



## Skaters getting ready for Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship

*Event set for Jan. 24-26*

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### CANTERBURY, N.H. -

On Kimball Pond, hockey is played in its purest form: No pads. No refs. No clock. No Zamboni. There's just a puck, a couple boots for a goal and a couple of buds.

It is hockey for fun and right now, practice is underway for the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship at White Park in Concord, Jan. 24-26.

"It is hockey pared down to its essence," said Avram Niebling of Boscawen, a member of the Concord Capital's black ice team which last year skated to the championship match in the open division before losing to a team headed up by Concord's Mick Mounsey.

This year, its rematch time and look out. Because these guys have been practicing.

Like many who are out there in the cold, this is playing hockey for the pure joy of it, after years of organized youth and school sports.

During the Christmas holidays, Bobby Berwick of Loudon, Evan Adams of Concord, Avram and his brother Sam Niebling of Boscawen embanked and flooded a rink they made on Kimball Pond.

It's about half the size of a regulation rink.

They created it using a snow-blower, an ice-fishing auger and a pump to pull water up from beneath the ice to smooth it off and maintain it during the snowy part of the winter.

The recent monsoon took care of the snow, and now there is a glassy quality to the ice.

"We've been out here like a dozen times," said Berwick, who with Avram will return to White's Park along with Concord's Ryan Blossom, Tyler Bickford, Adam Frew and new to the team Matt Famiglietti and Bow's Ryan MacDonald.

Practice is fun, fast and less structured than youth hockey which Avram said is "more like school."

Growing up, it wasn't all inside the Douglas N. Everett Arena.

They grew up with rinks in their backyard and also took to Hoyt Road Marsh in Concord to get some pond hockey time in with friends.

Now in their 20s, and through with college play, the love is still there. Hockey deconstructed down to its essence.

They scoured the region to find the perfect pond to make their rink.

They have used Kimball Pond over a dozen times and if you are driving on Kimball Pond Road near the intersection of Route 132, it's worth it to stop and watch. These guys can skate.

The 4th Annual Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship is popular though and the competition at White's Park is fierce.

Chris Brown, president of the association said there are 89 teams and 623 athletes signed up for the weekend of hockey on eight temporary rinks.

"It's kind of a natural amphitheater," perfect for watching good hockey, but Brown said there are spectator stands. No need to bring your folding chairs.

Friday games begin at 9 a.m. but the kick-off is at night and includes fireworks at 7 p.m., a bonfire and live music that evening. The Concord Capitals play their first game at 1 p.m.

Concord Youth Hockey league members will be playing in the rink and there will be a bonfire and DJ throughout the weekend.

So grab the warm gear, a Thermos of cocoa, pack up the kids and blankets and go watch. It's free and lots of fun. Just no alcohol. White's Park rules.

One of the teams is particularly stacked, this year.

Scott and Mark Fusco, who both won Hobey Baker Awards while skating for Harvard University, are playing on a team organized by former Gov. John Lynch who is also a player and pond hockey enthusiast himself.

But if they were in the same division, they might have some trouble up against the boys from Kimball Pond.

Brown said there are nine women teams this year, an increase from last year and Concord continues to be a hotbed for pond hockey just as it was in the 1880s.

He said no more teams can be accepted and there are 30 teams on a waiting list.

Meredith has its own pretty popular New England Pond Hockey Classic coming up the week following the Concord event, but this is more about local hockey and its long history on the ponds of Concord, Chris said.

For more information visit <http://www.blackicepondhockey.com/>.