

# Professional Sports Facilities and Developing Urban Communities: Vancouver's Recreation Park, 1905–1912

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## Article abstract

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the city of Vancouver, British Columbia was a rapidly developing community that would become the province's dominant urban centre. This growth and prosperity would continue through the first ten years of the twentieth century, as self-made entrepreneurs would shape a city that would quadruple in size to become Canada's fourth largest metropolis. With this growth came a desire for leisure pursuits found in other established urban areas throughout North America. Thus, several local businessmen formed the Recreation Park Company Limited in 1905, which would build an athletic facility of the same name, and introduce Vancouver's first professional baseball team. Although the team would struggle through the early years of its existence, a young baseball magnate, Robert "Bob" Brown, would later purchase the team and establish a strong baseball tradition in the city. Recreation Park would also host professional lacrosse, and other prominent sporting and social events, making it a focal point for the leisure activities of Vancouver's citizens. Like Vancouver itself, the promise shown by Recreation Park would disappear. As the decade ended, new economic conditions dictated the Park's closure. Despite its brief existence, Recreation Park would have a profound effect on Vancouver's sporting community as it ushered in a new era of commercialised sport.

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***During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the city of Vancouver, British Columbia was a rapidly developing community that would become the province's dominant urban centre. This growth and prosperity would continue through the first ten years of the twentieth century, as self-made entrepreneurs would shape a city that would quadruple in size to become Canada's fourth largest metropolis. With this growth came a desire for leisure pursuits found in other established urban areas throughout North America. Thus, several local businessmen formed the Recreation Park Company Limited in 1905, which would build an athletic facility of the same name, and introduce Vancouver's first professional baseball team. Although the team would struggle through the early years of its existence, a young baseball magnate, Robert "Bob" Brown, would later purchase the team and establish a strong baseball tradition in the city. Recreation Park would also host professional lacrosse, and other prominent sporting and social events, making it a focal point for the leisure activities of Vancouver's citizens. Like Vancouver itself, the promise shown by Recreation Park would disappear. As the decade ended, new economic conditions dictated the Park's closure. Despite its brief existence, Recreation Park would have a profound effect on Vancouver's sporting community as it ushered in a new era of commercialised sport.***

## **Résumé :**

***Le rapide développement économique que connut Vancouver durant les dernières décennies du dix-neuvième siècle fit de cette ville le principal centre urbain de la province. Alimentées par de dynamiques entrepreneurs, la croissance et la prospérité qui caractérisaient alors l'agglomération se poursuivirent pendant les dix premières années du vingtième siècle. Sous l'impulsion de ces hommes d'affaires, la ville quadrupla en taille et devint la quatrième plus grande ville du Canada. Avec la croissance se développa le goût des loisirs caractéristique des autres grands centres urbains d'Amérique du Nord. Un groupe d'hommes d'affaires locaux mit donc sur pied en 1905 la Recreation Park Company Limited. Cet organisme fit construire un centre sportif portant son nom et fut l'instigateur de la création de la première équipe de baseball professionnel de Vancouver. L'équipe, qui dut lutter pour sa survie pendant ses premières années d'existence, fut par la suite achetée par un jeune magnat du baseball, Robert « Bob » Brown, qui implanta solidement ce sport dans la ville. Le Recreation Park allait devenir le site de matchs de professionnels et d'autres importants événements sportifs et sociaux. Il devint le pivot des activités récréatives des Vancouverois. Comme la ville toutefois, le parc ne tint pas ses promesses. À la fin de la décennie, les nouvelles conditions économiques en décrétèrent la fermeture. En***

***dépit de sa brève existence, le Recreation Park marqua profondément la communauté sportive de Vancouver en ce début de l'ère du sport commercialisé.***

## **Introduction**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city of Vancouver, located on Canada's West Coast, underwent significant growth and change as it emerged as British Columbia's dominant urban centre. Its population nearly quadrupled from 1900 to 1910, as the city provided promise for many established and developing industries.<sup>1</sup> Sporting pursuits, a staple in larger urban centres of this period, also began to flourish,<sup>2</sup> and athletic clubs, teams and leagues emerged, starting with the formation of the Brockton Point Athletic Association by local businessmen in the 1880s.<sup>3</sup> The Association and other sporting enthusiasts helped facilitate the migration of already-established sport and leisure pursuits to the Vancouver area.<sup>4</sup> It was the influence of the young male business elites of the city<sup>5</sup> that allowed sport to gain a quick hold on the leisure pursuits of Vancouver's population, as those who did not participate in games would soon watch matches played in popular team sports such as baseball and lacrosse, organised by local entrepreneurs.<sup>6</sup> This influx of new sporting endeavours created an immediate need for sporting facilities, the majority of which were constructed and operated by the Vancouver Parks Board and the City, and controlled by various athletic associations.

The emergence of both a growing base of consumers who were willing to pay to see popular sports played at a high level in the community, and a group of young, self-made Vancouver businessmen eager to organise and operate teams, clubs, and leagues, led to interest in forming a professional baseball club.<sup>7</sup> When various baseball magnates decided to form a new league, featuring teams from the northwestern United States and British Columbia, a new park was required to host league games. To attract large crowds, players were acquired from other regions to play in Vancouver, often to sustain and encourage inter- and intra-city rivalries. However, the city lacked a suitable facility; the Cambie Street Grounds, built on CPR-leased land and used for baseball since the late 1880s, was so poorly maintained that baseball teams began playing at the "somewhat inaccessible Brockton Point Grounds."<sup>8</sup> Through 1900, teams also played at the Powell Street Grounds, but the facility had been taken over by the city by 1905,<sup>9</sup> and these grounds were not developed solely for the purpose of playing baseball.<sup>10</sup> Games were also played at the Hastings grounds, but park was considered too small.<sup>11</sup> The best facility available, at Brockton Point, was available only to amateur sporting events, according to the lease signed between the Brockton Point Athletic Association and local authorities.<sup>12</sup> Thus, a larger and more enclosed playing field was required to house the expected increased number of spectators, and to allow the new team's promoters control of their playing venue.<sup>13</sup> The result was the construction of Recreation Park in the Spring of 1905, a

completely-enclosed sporting grounds<sup>14</sup> that would become a centre of high-level baseball and lacrosse until it closed in the fall of 1912. The purpose of this study is to explore the development of the Park, the sports that were played there, and the roles of important actors who influenced its creation and operation. The results will show how the efforts of ambitious entrepreneurs brought commercialised sport to this rapidly-developing community. In addition, the demise of the Park will be examined.

