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## NYC squad enjoys a cold one at classic pond hockey tourney

BY DARRELL HARTMAN

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Skaters stick to it at the Pond Hockey championships in Wisconsin, where an all-New York City squad braved the sub-zero temperatures.

It was day one of the three-day Labatt Blue/USA Hockey Pond Hockey Championship in Eagle River, Wis., and as a dozen games played out on the frozen surface of Dollar Lake, a spectator described the many pleasures of good, old-fashioned pond hockey.

"I like to have my kids go out there," said Scott Kellett, a burly youth-hockey coach from Ironwood, Mich. "It's nostalgic." Next to him, an adult skater taking a breather nodded in agreement and raised a can of beer to his lips. Since they were numb, most of it ended up on his jersey.

Every February, men and - increasingly, women - from all over the country brave Eagle River's single-digit temperatures and icy back roads to compete in this outdoor tournament. The event has grown from some 40 teams when it started three years ago to an 18-rink, 142-team extravaganza.

A total of 22 states were represented this year. The bulk of the teams, especially the really good ones, hail from nearby



A player celebrates a goal.

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hockey nubs like [minnesota](#) and michigan. but plenty make the trip from the east - such as True Grit A, the tournament's only all-[New York City](#) squad. Its captain, [David Pechar](#), wasn't a fan of the ruts or the cold. "These bouncing pucks are killing us," he muttered from the sidelines.

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Pechar coolly swept in a backhander to put his team up 14-7. But by his calculation, they didn't stand a chance of advancing unless they beat their [Milwaukee](#) opponent by 10 goals.

In the end, they won by one and spent much of that night at the local strip club.

Like many teams, they weren't at Dollar Lake on Sunday, when the playoff matches took on a new intensity. Amid thickly falling snow, a young team from [Northern Michigan University](#) lost the Gold Division championship to an unpopular group of alums of Shattuck-St. Mary's, a Minnesota prep school. Although some teams take winning pretty seriously, most participants will tell you it's the camaraderie and the joy of playing outdoors that make it all worthwhile. Also, Labatt Blue offers each team a free 12-pack after each game, and that seems to go over pretty well.

"We all live in winter areas. If you're not celebrating, reveling in the winter, you're going to be depressed," said [Mike Natyshak](#) of the Buffalo Boys, which competed in the 40-and-over division.

The 6-foot-3 power forward added that he didn't mind battling the elements. "You've just got to fight the ruts, fight the cold, fight the snow and say, 'Whatever.'"

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