

# AHA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

*HELPING EVERY KID PLAY THE GREATEST GAME ON ICE*

Welcome back, AHA families!

We hope everyone enjoyed a well-deserved midseason break and maybe even a few extra hours of daylight and warmth (outside of Alaska!). As we dive into 2026, the season is picking up speed – league games are in full swing, state tournaments are on the horizon, and that familiar hint of spring sunshine is starting to peek back over the Chugach.

Looking back, 2025 was truly our best year yet. Our programs grew, our facilities improved, and our community came together stronger than ever. But just like our players, we're always looking for ways to get better – to keep improving our rinks, our operations, and the experience we provide for every family who calls AHA home.

Our work is never done.

We're so lucky to have such an amazing, supportive community that believes in what we're building together. Your enthusiasm, volunteer time, and passion for this sport make all the difference. So here's to the second half of the season – to hard work, great memories, and finishing strong under the brightening Alaska sun!

With Regards,

AHA Staff & Board of Directors



# WINTERFEST 2025

## HURRICANE WINDS AND FRIGID TEMPS WERE A TEST FOR PLAYERS AND PARENTS ALIKE



Winterfest 2025 was not for the faint of heart.

With temperatures hovering in the single digits combined with sustained winds of over 40 mph and gusts up to 80 mph - every person that walked away from this years Winterfest Invitational is a winner!

This annual outdoor tournament combines the competitiveness of a traditional hockey tournament with the unknown aspects and variables that come with playing on outdoor rinks, in Alaska, in December!

In years past, many players, coaches and volunteers have battled snowstorms, rain and warmth. 2025 provided extreme cold combined with strong winds and devastating wind chills for what was the most physically trying tournament in recent memory.

Games went off without a hitch thanks to the leadership of Tournament Director Brian Gross, the work of our many AHA volunteers, the ice maintenance staff from Alpine Services, the Municipality of Anchorage and the many dedicated officials at Anchorage Hockey Officials who braved the cold with stripes and whistles to make it all happen.

All for the kids!!!!

Even with the cold and windy conditions there was an abundance of smiles and laughter combined with incredibly competitive games featuring teams from all over Alaska as well as teams competing from Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon.

One has to wonder what kind of weather will be in store for Winterfest 2026! In the meantime, that indoor ice feels pretty nice.....

Congratulations to everyone who came to compete and to all the winners on a job well-done!

### 2025 CHAMPIONS

10A: Homer Glacier Kings

10B: Juneau Capitals

12A: AHA Comets

12B: Nikiski Ice Dawgs

14A: AHA Comets

14B: Nikiski Ice Dawgs

16A: AHA Comets

18B: Gomez Rams



ANCHORAGE HOCKEY  
ASSOCIATION

HC | Crystal Rader  
AC | Jimmy Gabriel, Michelle  
Watchman & Jacob Gondek



# AHA TEAM SPOTLIGHT

PLAYING **FOR** EACH OTHER

HOCKEY, FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY AND FUN

**10B 'RENEGADES'**



In this month's AHA Team Spotlight we are highlighting the AHA 10B 'Renegades'. The Renegades are coached by Head Coach Crystal Rader, with Assistant Coaches Jimmy Gabriel, Michelle Watchman, and Jacob Gondek.

"I have been coaching for the past half dozen years or so, coming up through the LTS, LTP and Mite Program. I have enjoyed the unique challenges and experiences that every level has offered." reminisced Coach Rader, "But some things you are just never prepared for. The kids teach you."

To finish off the 2024/2025 10B season the Rader team had their State Championship hopes come to end. After the loss, the handshakes were completed and the team took to the locker room together.

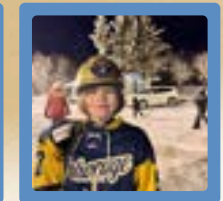
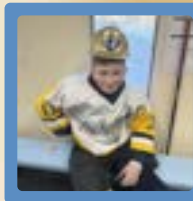
"When we walked into the locker room it was filled with tears. Like real tears." recalled Coach Rader. The coaching staff was fully prepared and started to explain the lessons in losses and how they should be proud of their achievement when the kids stepped in to set the record straight.

"But coach, we aren't crying because of the loss. We are sad that this is our last game together and we won't see each other again." the players explained. "We aren't ready for this to be over."