### **Early Developments**

Before a new playing area could be created, a suitable site was required. At the turn of the century, much of the city remained undeveloped; the majority of the land in what is known today as the downtown area had been owned by the CPR, who slowly sold off tracts to other companies or groups, both public and private.<sup>15</sup> Despite this practice, the area located south of Homer and west of Smithe Streets remained the property of the CPR, in what was referred to in early maps of the city as the "railway reserve." The railway reserve land could become a suitable site for hosting various sporting activities, should it be available for purchase or lease. The lack of facilities available in Vancouver was in direct contrast to other regions of Eastern Canada, who had built fenced grounds for sports such as professional baseball as early as the 1870s.<sup>16</sup>

South of the border, and in most regions of Canada by the turn of the century, baseball was thriving,<sup>17</sup> with many newly-developing cities operating professional leagues. Unlike other sports, baseball competition followed a North-South rather than East-West pattern, with teams in Canada competing against nearby US clubs.<sup>18</sup> Typically, facilities were inexpensive wooden structures; as explained by Riess, the state of early baseball parks reflected the financial instability of most teams, and the state of building technology.<sup>19</sup> Thus, although operating teams and leagues was a risky venture, several businessmen in Vancouver had entertained ideas of forming a professional baseball team, but the city lacked a facility suitable for the professional for this sport. A new park was necessary to lure potential investors.

W. H. Lucas, President of the fledgling Pacific National Baseball League, arrived in Vancouver in January, 1905, to discuss the formation of a new league with interested parties.<sup>20</sup> A. E. Tulk, already involved in the possible formation of a new athletic club in Vancouver,<sup>21</sup> was in the forefront of the baseball negotiations, and informed Lucas that Vancouver would be interested in becoming a member of a newly-formed North Western Baseball League (NWBL). Tulk was an avid baseball and lacrosse enthusiast who had been instrumental in the construction of the Powell Street Grounds,<sup>22</sup> and would later establish himself as an attorney in the Vancouver community.<sup>23</sup> With the creation of a baseball park crucial to admission to the new league, Tulk proclaimed that "there is money for grounds, grading, fence, and grandstand."<sup>24</sup> Joining with W. D. Haywood, another strong supporter of baseball who had worked on

Colorado railroads during the 1870s,<sup>25</sup> Tulk began to oversee Vancouver's involvement in the new league, and to concentrate on making the new park a reality.

On February 23, 1905, following their return from a NWBL meeting in the state of Washington, Tulk and Haywood sought to finalise plans for the new grounds.<sup>26</sup> The two men predicted that between \$30,000 and \$40,000 would be needed for the Park, to be completed by April 15.<sup>27</sup> To help raise this sum of money, a meeting was held for prospective park directors on March 8, and the Recreation Park Company Limited was formed.<sup>28</sup> On March 24, the following offices were elected: W. H. Armstrong, President; G. E. MacDonald, A. E. Tulk, and W. D. Haywood, Vice Presidents; and C. M. Marpole, Secretary-treasurer. This group provided a microcosm of the self-made entrepreneurs that would aid Vancouver's ascent to the position of Western Canada's dominant city by the onset of the First World War. Armstrong, considered one of Vancouver's business leaders prior to 1914,<sup>29</sup> was nearing the age of fifty and was involved in the construction of the CPR. By 1905 he had established himself in Vancouver's burgeoning construction industry through Armstrong, Morrow & Co., a public works contractor.<sup>30</sup> G.E. MacDonald, almost forty years of age, had studied law and had formed MacDonald, Marpole and Co., coal and commission merchants. A sports enthusiast, MacDonald had represented the Vancouver Lacrosse Club on the Brockton Point Athletic Association board and was a large stockholder and director of the Minoru Race Track.<sup>31</sup> His business partner, C.M. Marpole, was the son of Richard Marpole, General Executive Assistant of British Columbia's CPR. Although still in his twenties, C.M. Marpole also had ties to the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club and the Vancouver Rowing Club.<sup>32</sup> The new consortium was incorporated, with capital stock set at \$25,000, in equal shares of \$5,000. Work on the new park would now have to be rushed, and the opening date was moved back to April 20.<sup>33</sup>

It was determined that a downtown location would be the most suitable location for the new park, and a site was chosen at the corner of Homer and Smithe Streets. However, most of this area was owned by the CPR as part of its "railway reserve." Rather than purchase the land, the Recreation Park Company Limited chose to lease the land from the CPR.<sup>34</sup> Although the lease terms have not been discovered, CPR records located at the Vancouver City Archives describe the agreement signed for the use of the land on Homer and Smithe as the "Armstrong lease," no doubt reflecting the name of the Recreation Park Company Limited's new President. Despite the acquisition of an actual site to host professional baseball games, the new Company would need to organise its affairs quickly to complete the park in time for the opening game of the NWBL season. By the end of March, the *Vancouver Daily World* reported that construction began in earnest, as "progress on the new recreation park and ball grounds, facing False Creek, just East of Homer Street [was] excellent, and the old cow pasture and wilderness of a few weeks ago [had] disappeared."<sup>35</sup> This rapid transformation

was the result of work of the forty to fifty workers, who led teams of horses and scrapers in an attempt to quickly clear and grade the land; such efforts allowed for the erection of a board fence around the grounds by the first of April. However, this accomplishment did not ease the worries of the new manager of Vancouver's NWBL entry, John McCloskey, who remained on hand for the duration of the land clearing. McCloskey was also called upon to oversee the construction of the park's grandstand and bleachers, and to lay out the playing surface itself.<sup>36</sup> The grandstand contract was awarded on April 14 to Layfield and Williams of Vancouver, who agreed to construct the 375-foot long stands, for a cost of \$7,000; the completed seating areas would be able to support over 6,500 spectators.<sup>37</sup> By May 4, over \$30,000 had been spent to build the new facility,<sup>38</sup> and the Park was finished on May 11, just in time for the opening of the new baseball season.

