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Hitting the pond for some old-time hockey

By Alex Hall New Hampshire Union Leader
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Jack Wade, 7, of Concord plays in a pick-up game at White Park as teams played next door in the Black Ice Tournament in Co
DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

CONCORD — While they are still a few years away from being old enough to play in the NHL Winter Classic, the Concord Capitals 11U Premier team players felt like pros on Thursday night.

The Capitals played a red-white scrimmage on the pond at White Park on the opening night of this year's Black Ice Pond Hockey Tournament. The fourth annual Black Ice Mite Shiny Classic Tournament was scheduled to end Sunday, the final day of the four-day event, weather permitting.

The mite tournament includes teams from the Capitals, New Hampshire Junior Monarchs, New England Wildcats, New Hampshire Avalanche and Hanover programs.

The Black Ice tournament was canceled last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and cut short two years ago due to weather conditions.

"I couldn't wait for it," said Capitals 11U Premier player Griffin Blaine. "I've been waiting all week to just come out here and just skate because last year we couldn't do it at all."

Blaine and many of his teammates had played in the Black Ice tournament when they were at the mites level.

"It's fun playing with the boys and just having a good time skating," Blaine's teammate Grady Brown said.

Capitals 11U Premier assistant coach Dave Scott said his players love to compete, but the Black Ice tournament is a good reminder to always just enjoy playing the game. The event features adult divisions starting at age 18 up to a 50-plus division alongside the mites tournament and youth scrimmages.

"It's all about back to the basics of fun hockey and pond hockey," said Scott, who has played in the Black Ice tournament's adult divisions.

Scott and Jeff Cain, who is the Capitals 11U Premier head coach and president of Concord Youth Hockey, said the event also shows their players how they grew up learning the sport by playing on ponds.

"You're outdoors, it's back to what we did as kids — that old-school feel of just we're throwing a puck," Scott said. "They set the ground rules but it's not 100 whistles. It's just fun, gritty, get the puck, get it in the net."

Cain, who has also played in the adult divisions, said he believes that the Black Ice tournament has helped promote hockey in town. Concord Youth Hockey's learn-to-skate program numbers have never been higher, he said, with about 170 kids currently participating.

Jack Wade, 7, and his brothers, Keegen, 11, and Nolan, 9, made a few new friends while playing a pick-up pond hockey game at the event on Friday. Their mom, Jessica, said the brothers don't play competitively but enjoy skating on the pond during Black Ice each year.

"This event brings the hockey community in Concord together along with the regular community," Cain said.

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