"I was stunned," said Coach Rader. "It reminded me of how important the job that we do is and how much of an effect a good team environment can have on these kids. They take this with them for the rest of their lives."

After a quick reminder that the team had developed friendships outside of the rink, and that many of the kids would soon be at summer camp together and that all would be okay - the smiles and laughter returned to the locker room.

Coach Rader and staff were ready to reload and do it all again!



The 2025/26 10B Renegades team is made up of players from every experience level and includes some players who started by just learning to skate alongside some players who have been on the ice since they were able to stand up. This mix of players has been one of the most rewarding experiences. What makes the game of Hockey so special isn't just the skill, but the mix of personalities, backgrounds, and strengths that come together to form something bigger than any individual. Each player contributes not only to the game, but to the character and identity of the team as a whole.

The coaching staff is proud of the way this team has shown a love and passion for the game but also for each other as a team.

These kids have shown so much character throughout the season so far. They battle with and *for* each other. They bring each other up. They work to get better every day, and bring their own unique character and energy to the rink each day. Along with their smiles!

One of the greatest things to witness is how the players genuinely care about one another's success. They don't just play with each other, they play for each other. Watching them grow to understand that if one player struggles, the team needs to rally, because success and failure are shared. That sense of unity builds resilience, trust, and accountability in a way no drill ever could.

## 10B 'RENEGADES'

- Work hard every shift
- Don't quit after mistakes
- Support our teammates
- Play brave
- Give your best effort
- Have fun competing
- It's about effort, attitude, and teamwork— every practice and every game
- A Renegade is someone who gives their best, no matter what

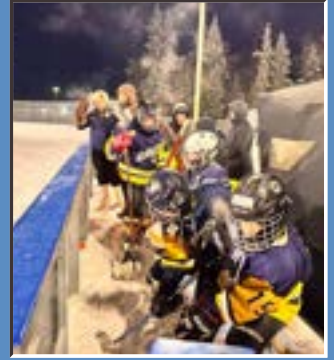


## AHA TEAM SPOTLIGHT

PLAYING **FOR EACH OTHER**

HOCKEY, FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY AND FUN

**10B 'RENEGADES'**



"Our staff has found tremendous joy in building bonds off the ice through team-building activities. Every kid on this team does more than just play hockey."

Seeing friendships grow away from the rink has strengthened the trust and connection between players, and that growth shows up in powerful ways on the ice. When players feel connected, supported, and confident in one another, they play with greater purpose and strength as a team.

As coaching staff, there is immense pride in watching children succeed not because they are forced to, but because they *want to*. Losses don't feel the same for every player, and that's okay. Our goal is to help them understand that growth comes from setbacks, and success is built through perseverance, effort, and learning along the way.

It's especially powerful to see experienced skaters turn to new players and offer help, not just to make them better hockey players, but to build friendships that can last a lifetime. Those moments reflect what hockey is truly about: inclusion, growth, confidence, and community.

"This team is truly something special. Our staff is excited every day we get to come to the rink and to be a part of their experience."

We are grateful to be part of a time when hockey provides such meaningful opportunities for every child who steps onto the ice. AHA is blessed beyond words to have such dedicated coaches like the Rader staff across the board. These are coaches who don't just teach the game, but genuinely care about these kids and want to see them succeed both on and off the rink.

# 2026 AHA BOARD ELECTIONS

## DO YOU WANT TO BE A BOARD MEMBER?

**DO YOU WANT TO SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY AND HELP MAKE A BIG IMPACT ON YOUTH HOCKEY?**

We are excited to announce to our Members that 5 AHA Board Positions are up for Election this spring.

We are accepting applications for the 5 open AHA Board of Directors positions vacated due to expiring terms. Electronic election voting for the Board of Directors will begin on February 17th and end on March 17th.

Anyone interested in running should first send an email indicating interest to our AHA Office Manager, Laura Higgins, at [anchoragehockeyoffice@gmail.com](mailto:anchoragehockeyoffice@gmail.com).

Interested candidates will be contacted via email by our election committee and asked to submit candidate bios and a headshot by the end of the day on February 12, 2026 to form the ballot.