The grandstand itself was located adjacent at the South-east corner of Homer and Smithe Streets, allowing spectators to view the game either westward or southward. The stands backing onto Homer were considerably longer than those along Smithe. It is likely that this format was used because the field itself was rectangular in shape, with the longer portion of the field situated in an east-west fashion along Homer. According to fire insurance maps, the total dimensions of the block on which the Park was built on was 475 feet along Homer, and 375 feet along Smithe. With the addition of the grandstand this meant that the left field wall would be unusually close to home plate for a baseball park, and give the field an asymmetrical appearance. Attached to the front of the grandstand were two flag-topped cupolas that faced the intersection of the two streets. In addition, at the midpoint of the roof of the grandstand, overhanging the seating area, was another cupola with a flag pole on top.<sup>39</sup>

### **Baseball at Recreation Park**

As discussed earlier, baseball was already established throughout Canada. Baseball was popular with the working class,<sup>40</sup> whose support would be crucial for the survival of the club. Recreation Park's location would allow easier access for working-class spectators, as Stanley Park's Brockton Point Grounds were more difficult to access by inhabitants of Vancouver's less prosperous east side.<sup>41</sup> While class distinctions were evident, recreational activities in Vancouver, "particularly outdoor ones, could be enjoyed by anyone."<sup>42</sup> A new recreational activity, watching professional baseball, could be pursued courtesy of the Recreation Park Company Limited.

In addition to their roles in the development of a new baseball facility, W. D. Haywood and A. E. Tulk had continued with preparations for the upcoming baseball season. The league would feature four teams, including Vancouver, and franchise fees of \$1,500 were to be posted by each member club.<sup>43</sup> Thus, as in other parts of Canada at this time, baseball would feature cross-border competition.<sup>44</sup> However, scheduling problems could develop when regulations regarding recreation on the Sabbath differed between provinces and states. Be-

cause sporting events could not be held on Sundays in Vancouver, the league decided to schedule games in British Columbia on Saturdays, and games in Washington on Sundays. To reduce the chance of financial troubles for any one team, the league also stipulated that all gate receipts be divided evenly between the two competing teams, in an effort to help any clubs that might encounter attendance problems. With this announcement, Tulk proclaimed that "we are all ready, and a definite announcement regarding the grounds will be made next week."<sup>45</sup>

The leaders of the Vancouver group then set out to organise the new club. John McCloskey had been hired as the team's manager, and on March 14, 1905, he and W. D. Haywood travelled to Everett, Washington, to determine where the opening day games of the new league would be held.<sup>46</sup> This task would prove difficult, as the actual teams involved in the NWBL had yet to be finalised. The city of Victoria also expressed interest in fielding a team, but financial backing was a concern.<sup>47</sup> Many involved with the League felt that Victoria could not meet a monthly salary list of \$1,200 from gate and grandstand receipts with the facilities available in that city's Oak Bay district.<sup>48</sup> Despite this potential problem, Victoria was included in the plans for the upcoming season,<sup>49</sup> and a meeting held in Bellingham, Washington, on March 30, confirmed the four participating cities: Victoria and Vancouver in B.C., and Bellingham and Everett in Washington.<sup>50</sup>

With the completion of Recreation Park still a month away, the Vancouver team began practising at the Cambie Street Grounds, where a number of amateur baseball leagues frequently hosted games.<sup>51</sup> The team, at the time, remained unnamed until the *Daily News Advertiser* reported that the Vancouver club would be called the "Vets".<sup>52</sup> Another local newspaper explained that the name "Veterans" had been given because "many of honest John [McCloskey]'s ball tossers are veterans, and the title 'Vancouver Veterans' has the double recommendation of being truthful and alliterative."<sup>53</sup>

As the team prepared for the season elsewhere, the Park was completed for the season-opening game on May 11. That contest, against Victoria, was to start at 4 o'clock. To commemorate the new facility and league, the grandstand of Recreation Park was decorated with white and cardinal streamers, to signify the new club's colours.<sup>54</sup> The City Council declared May 11 a holiday, so that Vancouver's citizens, particularly school-children, could witness the parade that marked the opening of the Park and baseball season. The parade, starting at the Vancouver Courthouse at 2:30, finished with Mayor Buscombe throwing the first pitch at the new park.<sup>55</sup> The Mayor's pitch must have been formidable, as the Vancouver club's own "Home Run" Marshall could "only bat a foul to third."<sup>56</sup> The parade would include cars filled with players, owners, and city dignitaries, headed by a local Regimental Band. Affiliation with local teams by political and civic leaders was important, as clubs increased both public sentiment and impacted other businesses, particularly local street railways.

Attendance at the game was estimated at 4,750, and one witness reported that the diamond itself "was in fair shape, though somewhat soft, and the field back of the bases was good. The stand was all but completed, and taking it throughout, Vancouver has the best ballpark west of Chicago."<sup>57</sup> The *Daily News Advertiser* reported that the match was a success "financially, meteorologically, and from a sporting point of view;"<sup>58</sup> however, the game scheduled for the following day was cancelled due to rain. This did not douse the spirits of the Vancouver team, who had beaten Victoria 4–2 in the opener, despite a lack of regular practice grounds.<sup>59</sup> A brass section had ensured that the crowd continued to root loudly for the home team,<sup>60</sup> and with grandstand and grounds tickets set at twenty-five cents each,<sup>61</sup> the Park and club directors hoped to recover expenses quickly.

