the Berlin Maroons," a reference to a traditional power from the state's far northern reaches.

"Concord was a real good hockey town," he added.

Keeping old-school hockey vital in Concord is one goal of the 1883 Black Ice tournament, in which seven-person teams in men's and women's divisions will

play four against four on six rinks.

"It's shinny hockey," said Tom Painchaud, 55, a Concord native and St. Paul's graduate, "like we used to play when we had nothing else to do on a Saturday afternoon."

The tournament resulted from a brainstorming session between Brown and David Gill, the city's recreation director. The City Council directed Gill to find ways to help offset budget shortfalls, and he reached out to Brown, a

## A hockey hotbed's roots are blueblood and blue collar.

board member of the Boys and Girls Club.

"This is not necessarily about hockey," Brown said. "It's about a community."

Gill said the tournament, through its business partnerships, had raised enough money to restore a skating area at Rollins Park in the city's South End. "We haven't had skating there in two or three decades," he said.

## From the Outside In

Hockey here moved indoors in December 1965 with the opening of Douglas N. Everett Arena,

named for a Concord native and 1932 Olympic silver medalist who was inducted into the United States Hockey Hall of Fame in 1974.

Champagne's son, also named Tom, played for Concord High and is president of Legends of Hockey. He recalls the visceral thrill of attending games there with his father, starting with the amateur Shamrocks, who moved from White Park in 1966.

"In the days before plexiglass, it was wire mesh, and you could smell these guys," Champagne said. "You'd get sprayed with the shavings. You could see the blood. You'd be right there."

Sabeane, 54, who never played hockey but whose brothers did, said the opening of Everett and the availability of Bruins games on television for the first time revived the sport from a down period.

"That place was going 24 hours a day almost, to accommodate all the teams," he said of the arena. "They had youth teams, the high schools, travel teams, games, practices, what have you."

Everett was also home to the Coachmen (1966-68), the Eastern Olympics (1967-74), the Tri-City Coachmen (1974-75) and the Budmen (1975-92). Leagues came and went, among them the Granite State League, the Can-Am League and the New England Hockey League.

"I watched them all," the elder Champagne said. "That was good

hockey. It was a different era, but a great era."

For the younger Champagne, 52 and with three sons of his own, the 1883 Black Ice tournament is a reminder of how hockey in the city has changed for the younger generation.

"What's unique for guys my age is that I spent just as much if not more time outside playing hockey," said Champagne, who will suit up for the Turkey Pond Flyers. "Nowadays, even my kids, it's pretty limited how much time they go out. They don't know what the nuances of the ice are like. You've got to learn to skate around the cracks, and how the puck's going to bounce. You have to shovel the ice off. If you miss the net, someone has to go get the puck."

"It was just shinny pickup. But that's where you learned to be creative, where you learned the etiquette of the game, keeping your stick down, being a competitor. I think the kids miss that today because it's all about systems and it's all about drills at practices."

Which, ultimately, may be the best reason for a pond hockey tournament, though certainly not the only one.

"There's nothing quite like skating outdoors, no matter what the weather," Matthews of St. Paul's said. "Whether it's freezing cold or one of those beautiful cool days when the sun is shining, one of those magical days."