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It's time for the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championships; or is it?



A sign warns visitors to White Park to steer clear of the thin ice.



Open water flows into the pond.



By [RAY DUCKLER \(/byline?byline=By RAY DUCKLER.\)](#)

Monitor columnist

Published: 1/12/2023 4:42:14 PM

Chris Brown is usually nervous this time of year, when the Black Ice Pond Hockey tournament at White Park is on the horizon.

This time, though, the president and CEO of New Hampshire Distributors insists that he's calm as his self-imposed deadline of Jan. 18 to set the final dates for the event approaches.

The three-day Black Ice event is scheduled for Jan. 27-29, with the weather's cooperation, of course. Otherwise, Brown said the games would move indoors to Everett Arena and be played March 17-19.



While the owner of Gas Lighter Restaurant wonders about her future, she feels a little hope that her busi...

"We're having our normal mid-January proposition," said Brown, who founded the event 11 years ago. "I learned not to panic. At the end of the day, I want to put on a great event and see how the town and the players embrace this. When we pull it off, it is great, but we always know that we may have to change or manipulate the schedule."

The fourth Winter Festival, held downtown in conjunction with Black Ice officials and In-Town Concord, will be held this month on schedule, simply because the main event there – Chainsaw ice sculpting – doesn't require the freezing temperatures needed to skate safely on the pond at White Park.

With hockey, though, more often than not, a snafu surfaces. Unseasonably high temperatures for this time of year. Or a blizzard. Or, in recent years, Covid.

All have joined forces to create a not-so-perfect storm. The Black Ice's track record of keeping its initial dates is not great. In fact, only three of 11 Black Ice Championships have gone off without a hitch through the entire weekend.

As in years, past, Brown is balancing the fans' need to plan ahead with a forecast of freezing temperatures leading up to the Black Ice Tournament. Too much snow will also cause a delay, if nothing else.

At this point, weather predictions are premature. Brown said that this year he's learned to follow weather patterns that originate on the West Coast. That could be the start of something big, yet warm.

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"We'll wait until Wednesday of next week and we can see these Pacific storms in California," Brown said. "It gives a nice ski season out there, but they are going across the country with milder Pacific air. You need five or six days like it was (Wednesday). You want temperatures in the single digits to the

20s.”

Last year, a Nor’easter on Saturday, during the heart of the games, caused a stoppage in play. Only one-third of the scheduled games were held that day.

That night, Dan Luker, the president of the 1883 Black Ice Hockey Association, sent an email looking for help to clear 5½ inches of snow from the pond hockey rinks. He hoped for a small army on the final day and got one.

“I had 30 guys here at 6 a.m.,” Luker said at the time.

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

The postponements have at times overshadowed what for many is a reunion of sorts. Some of the city’s best players, stars of professional, big-time college and Olympic hockey, have returned in the past to reminisce about the old days, filled with championships trophies and individual accolades.

Players returned to their roots, like former USA Olympic star Tara Mounsey; ex-Boston College forward and Beanpot Invitational Most Valuable player Lee Blossom; and giant goaltender Bruce Gillies, who played at the University of New Hampshire.

The plan this year is to have fireworks under the lights on Friday, Jan. 27, followed by dozens of hockey games played by youth and adult players, and then the semifinals and championship rounds on that Sunday.

Weather permitting, of course.



Ray Duckler, our intrepid columnist, focuses on the Suncook Valley. He floats from topic to topic, searching for the humor or sadness or humanity in each subject. A native New Yorker, he loves the Yankees and Giants. The Red Sox and Patriots? Not so much.

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