Baseball games continued at Recreation Park throughout the remainder of the summer of 1905, but, unfortunately, the enthusiasm that Vancouver held for its new baseball team was not enough to keep it from going bankrupt. The NWBL continued to operate the following season, with several new franchisees replacing the unsuccessful ones,<sup>62</sup> although Vancouver was unable to enter a club in 1906. The decision was finalised when W. D. Haywood, upon returning from a trip to California, announced that he and his associates had decided not to operate during the 1906 season.<sup>63</sup> The failure of the team was typical of professional sports clubs at the turn of the century. Vincent reported that only three quarters of nineteenth-century teams operated longer than two seasons,<sup>64</sup> while in the Canadian prairies professional baseball "was plagued by instability; it always lived on the edge of disaster."<sup>65</sup> In other sports in other countries, early professional teams had similar problems; According to Metcalfe, few English football "clubs or teams ever achieved long-term financial viability."<sup>66</sup>

### **Baseball Returns to Vancouver**

Following a one-year hiatus, professional baseball returned to Vancouver and Recreation Park in 1907. W. H. Lucas, NWBL President, arrived in Vancouver on January 10, 1907, to discuss the possible return of NWBL games with Haywood.<sup>67</sup> By this time, six teams were interested in or already participating in the NWBL—Seattle, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, Vancouver, and Butte and Helena, Montana. A League-wide salary cap had been set at \$2,400 per month, with directors debating whether not to decrease this amount to \$1,800.<sup>68</sup> In the meantime, a new Vancouver company had been formed in January of 1907, hoping to take over the operations of Recreation Park. The company was named the Recreation Park Amusement Centre, and shares were set at \$100 each.<sup>69</sup> The officers of the new company were: G. C. Leonard, President; T. A. Tulk, Secretary; and James W. Evans, General Manager.<sup>70</sup> On February 6, 1907, the Vancouver Baseball Club was incorporated with \$10,000 capital.<sup>71</sup> All offices for the new club were held by the officers of the Recreation Park Amusement Centre, with the addition of a Mr. Atkins.

In an effort to reduce initial capital investment, the Recreation Park Amusement Centre chose to lease the use of the Park from the previous ownership group, rather than purchase the Park outright.<sup>72</sup> In a meeting held on February 1, the Recreation Park Company Limited and the Recreation Park Amusement Centre agreed to a price of \$4,000 per year for the lease, which was considerably lower than the \$25,000 that the Amusement Centre group anticipated.<sup>73</sup> The baseball team was renamed the "Beavers" and began operations for the 1907 season.

In December, 1908, B. Halstead tried to purchase the team; however, this attempt failed, and soon the same financial problems that the team had encountered in 1905 began to resurface.<sup>74</sup> Some ownership stability was achieved after the team was purchased by A. R. Dickson in 1909, but the club suffered losses of over \$4,000 for the 1909 season.<sup>75</sup> The financial state of the club became so woeful that, on occasion, the team could not meet the thirty-dollar guaranteed gate receipt total for some games. The result was the disbanding of the club on September 15, 1909,<sup>76</sup> as the season concluded and two players left the team to join the major leagues.<sup>77</sup> The team was purchased by Walter MacFarlane,<sup>78</sup> who kept Dickson on as President and General Manager of the club. Dickson then tried to take over the franchise by forming the Vancouver Amusement Association Limited, providing 2,500 shares at ten dollars each;<sup>79</sup> this arrangement was not feasible and a portion of the team was sold to Charles Johnson the following January.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the team would require new investors in order for professional baseball to continue operations in Vancouver.

### **Bob Brown and Vancouver Baseball**

While Vancouver's baseball team struggled through financial instability, Robert "Bob" Brown was establishing himself in the NWBL. Originally from South Dakota, Brown began his professional baseball career in Helena, Montana, in 1899.<sup>81</sup> By 1906, Brown was part owner of the Brown-Elmore Shoe Company in Aberdeen, Washington, and had signed as the manager and catcher of that city's new NWBL team (Aberdeen had replaced Vancouver for the 1906 season). After winning the league championship in 1907, Brown was offered the position of manager of the Spokane team; he received a two-year contract, 25% of the club's stock, and a percentage of the team's profits.<sup>82</sup>

After learning that the Vancouver club had folded at the conclusion of the 1909 season, Brown decided to sell his interests in the Spokane club. As he recalled, "after the autumn league meeting in Seattle in December, I took the night boat to Vancouver and met two of the Vancouver directors at the Vancouver Hotel. Their names were Dixon [sic] and Johnson."<sup>83</sup> The meeting ended with Brown presenting the two with a \$500 cheque on a thirty-day option to purchase 60% of the team's stock. He then returned to Spokane and sold all of his stock in that club.<sup>84</sup> The Vancouver team had been valued at \$8,000,<sup>85</sup> so Brown purchased 60% of the club's stock from Charles Johnson for \$4,800; the sale was announced on January 6, 1910.<sup>86</sup> However, before the opening of the season, Brown

bought the remaining stock in the club, and found himself assuming the role of President, owner, manager, and starting shortstop.<sup>87</sup>

1911 was a success for both Brown and his baseball club. The season opened at Recreation Park on May 13,<sup>88</sup> and culminated with a series against Spokane in late September that saw Vancouver win the league championship.<sup>89</sup> The exploits of the professional club, and increased interest in the game of baseball locally ensured that the financial trouble encountered by previous owners was unlikely to continue. In 1911, the Greater Vancouver region boasted five amateur, eight "commercial," and six "wholesale" baseball leagues, in addition to sixty Sunday School teams.<sup>90</sup> The wholesale league held some of its games at Recreation Park in 1912. Teams that played there included Kelly-Douglas food wholesalers and the Canadian Rubber Co., which also played at the Cambie and Powell Street Grounds.<sup>91</sup> Although Recreation Park may have been competing with other grounds for the right to host various recreational sports, this would only be to supplement revenues generated from the professional sports teams.

