



THE PUCK Starts Here

PLANS FOR
ROUND TWO OF
BERKSHIRE POND
HOCKEY CLASSIC
ARE WELL
UNDERWAY

By Taylor Staubach

Photos By David Edgecomb

The Berkshire Pond Hockey Classic is an exhilarating annual event that celebrates the pure essence of hockey. This tournament embraces the elements: a frozen pond surrounded by snow-covered hills that ring with the impassioned shouts of players and spectators alike; a chance to witness thrilling games that harken back to the sport's roots.

It's this experience that inspired tournament founder Alex Regen to run with this idea. "There's just a freedom that you feel, something so elemental to being on a frozen pond," he says. "The mountains are in the background; there might be a bald eagle. There's this crisp silence, fresh air, and the camaraderie of other players. It's something very nostalgic."

That was the plan back in January of 2023. But Berkshire weather can have a way of shifting the most thought-out plans, and last winter was no exception. Plan A turned to Plan B, which turned to Plan C, and the lively game of pond hockey was set up in Berkshires School's indoor rink in Sheffield. Perseverance paid off, and oh, what fun was had by all! It came down to the determination of one person whose love for hockey began as a young boy and never diminished.

Growing up in New Jersey, Alex's family

frequented a cabin on Lake Buel in Monterey from the time he was a year old. It was there that his dad taught him to skate. "My love of the sport really started here in the Berkshires," he says. Alex would go on to play high school, college, and league hockey. Now a start-up executive for various media companies, he still spends time at his childhood lake. It was there that a chance conversation with a new neighbor—who happened to be a former hockey player—started a series of events that would turn out to be serendipitous. The conversation inspired Alex to inquire about the possibility of holding a tournament on the pond. Emailing his query to the Monterey Parks and Recreation Committee, he received an enthusiastic reply from committee member and former team dentist to the NHL Hartford Whalers, Tom Mensi. Alex and Tom would meet up to discuss plans at the Great Barrington Bagel Company, only to have its owner, Bob Clemo, a hockey player himself, sign up to be the tournament's first sponsor. "The more I started talking to people about this idea of a tournament, it's like people started coming out of the woodwork, and I kind of uncovered that we lived in this type of 'Mystery, Alaska' hockey community in the Berkshires," says Alex.

After securing a grant through the Berkshire Bank Foundation, fortuitous moments continued to snowball as the tournament gained

momentum. Local hockey players clamored to sign for a team. "It got to the point where I was able to quite easily get 16 teams," says Alex. "It just seemed like everyone knew someone who played hockey." Event sponsors began to pile up, too.

Alex reflects on this groundswell of support. "My dad passed away five years ago, and his favorite place in the world was the Berkshires. He just loved it up here, and I just feel like he had something to do with it. Every single obstacle was able to be overcome, and that brought a lot of purpose to this, to be able to do something for the Berkshire community."

Cut to January 2023. With 16 co-ed teams confirmed for play and Roberto's Pizza and ExtraSpecialTeas set to serve wood-fired pizza and hot beverages lakeside, everything had fallen into place. A couple weeks before the scheduled tournament, though, it was clear from the milder temperatures that Lake Buel was not a viable location. The tournament was shifted to the higher-elevated Benedict Pond in Beartown State Forest in hopes that the ice would freeze deep enough for safe play.

The DCR (Department of Conservation & Recreation) was switching permits for them, the date was changed to February 11, but the weather again wasn't working in their favor. Just when they were about to throw in the

towel, Chris Weld, CEO of The Pass, the event's main sponsor, put a last-ditch call in to Berkshire School. With the monumental help of alum Robin McGraw, the school offered to let the tournament take place there.

"To get an ice slot on a Saturday in February was quite literally a miracle," says Alex. "They were kind enough to donate the ice."

With eight teams agreeing to play indoors, they were at capacity at the new venue—and the tournament was back on! The community rallied together, determined to make the event a resounding success. As the 2023 tournament unfolded, the spirit of togetherness was palpable. Teams battled fiercely, and the Pittsfield Police Department emerged victorious.

"It was all hands on deck," says Alex. "We had the tournament; it was successful and just an amazing community event."

As plans for the 2024 tourney take shape, Alex is determined to keep the momentum going. Plans are underway for the 2nd Annual Berkshire Pond Hockey Classic, tentatively scheduled for Saturday, February 10, at Benedict Pond in Beartown State Forest. Personally significant to Alex, the date is also his dad's birthday.

While Alex is hopeful for the next tournament, he won't let the unpredictable Berkshire winters create an annual roadblock. In an effort to strengthen the bond among hockey enthusiasts scattered across the community, Alex is spearheading a coalition to build a seasonal outdoor rink in Pittsfield. "It would be a two-month rink with piping underneath so you're not at the mercy of the weather so much," he says.

Along with a strong board of advisors, the coalition has begun talks with local investors to create "a multi-use, community sheet of ice," fostering community engagement and creating a lasting, positive impact.

Through this journey, Alex believes his purpose is simply to channel the passion and energy that hockey has unearthed. "I really just feel like a conduit, a project manager who's bringing people together," he reflects. The Berkshire Pond Hockey Classic is a testament to the enduring power of sport, camaraderie, and community, proving that when the love for hockey runs deep, nothing can dampen the spirit of the game.

Visit berkshirepondhockeyclassic.com for updates and ways to get involved.



The Berkshire Pond Hockey Classic was held earlier this year at Berkshire School's indoor hockey arena. The Pittsfield Police Department was the winning team. The hope is to have it next year at Benedict Pond.