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MIDDLEBURY, Vt. — The Vermont State Amateur Hockey Association (VSAHA) is pleased to announce the inaugural sled hockey state championship tournament to be held at the Memorial Sports Center in Middlebury this Saturday and Sunday. The Central Vermont Pioneers, the Vermont Sled Cats and the Twin-State Ice Vets will tangle for state bragging rights in the two-day, VSAHA-sanctioned tournament. The Middlebury Amateur Hockey Association (MAHA), the Friends of Middlebury Hockey (FOMH), and the Town of Middlebury serve as this year's hosts.

Sled hockey is the adapted version of stand-up ice hockey. Persons who play sled hockey generally have some form of physical impairment which otherwise would prohibit the individual from competing in stand-up hockey. Since its creation in the early 1960s by Swedish war veterans who wished to continue playing competitive ice hockey, sled hockey has grown into an international phenomenon. The United States first competed in the Winter Paralympics in 1998, and has since medaled four times, including three gold performances. While nearly one dozen countries sponsor a respective national team, the growth of sled hockey relies heavily on the successes and publicity of local programs.

The Pioneers, Sled Cats, and Ice Vets provide Vermonters and neighboring states with sled hockey opportunities. The Sled Cats, founded in 2005, have the longest running program and are a member of the Northeast Sled Hockey League (NESHL). They won last year's NESHL "B" Division championship, while the Pioneers and Ice Vets both follow independent schedules. The Sled Cats enter this weekend's games with a 9-4 overall record, while both the Pioneers and the Ice Vets sit at 1-0.

Game schedule for Saturday, Feb. 27:

Game 1 (12 p.m.) - Sled Cats v. Ice Vets

Game 2 (1:25 p.m.) - Sled Cats v. Pioneers

Game 3 (2:50 p.m.) - Pioneers v. Ice Vets

Game schedule for Sunday, Feb. 28:

Semifinal (12 p.m.) - TBA

Championship (1:25 p.m.) - TBA

A modest admission fee will benefit MAHA and local homeless organizations.