With interest in the sport high, and with a league championship for his club, Brown eagerly anticipated the upcoming 1912 baseball season. He sent an invitation to the Vancouver City Council, inviting the Mayor and Aldermen to the opening game.<sup>92</sup> The team's championship banner was raised at the opener, and the *Vancouver Daily Province* reported that an attendance record was set at Recreation Park for the series.<sup>93</sup> Despite the early-season enthusiasm, the team managed only a third-place finish during the 1912 NWBL season. However, Bob Brown had salvaged a team that had been bankrupt two years earlier, and had established baseball as a professional spectator sport in Vancouver for the years to come.

### **Other Sports and Activities at Recreation Park**

While originally developed for professional baseball, and operated by baseball interests, Recreation Park frequently hosted other sports and events during its tenure as a centre for high-calibre athletics in Vancouver. In April, 1906, following a disagreement over the distribution of gate receipts, the Vancouver Lacrosse Club (VLC) left its home at Brockton Point and began using the grounds at Recreation Park.<sup>94</sup> The VLC was a strong club, but was often defeated by its rivals, the New Westminster Salmonbellies. Attendance at games was high, as lacrosse was extremely popular in the area at this time.<sup>95</sup>

In 1908, entrepreneur Con Jones arrived in Vancouver from Australia,<sup>96</sup> whereupon he took a keen interest in the sport, and eventually became the manager of the VLC. By 1911, Jones had accumulated a significant number of the top players from Eastern Canada, lured by lucrative contracts, in an effort to defeat the Salmonbellies for the coveted Minto Cup. The "Greenshirts," as the VLC were popularly known, were now dubbed Con Jones' "All-stars," and each of the regular season games between the VLC and rival Salmonbellies provided possibly the most entertaining and highest-calibre of lacrosse of

this era.<sup>97</sup> On June 3, 1911, the *Daily Province* reported that a record attendance was reached at Recreation Park, where the fans witnessed "the best exhibition of the national pastime ever played there."<sup>98</sup> New Westminster's local paper further praised the match, proclaiming that the contest was "the best game ever played in Canada."<sup>99</sup> Attendance at Recreation Park, with its rectangular dimensions more suitable for lacrosse or soccer than for baseball, was estimated at over 11,000. Some of the more robust spectators chose to seek out the referee, Alderman Wells Gray of New Westminster, at the conclusion of the match; the incident was so unsettling for Gray that he quit his refereeing position two days later.<sup>100</sup>

Attendance continued to be high for games between the rival clubs; a match held at the Park on June 10, 1911, had an attendance of 8,800.<sup>101</sup> Despite the large number of spectators, Con Jones was having difficulty profiting from the large gates; many tickets were given away, and on June 17, Jones handed out 1,100 free lacrosse sticks to boys under the age of twelve who attended.<sup>102</sup> However, Jones was more driven by the pursuit of victories than profits, a full park would motivate his team. The final games between the two teams saw crowds of 9,000 on June 22, and 12,000 on July 1, 1911.<sup>103</sup> Jones' efforts to bring the highest calibre of lacrosse to Vancouver were not in vain; the team finally managed to defeat New Westminster for the Minto Cup, as the team won a two-game playoff in September of 1911.<sup>104</sup> The following season, interest in professional lacrosse remained high as 9,000 attended the opening game of the 1912 season.<sup>105</sup> However, despite both the efforts of Jones, and many of the players who did return from the previous season's club, the VLC was unable to repeat its championship season.

With both lacrosse and baseball played professionally at Recreation Park during the summer months, scheduling became difficult for other events. Often, the VLC would practice in the afternoon, before the Beavers baseball team played games in the evening.<sup>106</sup> Thus, although other, lower level lacrosse and baseball games were scheduled at the Park, they likely received less priority over the professional games. Despite this, the Vancouver Athletic Club, reigning Mann Cup champions (the Canadian amateur lacrosse championship at this time), were able to host games against the local Fairview team at Recreation Park in 1912.<sup>107</sup>

However, use of the Park was by no means restricted to lacrosse and baseball teams. The Park also featured outdoor prize fighting,<sup>108</sup> as well as soccer games played at various skill levels.<sup>109</sup> Thus, many of the more popular sports scheduled games in Vancouver's Recreation Park between 1905 and 1912, although interest in other sports did not match the popularity of lacrosse and baseball. Other sporting activities staged in Vancouver during this period included regattas at the Vancouver Rowing Club, cricket matches at Brockton Point, and equestrian events at the Vancouver Jockey Club race track at Hastings Park; however, these sports were mostly the domain of the city's more affluent citizens.<sup>110</sup>

## ***Professional Sports Facilities and Developing Urban Communities***

Giving further evidence of Recreation Park's prominence in the Vancouver community, other events were also held there to take advantage of the facility's large seating capacity and playing area. Various Police Sports track and field activities were held, and between May 17 and May 22, 1909, the Park hosted a visit from the Japanese squadron under Admiral Iijichi, along with sailors from H.I.J.M.S. "Soya" and "Aso."<sup>111</sup> A year later, following the death of King Edward VII, a memorial service was held at the Park on May 20, 1910.<sup>112</sup> Thus, despite its original design for baseball purposes, Recreation Park provided an opportunity for other sport and non-sport related activities to be experienced by many different members of the community.

### ***Park Operations***

Recreation Park had quickly emerged as a prominent venue to host many types of recreational and social events. Although details are not known, it is possible to speculate about the profitability of lease arrangements. However, as evidenced by the actions of lacrosse organiser Con Jones, the attendance levels seen at lacrosse games at Recreation Park did not necessarily give a realistic predictor of the team's profitability, as he often gave tickets away to generate and maintain interest in the sport.<sup>113</sup> In addition, the large salaries that he paid players in an effort to win the Minto Cup made financial losses more likely. Thus, the lease agreements between Jones and the Park's directors would probably not be so high as to make lacrosse operations financially impossible. The revenues generated from use of the Park by other parties were also not likely to be of any significant amount. In 1911, a recreational "warehouse" baseball league used the Park; organised more for leisure purposes, and not financial gain, these teams would probably not have spent a high rental fee to use the Park, as other grounds could be secured throughout the city for low rates.

