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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. – Members of the University of Alabama’s Women’s and Men’s hockey team spend hours every week on the road. The teams drive roughly 50 miles to Pelham to practice and play games at the Pelham Civic Complex & Ice Arena. Because UA has no ice facility in Tuscaloosa, both teams must travel about an hour each way for practices and home games. That drive has been a burden for both teams and some members say it limits the team’s growth.

“For practice nights, I’m not even getting to the rink until 8 p.m., we have off ice practice at 9, get on the ice at 10, and then we’re done practice around 11:15,” said Avery LaRose, a sophomore on the women’s team. “I’m normally not home until after midnight. Then I still have to shower and do work. We have to practice late hours, so it interferes the least with classes. I love hockey, but this isn’t sustainable for us long term.”

“We miss classes sometimes because of travel and late-night practices. It’s not just rink time – its gas money and getting home late, which affects our sleep and schoolwork. It’s hard to balance college life when your practice facility is an hour away,” said Joey Petrich, a freshman on the men’s team.

The lack of a local facility has forces players to consider leaving the team and causes difficulty recruiting members who can’t commit to those drives and the late-night schedules.

“It’s just so hard, I mean no one wants to be on a team where your “home” games are an hour away.” Said LaRose.

Some athletes and supporters argue a Tuscaloosa rink would change the future of the hockey club.

“If the team had a rink within 15 minutes from campus, I think it would attract a lot more supporters and maybe even more players,” said Gracie Helton, LaRose’s best friend who travels to every single one of her games. “I know Avery loves the team, but it makes her mad driving to every game. I’ve heard her talking to her teammates and player prospects turn down the team just because of the drive.”

According to Sports Venue Calculators, estimates show even a basic indoor ice rink can cost between \$150,000 and \$950,000 for a standard “real ice” facility. While far less than a large ice complex, the funding still represents a huge financial commitment.

Building and maintaining a rink is more than just the cost upfront.

“Indoor ice rinks cost close to, if not, over a million dollars to build. They also require constant maintenance and the space for the actual arena. It is a big commitment that I’m not sure UA can handle,” said Stephane Normandeau, owner and manager of Center Ice Arena in GA.

A local rink could reduce late-night travel, boost student involvement, and increase the popularity of the sport at the school. On the other hand, critics say the cost outweigh the benefits, arguing that funding a private rink could divert resources that UA might not even have.

For now, the club will continue to make the hour-long drive to Pelham and try to make it work. “We absolutely love what we do,” said Caroline Craco, a freshman on the team. “But having a rink at home would change everything and not just for convenience, it would make school easier as well.”