



Pond Hockey Tournament

Brings Excitement of the Game to the Outdoors

By Kylie Blanchard, Clearwater Communications

The gleam of the ice, the glide of the skates and the speed of the puck draw many players and spectators to the game of hockey. And, while most of North Dakota's winter hockey season is played at indoor rinks across the state, for one weekend each February, the North Dakota State Pond Hockey Championship is played on the natural ice of Devils Lake.

The seventh annual Pond Hockey Championship will be held February 21 and 22, and organizers are expecting to see an increase in the number of teams and spectators as the event continues to grow in popularity.

Getting Started

The North Dakota State Pond Hockey Championship began in 2008 when Kale Stromme, the event's founder and tournament manager, heard about a similar event in Wisconsin. "I thought this would be a great opportunity to start an annual event that would bring us back to our childhood days of playing on outdoor rinks," he says.

Devils Lake also offered the ideal location for the event, he adds. "The lake provides us with a huge body of water, and North Dakota people are always excited about hockey in the winter. I thought this had the potential to be a new and growing event in the state."





2014 repeat Men's Division champions, "The Internationals."

Eight adult teams, all from Devils Lake, played in the first annual tournament, which Stromme says was a learning experience in preparing for the outdoor games. "We have continued to grow every year and now have perfected the ice so it is close to as smooth as an actual indoor ice sheet," he says. "Last year our tournament grew to 40 teams and there were 22 adult and 18 youth teams. Our goal is to gain at least 10 teams every year and have 50 teams."

The Game of Pond Hockey

"Successful pond hockey teams have mastered stick movement, puck control and have a keen ability to move the puck up the ice," says Stromme of the three-on-three player games. "There are no goaltenders, and the goal nets are one foot high by five feet long. The rinks are 100 feet by 50 feet wide, and there are no boards around the rinks."

He says the Pond Hockey Championship "focuses on keeping the roots of outdoor hockey alive," adding there are no on-ice officials and teams are responsible for monitoring their games and scores.

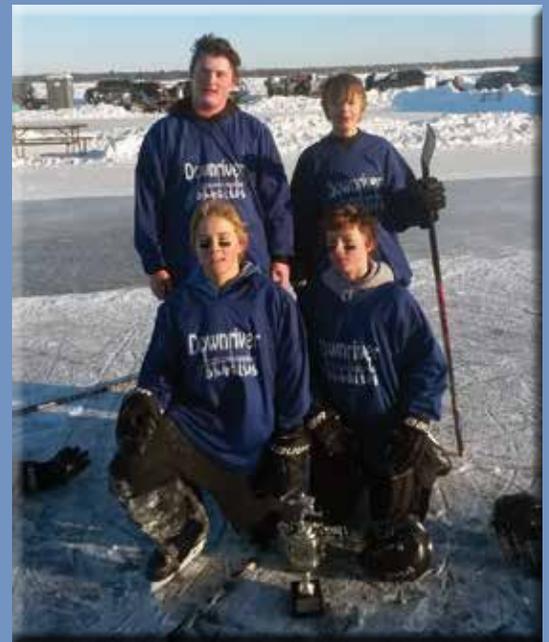
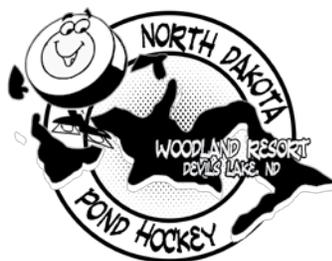
Tomas Solc, a tournament participant for the past two years, has been playing hockey for 22 years and says the Pond Hockey Championship offers the opportunity to play in a unique setting. "The idea of playing on a lake surrounded by trees and cabins has always appealed to me," he says. "I think it is the atmosphere and the commitment of the organizers that make it so special."

Solc's team has won the Men's Division the past two years, but he says the tournament is about more than a championship. "Everyone there is having fun, not just playing hockey, but also participating in the other events they have available."

Tournament Events and Support

The tournament is played at the Woodland Resort, and owner Kyle Blanchfield says the Pond Hockey Championship has brought a new dimension to a popular winter sport. "Minnesota pond hockey is a big deal, and we were missing that in North Dakota," he says. "Pond hockey has a spirit of competition, but it is also supposed to be fun."

The Pond Hockey Championship is held in conjunction with the community's ShiverFest, a weekend of winter events sponsored by Devils Lake Tourism. "This allows people to bring family and friends to take in all there is to offer," says Stromme. "Last year there was a youth ice fishing tournament and snowmobile races all within the viewing area of the hockey event. There is also a Mite hockey tournament, kite flying, a golf course on the ice, gun show, sleigh rides, a business showcase and much more."



The "Down River Danglers," 2014 Bantam Division champions.



2014 Peeewe Division champions, the "Super Snipers."



The "DL Dusters," 2014 High School Division champions.



The North Dakota State Pond Hockey Championships recently acquired a Zamboni to use in preparing and maintaining the outdoor ice surfaces. It is believed that this is the only pond hockey tournament in the Midwest that has its own Zamboni.

The tournament organizers also set up facilities on the ice to make the Pond Hockey Championship more player and spectator friendly. “Last year we had two warming tents. One was a dressing room, and the other was for players and fans to grab some food and beverages,” says Stromme. “A ritual of the event has also been fireworks capping off the night and a live band playing at Proz Lakeside at the Cove, a bar and restaurant located at Woodland Resort.”

Stromme says Blanchfield and the Woodland Resort have been imperative to the success of the tournament. “Blanchfield has welcomed the event in front of his resort and provides any resource necessary to make it a success every year. He provides equipment, facilities and the manpower needed to put this together.”

With Blanchfield’s help, the tournament also recently acquired a Zamboni to use in preparing and maintaining the outdoor ice surfaces. “The hockey association in a smaller town was selling its Zamboni, and we bought it and donated it to the tournament,” says Blanchfield. “This summer we got some additional sponsors and got it wrapped so it can be used for advertisement and promotion.”

“I am very excited to have our very own Zamboni for the

Pond Hockey Tournament,” adds Stromme. “I believe this is the only pond hockey tournament in the Midwest that has its own Zamboni designated for the tournament. The Zamboni is really unique and stands out.”

Welcoming All Players

“The tournament is open for all to enjoy,” says Stromme. “Most teams come from North Dakota, and we have had players come from Minnesota and Canada. We also had three players over 60 years old play in last year’s event.”

The tournament has three youth divisions: Peewee, Bantam and high school, as well as men’s and women’s adult and adult 30 and older divisions. “We will also have a boot hockey division available for non-skaters, and a rink open for anyone to come out and skate during the weekend.”

“The costs are probably the lowest for any pond hockey tournament you can find,” Stromme continues. “Adult teams are \$50 per team, and youth teams are \$25 per team.”

Stromme says in the future he hopes to see more than 100 teams playing on 15 ice sheets, but he notes the tournament’s many sponsors and volunteers will continue to play a vital role in its success. “The event is run under the Devils Lake Park Board, the main sponsor of the event,” says Stromme. “Devils Lake Tourism is also a continued sponsor and, the last three years, the North Dakota Tourism Department has provided matching grant funds to market the event. We have many local sponsors that also help to grow this event.”

The Pond Hockey Championship is meant to be different from other hockey tournaments, says Stromme, helping it to gain in popularity. “One of my favorite things to see is people having fun, enjoying the game and having good sportsmanship. If we can get players and fans to come play a competitive game of hockey and after the game, sit down together, laugh and have a good time, then we have created a successful event.”

For additional information on the North Dakota Pond Hockey Championship visit www.ndpondhockey.com.