The Park was managed over the years by a board of directors that often looked after the affairs of the professional baseball team operating at the time. The land itself was never purchased outright from the CPR, although the CPR would have sold it for an appropriate price. This is seen by the sale of other "railway reserve" land around the Park during this period. However, there is no evidence that any party expressed the desire or had the financial backing to purchase the land during the years that the Park operated.

The directors concentrated more on booking the facility for the remainder of the lease agreement with the CPR. Soon, use of the Park became so frequent that the scheduling of events became quite complicated. On some days, the VLC would practice in the morning hours, and the Vancouver Beavers would play afternoon baseball games. Following the game, amateur lacrosse matches would be held throughout the evening.<sup>114</sup> Park use became so hectic that time limits were set for games where there were two or more sports or events held on the same day.<sup>115</sup>

Frequent use of the grounds was the result of the Park's for-profit orientation. Unlike other parks in the city, Recreation Park

was heavily reliant upon its ability to maintain tenants to remain financially solvent. The other major parks, the Cambie and Powell Street grounds, were operated under the jurisdiction of the Vancouver Parks Board, and therefore less dependent on gate receipts to maintain operations.<sup>116</sup> In contrast, both Recreation Park and the professional teams that played in it were operated as businesses. The land was leased to the Park directors by the CPR and, in turn, the Park signed leases with the participating clubs. After Bob Brown purchased the baseball team in 1910, he was also given a one-year lease by the Park's directors for use of the field.<sup>117</sup>

### ***The Demise of Recreation Park***

Although it is not clear how profitable Recreation Park was for its operators, the Park was highly successful in seeking out and arranging for use of the facility. Although the baseball team suffered financial losses during its early years, there is no evidence to suggest that the Park itself was in any financial distress during its years of operations. However, the Park would cease operations after the CPR declined to renew with the Park's board of directors in 1912. This decision was not a surprise for the two parties; as early as 1909, it was announced that the land would be returned to the railway for its own use. The CPR's decision was likely influenced by a real estate and building boom that occurred from 1909 through 1913;<sup>118</sup> the land would be much more valuable than it had been when the lease was initially signed in 1905. On September 28, 1909, the *Vancouver Province* reported that a new park would be needed in three years, following the expiration of the lease.<sup>119</sup> Bob Brown later recalled that the land where the Park stood was considered too valuable, and added that the site was too "downtownish" for athletic purposes.<sup>120</sup>

The CPR likely wanted to be able to sell off the land in smaller lots, as was being done to the area surrounding the Park. However, the corner of Homer and Smithe remained barren and undeveloped as late as 1937,<sup>121</sup> a victim of a market crash in 1913 that destroyed inflated land values in the city, and "inaugurated a quarter-century of uncertain urban growth."<sup>122</sup> In 1937, the site was described as "unsightly" and "a shame that [the] vacant area [had] not been kept [clear] for an open space in the centre of the city."<sup>123</sup>

### ***Sporting Events Moving to Other Venues***

Both the Vancouver Beavers baseball club, and the Vancouver Lacrosse Club, the two major tenants for Recreation Park, had made arrangements to play elsewhere prior to the closure of the Park. Lacrosse promoter Con Jones turned his attention to other available facilities in the Vancouver area. Among them was the Brockton Point grounds, located in nearby Stanley Park. Jones offered the Brockton Point Athletic Association \$1,000 per year for the use of the park, and promised an additional \$15,000 to \$20,000 would be spent on improvements to the facility.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, Jones submitted an offer to the Vancouver Exhibition regarding the use of Hastings Park. The latter arrangement was identical to the offer made to the Brock-

ton Point Athletic Association, except that the \$15,000 was to be used specifically for improvements to the centre field.<sup>125</sup> Both offers were put to City Council, and were met with disapproval. Alderman McBeath was adamantly opposed to any leasing of a public park,<sup>126</sup> and so Jones was unable to find a suitable arrangement with any existing facility. In lieu of these problems, Jones needed to find a venue to display the talents of his lacrosse club; he then built a park in his own name on Renfrew Street, near where the Pacific Coliseum stands today, on the site of the Pacific National Exhibition.<sup>127</sup> Until the completion of Con Jones Park, games were temporarily played at Hastings park.

Meanwhile, Recreation Park's principal tenants, the Vancouver Beavers, were also in need of a new playing area. Bob Brown, who still owned the team, had been interested in building his own park for several years. Attendance at baseball games had been slowly waning, and Brown felt that his baseball team required a true stadium, and not a grandstand that stood on a multi-purpose playing field. He decided to construct his own park, and set out to build Athletic Park by clearing the land himself.<sup>128</sup> The land was again leased from the CPR, and was situated south of False Creek, on the corner where Granville Street and 6th Avenue intersect today.

