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Northampton to host first annual Pioneer Valley Ultimate Invitational

By SARAH MOOMAW
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"We want Northampton ultimate on the map and to fundraise for the team," coach and tournament organizer Sheldon Snodgrass said.

The tournament is important to not only showcase the Blue Devils' growth over the last three years, but also to help fund the program, he said. As an MIAA unsanctioned sport, the school budget doesn't leave much room for ultimate, Snodgrass added.

Tournament fees, similar to what the Pioneer Valley Invitational is charging teams, can be hundreds of dollars and coupled with travel and equipment expenses, program costs add up.



Most of the proceeds from this weekend will go back to the Blue Devils to help continue the sport's local growth, while 10 percent is donated to Ultimate Peace, a nonprofit organization that uses ultimate to "builds bridges of understanding and friendship between youth who live in communities divided by conflict" according to its website.

Hamp's program started in the spring of 2012 with one varsity boys team. It's since expanded to three boys and two girls teams, and all will be in action among the 117 games slated for Saturday and Sunday.

The invitational wouldn't be happening if not for tournament director Josh Seamon's involvement.

Seamon, who is from Amherst and played for legendary coach Tiina Booth in the late 1990s, spent the last nine years running the St. Johnsbury Invitational in St. Johnsbury, Vermont.

Snodgrass and fellow Northampton coach Lee Feldscher, among other organizers, requested his help because "there are certain elements to running large ultimate tournaments that are really hard to wrap your head around unless you've done it," Seamon said.

Seamon relocated last year from Vermont to Easthampton for a teaching job at Williston Northampton, leaving him with little time to coach, but enough to direct tournaments. Seamon was just in need of a tournament missing a director. His tournament ideals aligned with Snodgrass' and the rest came together.

A key in the planning for both Seamon and Snodgrass was including and making junior varsity teams feel welcome, which can be a snag at most tournaments.

"We are creating an opportunity for not just varsity squads, but junior varsity squads," Snodgrass said. "They don't get a lot of (tournaments)."

Seamon echoed the struggle. Having quality matches at a tournament is key to success, and a successful tournament will achieve Snodgrass' goal of making a name of Northampton ultimate, but getting the right mix of teams is the hard part.

"I want to run a professional-level event for all level teams," Seamon said. "One thing I'd seen was too much correlation to how competitive a team was to how well the event was run."



Seamon wants to make sure that, despite how Northampton performs, the tournament runs to the best of its abilities. That starts with pool play. Seamon spent weeks trying to insure matchups will result in quality games as that can make or break a tournament.

“If a tournament has a good reputation then you get known,” Snodgrass said. “We want it to gain in popularity. Amherst actually turns away teams (from the Amherst Invitational). We just want to be as popular, sought after, renowned tournament.”

Seamon’s track record gave the tournament some early recognition.

“The kids won’t come if the kids aren’t there ... unless you already have competitive teams, it’s hard to get competitive teams to show,” he said. “Roughly 90 percent of the teams coming are teams that have come to my (past) events.”

However, Seamon said the support and effort the Northampton community put forth during planning was a positive sign.

“What (teams) are going to see is better than what they’ve seen at St. Johnsbury,” Seamon said. “The goal is to be another high-level ultimate tournament that offers a quality ultimate experience no matter the level the team is.”

Local teams scheduled to compete are: Girls — Amherst junior varsity A & B, Northampton varsity & JV, and Pioneer Valley Performing Arts. Boys — Northampton varsity & JV, Amherst junior varsity A & B, and Pioneer Valley Performing Arts.

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Pioneer Valley Indoor

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