

Black Ice Pond Hockey to return after COVID hiatus

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By Cassidy Jensen - Jan 26, 2022 | 0 comments



Concord Parks and Recreation workers pour water on the pond at White Park to smooth out the surface in anticipation of skating and the Black Ice Tournament later this month.

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The Black Ice Pond Hockey Championships will return this year with some changes to mitigate the frustrating rescheduling that often comes with unpredictable January weather.

The 2021 hockey tournament was canceled because of COVID-19, and in 2020 warm temperatures followed by a snowstorm shortened the tournament by two days.

This year, if organizers determine the weather – or COVID – prove too big a challenge, the games set for Jan. 27 through Jan. 30 will be rescheduled for March 18 through 22 at Concord's Everett Arena.

"The important distinction we made this year is if it looks iffy, we'll just make the call," said Dan Luker, president of the 1883 Black Ice Hockey Association.

The board seeks to avoid repeating the cumbersome process of setting up White Park again on short notice if the weather turns during the original dates.

"It's not the same as pond hockey, but everyone will get their games," Luker said.

Another change this year is that only about 80 teams will play, instead of the usual 95. That's because there will be seven rinks rather than eight, excluding a rink located at the edge of the ponds. "The thought was to have one less rink to maximize the good ice," Luker said.

Luker said some measures are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including a separate registration tent. Signs will remind spectators to wear masks and warn attendees to stay away from the event if they are

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experiencing COVID symptoms.

In addition to the adult hockey teams, youth teams will also play, and tournament attendees can enjoy food from local vendors, fireworks, games, a rock wall and a bonfire.

The Concord Parks and Recreation Department maintains the ice at White Park each winter, flooding the ponds and moving snow off the ice for public skating. During the tournament, Parks staff will assist Black Ice tournament volunteers in clearing ice shavings and making sure the rinks are ready between games.

Parks and Recreation Director David Gill said Black Ice is a great way for families to celebrate winter in Concord, but that the event has been challenged in recent years by the warming climate in New Hampshire. However, last year, when the tournament was canceled, good weather for ice formation allowed the pond to stay open for 40 days.

"It's turned out to be a wonderful new tradition for Concord. It brings a lot of people back to Concord who moved away and celebrates the roots of hockey, but it's also good for downtown businesses," Gill said.

During the weekend, hockey teams from other states will flock to Concord, where tournament organizers say the first organized game of hockey in the U.S. was played at St. Paul's School in 1883.

"All we need is the weather gods to cooperate," Luker said.

For updates and match schedules, visit blackicepondhockey.com.

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