Brown also realised that he could use the existing grandstand and other facilities that were to be removed from the vacant Recreation Park, so he enclosed a cheque for \$500 along with a closed bid for the right to remove the stands there.<sup>129</sup> He was awarded the furnishings, and began plans to move the seating area. In the meantime, Con Jones' lacrosse team was still scheduled to play its final games of the lacrosse season, and assumed that Recreation Park would remain unaltered for the duration of the final games. However, the Park directors, likely happy to have recovered any money for the facility, were eager to have Brown remove the grandstand. The wily Brown, sensing an opportunity to profit from this potential dilemma, arranged to leave the stands intact until the conclusion of the lacrosse season, for a 50% share of the gate receipts of the final games. Through this arrangement, Brown was able to recover the \$500 he had spent for the stands, cover the cost of transporting the seating to Athletic Park, and have enough money remaining to buy timber for the new bleachers at his own park.<sup>130</sup>

When the transfer of the grandstand had been completed, the land once occupied by Recreation Park remained vacant until many years later, as tracts of land were slowly sold off and developed. Today the intersection of Homer and Smithe in downtown Vancouver is the site of a storage company, and no evidence of the games and events that occupied the leisure time of Vancouverites at the turn of the century remains.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Vancouver was created virtually overnight in the 1880s and by the 1890s, most business activity in Vancouver was controlled by locally-centred entrepreneurs. At the beginning of the twentieth century the city was British Columbia's largest urban

centre.<sup>131</sup> In the spring of 1905, during a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity, several sports-minded businessmen built Recreation Park for the purpose of hosting professional baseball games. The facility quickly became a landmark in the Vancouver community as its operators sought out new revenue sources and sports to support their financial venture. Recreation Park marked the true beginning of the commodification of sport in the city, and an example of the efforts of local entrepreneurs to make Vancouver Western Canada's leading metropolitan centre. The demise of the Park in 1912 mirrored that of the greater Vancouver community, as the promise and growth of the first decade of the century would be destroyed by economic upheaval shortly before the First World War. It would be decades before Vancouver would recover. However, the sports that Recreation Park hosted would not suffer the same fate, as 1913 saw the migration of the Park's two major tenants, the Beavers and the VLC, to new private facilities. Although the land where Recreation Park stood remained unused for many years following its closure, the games played at the newly-built Con Jones Park and Athletic Park carried on the entrepreneurial spirit created by the Recreation Park Company Limited in the spring of 1905.

### **Notes**

1. See Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863–1913* (Vancouver, 1996); L.D. McCann, "Urban Growth in a Staple Economy: The Emergence of Vancouver as a Regional Metropolis, 1886–1914," in L.J. Evenden, ed., *Vancouver – Western Metropolis* (Victoria, 1978); Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, 1980).
2. For a detailed look at the development of sport in Canada, see Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organised Sport, 1807–1914* (Toronto, 1987).
3. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 69. For a more detailed look at this Association, see Barbara Schrodt, "Control of Sports Facilities in Early Vancouver: The Brockton Point Athletic Association at Stanley Park, 1880–1913," in *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* (1992) 23(2).
4. See Barbara Schrodt, "Sport in Emerging Urban Settings: Lacrosse in Early British Columbia Prior to World War I," Unpublished paper, 1990.
5. The promotion of green spaces in the city by local businessmen could not be attributed exclusively to the goodwill of local, well-to-do businessmen. As MacDonald explained, early Vancouver Parks Board members were "aware that attractive parks and especially Stanley park would boost adjacent real estate values." Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln, 1987), 72.
6. See Richard Gruneau & David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto, 1993), for a discussion of the commercialisation and commodification of Canadian sport during this period.
7. In Vancouver at the beginning of the twentieth century, Vancouver's business leaders featured a large contingent of self-made men, while the city itself featured a young and male-dominated population base. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 53, 144; MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors*, 92.
8. William Humber, *Diamonds of the North: A Concise History of Baseball in Canada* (Toronto, 1995), 98. The city acquired the title to the Cambie Street Grounds and it was renamed Larwill Park; *Vancouver Daily Province*, January 10, 1902.
9. Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 99.



