

**THE ODYSSEY TRUST
PRESS RELEASE**

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LEGACY OF FRIENDSHIP FOUR SET TO CONTINUE INTO 2024

Today (Thursday 2 November 2023), The Odyssey Trust has announced the continuation of the Friendship Four men's college ice hockey tournament into 2024, in conjunction with the official launch of 'Ring the Bell!' - a new book centred around the history and legacy of the event.

Held annually in Belfast since 2015, the Friendship Four is designed to promote education, social welfare, and community interaction, building on the sister cities agreement between Belfast and Boston, which was signed a decade ago. Having seen a total of 24 games played across six tournaments, Northern Ireland remains the only destination outside of the United States to host consequential NCAA Division One ice hockey games.

Set to take place in November 2024, Harvard University, Boston University, Merrimack College, and the University of Notre Dame will compete for the coveted Belpot Trophy, which was won by Quinnipiac University in 2022.

Robert Fitzpatrick, chief executive officer of The Odyssey Trust, said: *"I am proud to announce that the Friendship Four will be taking place in 2024. Creating opportunities for student-athletes to have a global experience is incredibly important and something that underpins the tournament. The significance of the games reaches far beyond the ice, providing a unique opportunity to use sport as a tool to educate young people and create a spirit of mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity, and fair play."*

The news follows the announcement that the women's Friendship Series will be returning to The SSE Arena, Belfast for the first time since the 2019/20 season, with a two-game series set to take place between Princeton University and Providence College across Friday 5 and Saturday 6 January 2024.

Also announced is the release of 'Ring the Bell!', a brand-new book – co-authored by Robert Fitzpatrick and Joe Bertagna – that explores the history and growth of the Friendship Four. Chronicling the origins and impact of the Friendship Four, which has produced no less than 13 Belfast Giants, the book not only explores the 20 different NCAA universities that have taken part, but also describes how the friendships formed have endured and developed.

Commenting on the book launch, Joe Bertagna, commissioner of the Eastern Hockey League, said: *"It was a treat to revisit the competition and explore the themes that permeate everything about the Friendship events. This isn't just recounting memorable moments in exciting games. Robert and I spoke with scores of people to understand why this has been such a special phenomenon. The themes of friendship, education, opportunity, and inclusion come alive in recounting the eight years since the Friendship Four began."*

Robert Fitzpatrick added: *"The people, stories, and memories in this book are testament to what happens when good people come together in friendship to do good things. It's our duty to pay it forward and, in reading this book, I trust you will see true friendship at work."*

For more information or to purchase 'Ring the Bell!', please visit bit.ly/FriendshipFourBook.

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For further media information and interview requests, please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

- The Friendship Four is an annual mid-season college ice hockey tournament that has been held at The SSE Arena, Belfast since 2015, with the winner receiving the coveted Belpot Trophy.
- The Friendship Four is currently the only NCAA Division One men's tournament to take place outside of the United States.
- Each year, four teams are selected to participate in the tournament, which is typically held on the same weekend as Thanksgiving in the United States.
- The tournament began as a way to foster stronger economic development, trade, investment, tourism, cultural exchange, and educational linkages between the sister cities of Belfast and Boston.
- The Friendship Series, which is an extension of the Friendship Four, is the first and only NCAA Division One women's hockey tournament to be held outside of the United States.
- For the first time since the 2019/20 season, the Friendship Series will return to The SSE Arena, Belfast in January 2024, marking the third iteration of the tournament. Over Friday 5 and Saturday 6 January 2024, Princeton University and Providence College will renew the event with a two-game series at The SSE Arena, Belfast.