AHA is looking for members who are passionate about helping to continue to build the foundations for a successful, mission driven youth hockey non-profit to run for the board. Board positions are a 2-year term that start and end the end of June this year. We ask that newly elected Directors attend the 3 monthly remaining Board meetings for this season before taking office in order to become familiar with the operation of the AHA Board and the Association.

Questions about areas of responsibilities, time commitment and generally what-to-expect would be best addressed by speaking directly with an AHA board member or by contacting our Executive Director, Rob Forbes at [rforbes@anchoragehockey.com](mailto:rforbes@anchoragehockey.com).

Board of Director positions and the work performed are an integral part of the successful oversight and direction of the Anchorage Hockey Association.

The results of the election will be announced at our Annual Membership Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, March 18, 2026.

**(Election voting will be electronic. Members will receive their ballots in an email and a cell text invitation using the contact information you provided in your child's 2025/26 PLAYER REGISTRATION. Contact Laura Higgins if you want to confirm that information or change it.)**



**ANCHORAGE HOCKEY  
ASSOCIATION**

# WHAT'S COMING UP

## IMPORTANT EVENTS FOR AHA FAMILIES

February brings the biggest tournament of the season for the State of Alaska to Anchorage as AHA hosts the President's Day Invitational over two consecutive weekends. AHA will also host the 'Mite Transition' meeting to assist families in understanding the next step as their players move to the 10U level next season.

### AHA MITE TRANSITION MEETING

**February 17, 2026 | 7:00 PM**

**Romig Middle School Auditorium**

We've all been there. If you are new to the hockey community - the transition from 8U to 10 can be scary, and confusing.

We are here to help.

AHA will host our annual Mite Transition Meeting to help families better understand the next step in their players' hockey journey from the Little Dippers Mite Program into 10U hockey.

This meeting introduces families to all the directors and gives an in depth look at all the 10U options available to players moving up. AHA offers the 'Comp' North Star Program, as well as the Rec A Comets and Rec B teams.

Directors and staff will be on hand to discuss the differences between the programs and highlighted the unique benefits each one offers depending on a player's development and goals. This meeting serves as a great opportunity to ask questions, ease concerns, and for AHA to share success stories from players who have thrived in each pathway.

Pizza and Drinks will be on hand for all who attend.

### 2026 PRESIDENTS DAY INVITATIONAL

**February 6-8 & 13-16, 2026**

**Ben Boeke, Dempsey Anderson, UAA and O'Malley**

112 teams will compete across 10 Divisions over two weekends in February to see who takes home the 2026 President's Day Championship. This tournament takes an extraordinary amount of volunteer work and dedication and we are incredibly thankful to all who help make it happen!

Best of luck to all the teams in this years tournament!

**WWW.ANCHORAGEHOCKEY.COM**





# MARK YOUR CALENDARS



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### GIRLS 10 AND UNDER FUN SKATE

JANUARY 11, 2026 @ 12:15 PM - DA2

### AHA COACHES TRAINING

JANUARY 25, 2026 @ 6 PM - AHA TRAINING CENTER

### AK GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL STATE TOURNAMENT

FEBRUARY 13-16, 2026 | BEN BOEKE

### MITE TRANSITION MEETING

FEBRUARY 17, 2026 | 7:00 PM  
ROMIG MIDDLE SCHOOL

### PRESIDENTS DAY INVITATIONAL WEEK 1

FEBRUARY 6-8, 2026

BEN BOEKE, DEMPSEY, UAA, & O'MALLEY ICE RINKS

### PRESIDENTS DAY INVITATIONAL WEEK 2

FEBRUARY 13-16, 2026

BEN BOEKE, DEMPSEY, UAA, & O'MALLEY ICE RINKS

## GAMES TO WATCH FOR

### 12 MAJOR NS VS. OILERS 12 MAJOR

JANUARY 10<sup>TH</sup> 2026 | 2:00 PM | UAA

### NS 10 MINOR BATTLE - WEIDNER VS. WETTIN

JANUARY 16<sup>TH</sup>, 2026 | 9:30 AM | DEMPSEY ANDERSON



### 14U COMETS GASTROCK VS. 14A AVALANCHE

JANUARY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2026 | 7:00 PM | MENDARD SPORTS CENTER



### 16B DARLING VS. 18B MUSTANGS

JANUARY 24<sup>TH</sup>, 2026 | 6:15 PM | THE MAC

