

# Arctic Bay hockey players prep for north Baffin Island tournament

Qamutik Cup opened April 28 in Igloolik

By David Venn  
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Arctic Bay hockey players prepped this month for a north Baffin Island tournament, with some having already begun their 500-kilometre trip to Igloolik by mid-April with their gear strapped to a qamutik.

“When you go by [snowmobile] it’s always exhausting,” said Rex Willie, who coaches the hamlet’s youth and organizes the men’s league.

However, he said, “Every time we host it we end up with bronze. I think the travelling, [going] to a different community by [snowmobile]

gets you more pumped to win.”

The Qamutik Cup, which began in 2009, is happening for the first time since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s always scheduled for the weekend after the Nunavut Quest dog sled race ends, and is hosted in the community where the finish line is.

This year it will be held from April 28 to May 3 in Igloolik and will have three teams from the host community, a team from Pond Inlet, and Arctic Bay’s team, the Impact. Clyde River and Nauyasat’s teams haven’t confirmed whether they will participate.

“[We are] very excited,



Forward Lionel Willie races away from opponent Rick Jr. Oyukuluk, number 93, on April 15. (Photo by David Venn)

and some of the players say they get chills whenever they think about it,” Willie said.

The players chose the Impact’s 15-member roster April 15. Some will fly and others will travel by snowmobile.

The team held fundraisers and is sponsored by the Hamlet of Arctic Bay, the North West Company, and the Alcohol

Education Committee, which provided gas for the snowmobiles, Willie said.

There was a pool of about 20 players to choose from. Not all of them could make the starting roster, but some of the players who got cut will still travel with the team in case there are injuries or suspensions.

“It was hard for them ... all of us want to go,” said Willie, who, at 46, will be the oldest player on the team.

Willie was the captain and starting goaltender for the Impact when they won the first-ever Qamutik Cup tournament. The team has won three times since then.

Now, he will be playing on the team with his three sons: Owen, who is a musher in the Nunavut Quest race, and twins Edmond and Logan Willie.

All of the players who were competing for a spot are part of a group that, for six evenings of the week from November through May, play pick-up hockey in front of 20 to 40 spectators in Arctic Bay’s Tununirusiq Arena.

Some of their kids

come to chase each other, high-fiving players exiting the ice at the intermissions. Others stand on the boards to watch over the Plexiglas, cheering when a goalie makes a big save or jeering when a player misses a wide-open net.

It’s a home-away-from-home for many of the players.

“We are team Impact

not feeling well, to come to the arena, meet with other players and get support from their peers. ... It’s like a second family to them.”

The Impact won’t have the same kind of home-ice support they get during their pick-up games while they are playing in Igloolik, but there will be some Arctic Bay residents in

*“We are team Impact because hockey has lots of impact on the hockey players. It helps them when they’re going through hard times.”*

— Rex Willie

because hockey has lots of impact on the hockey players. It helps them when they’re going through hard times,” Willie said, adding that the sakku, or harpoon head, is on the logo because of how important the tool is for hunting marine animals.

“[It gives the players] something to do if they’re

town from Nunavut Quest.

One of them will be Mayor Moses Oyukuluk, who is looking forward to watching his community’s team compete in the first few games.

“I love it when there’s community [events] going on,” Oyukuluk said in an interview through an interpreter.



The 2009 Arctic Bay Impact team won the first Qamutik Cup in Pond Inlet. Top row from left to right: Moses Kigutak, Jeremy Tunraluk, Joabie Levi, Darryl Levi, Rex Willie, Steve Oqallak, Justin Muckpa, Tagoo Willie, Ryan Willie and Darcy Enoogoo. Middle row from left to right: Brad Taqtu, Rick Sr. Oyukuluk, Tom Naqitarvik, Issiah Oyukuluk, Randy Olayuk and Owen Willie. Bottom row, Steven Taqtu. (Photo courtesy of Rex Willie)

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