## ***Professional Sports Facilities and Developing Urban Communities***

10. This would seem to be the norm for the development of parks and facilities of the late nineteenth century. For example Metcalfe found that the majority of fields used in North England at this time were multi-purpose facilities; it was not until 1900 that football-specific stadiums were developed. Alan Metcalfe, "Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland, 1882–1914," *International Journal for the History of Sport* 5(3), 281.
11. *City of Vancouver Archives* (Hereafter CVA), "Parks – Named and Unnamed." Additional Manuscripts 54, Vol. 19, Box 8.
12. Schrodt, "Control of Early Sporting Facilities," 37.
13. According to Schrodt, the Parks Board or the City's controlled most of the existing parks; therefore the opportunity for entrepreneurs to become involved in the local sports scene was limited unless new independent facilities could be developed. See Schrodt, "Control of Early Sporting Facilities."
14. Jim Kearney, *Champions – A British Columbia Sports Album*, (Vancouver, 1985), 30.
15. The control of land by the CPR meant that it would be this powerful company that would determine the pattern of growth of Vancouver; Roy, *Illustrated History*, 56; McDonald attributed the CPR's land arrangement, in which the B.C. government awarded the CPR ten square miles of property to make Coal Harbour the railway's terminus, as the impetus for the shift of economic activity from servicing the lumber industry to urban growth. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 35, 37.
16. For works on the development of baseball in Canada, see Colin D. Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto, 1995); William Humber, *Cheering For the Home Team: The Story of Baseball in Canada* (Erin, 1983); Humber, *Diamonds of the North*.
17. According to Metcalfe, baseball was played and watched by more Canadians than any other sport; Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play – The Emergence of Organised Sport, 1807–1914* (Toronto, 1987), 85.
18. *Ibid.*, 88.
19. Steven A. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Wheeling, Ill, 1995), 168. The first fire-resistant, fully modern Stadiums did not appear until 1909. *Ibid.*, 169. For an analysis of the development of baseball parks, see Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark* (Boston, 1993).
20. *Vancouver Daily News Advertiser*, January 20, 1905.
21. *Ibid.*, January 31, 1905.
22. Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 98.
23. C.W. Parker, ed., *Who's Who and Why, Volume 2* (Vancouver, 1912), 588.
24. *Vancouver Daily News Advertiser*, February 10, 1905.
25. Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 95.
26. *Ibid.*, February 23, 1905.
27. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1905.
28. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1905.
29. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 136.
30. C.W. Parker, *Who's Who in Western Canada, Volume 1* (Vancouver, 1911), 97.
31. C.W. Parker, *Who's Who and Why*, 335.
32. *Ibid.*, 361.
33. *Vancouver Daily World*, March 25, 1905.
34. The CPR had hired the surveying team of Herman and Burwell to plot and mark off this land for the purpose of future sale. According to CPR records located in the Vancouver City Archives, the land surveyed in District Lot 541 was leased to various groups, including the Recreation Park Company Limited. These records do not contain any financial information on land leased to other parties; I have determined the exact location of the Park by tracing the sale of land to other parties in the areas immediate to the site of the Park on the corner of Homer and Smithe; these records can be found at the *City of Vancouver Archives*.
35. *Daily World*, March 31, 1905.
36. *Daily News Advertiser*, April 5, 1905.
37. *Ibid.*, April 15, 1905.
38. *Ibid.*, May 4, 1905.
39. While the dimensions of the Park seem irregular, most baseball facilities built during this period lacked uniformity. The use of cupolas and flags was typical of ballparks built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Gershman, *Diamonds*.
40. Strong working-class support of baseball had occurred by 1870; Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 55. Metcalfe reports that baseball was the only sport in Canada played by all social classes; Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 93.
41. MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors*, 71. Accessibility to such parks was typical; Riess reported that "parks were mainly middle-class resorts during the nineteenth century." Riess, *Sport in Industrial America*, 23.
42. Roy, *Illustrated History*, 79–80.
43. *Daily News Advertiser*, February 11, 1905.
44. Howell; Humber, *Cheering*.
45. *Daily News Advertiser*, February 10, 1905.
46. *Ibid.*, March 14, 1905.
47. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1905. Victoria had already established a baseball tradition as the sport migrated from California during the 1850s; Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 94.
48. *Daily World*, March 17, 1905.
49. *Daily News Advertiser*, March 21, 1905.
50. *Daily World*, March 30, 1905.
51. *Daily News Advertiser*, April 19, 1905.
52. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1905.
53. *Daily World*, May 6, 1905.
54. *Daily News Advertiser*, May 9, 1905.
55. *Vancouver Daily Province*, May 9, 1905.
56. *Daily World*, May 11, 1905.
57. *Vancouver Daily Province*, May 9, 1905.
58. *Daily News Advertiser*, May 12, 1905.
59. *New Westminster Daily Columbian*, May 11, 1905.
60. *Daily News Advertiser*, May 12, 1905.
61. *Vancouver Daily Province*, May 9, 1905.
62. *Ibid.*, June 12, 1906.
63. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1906.
64. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America*, 167.
65. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 167.
66. Metcalfe, "Mining," 275.
67. *Vancouver Daily Province*, January 24, 1907.
68. *Ibid.*, January 25, 1907.
69. *Ibid.*, January 30, 1907.
70. *Henderson's Vancouver Directory*. (Vancouver, 1907), 708.
71. *Vancouver Daily Province*, February 6, 1907.
72. *Ibid.*, February 2, 1907.

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73. *Ibid.*, February 4, 1907.
74. *The Vancouver Province – B. C. Magazine*, July 6, 1957, 5.
75. *Vancouver Daily Province*, September 7, 1909.
76. *Ibid.*, September 15, 1909.
77. *B. C. Magazine*, July 6, 1957, 5.
78. *Vancouver Daily Province*, September 15, 1909.
79. *Ibid.*, September 28, 1909.
80. *Ibid.*, January 10, 1910.
81. Roy Premack, "Meet Mr. Baseball." Aug. 19, 1950, CVA, M. 1194, Recreation Park.
82. *The Vancouver Province – B. C. Magazine*, July 6, 1957, 4.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Vancouver Daily Province*, January 5, 1910.
86. *Ibid.*, January 6, 1910.
87. *B. C. Magazine*, July 6, 1957, 5. He led the team to a third-place finish.
88. *Vancouver Daily Province*, April 22, 1911.
89. *Ibid.*, September 30, 1911.
90. Henry J. Boam. *British Columbia*. (London, 1912), 465. "Wholesale," and "commercial" were names given to recreational leagues that typically were sponsored by various companies. The title of the league usually reflected the nature of the sponsoring business.
91. *Vancouver Daily Province*, June 29, 1912.
92. CVA, Vancouver City Council Minutes, R6 2A1, Vol. 39, 1912.
93. *Vancouver Daily Province*, May 10, 1912. The exact attendance was not reported.
94. Schrod, "Control of Sports Facilities," 40.
95. Lacrosse was Canada's most popular spectator sport. Roy, *Illustrated History*, 80. Ice hockey would surpass lacrosse in popularity with Canadians, but both featured violent, exciting contests and were truly Canadian games.
96. David S. Savelieff, jr., *A History of the Sport of Lacrosse in B.C.* (Vancouver, 1980), 6.
97. Schrod, "Sport in Emerging Urban Settings," 10.
98. *Vancouver Daily Province*, June 3, 1911.
99. *Daily Columbian*, June 5, 1911.
100. *Vancouver Daily Province*, June 6, 1911.
101. *Ibid.*, June 12, 1911.
102. *Ibid.*, June 16, 1911.
103. *Ibid.*, June 23 and July 3, 1911.
104. *Ibid.*, September 18, 1911. Following the victory over the Salmonbellies, Vancouver successfully defended a challenge from the Toronto Tecumsehs lacrosse team; *Ibid.*, October 9, 1911.
105. *Ibid.*, June 13, 1912.
106. *Ibid.*, May 9, May 10. The quality of the baseball diamond must have been diminished after having a lacrosse team practice on the surface only hours before games.
107. *Ibid.*, May 18, 1912.
108. *Ibid.*, May 12, 1905.
109. *Ibid.*, January 4, 1963.
110. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1905.
111. CVA, "Parks – Named and Unnamed." Recreation Park. Additional Manuscripts 54, Vol. 19, Box 8.
112. CVA, Various Photographs.
113. Cleve Dheensaw, *Lacrosse 100 – One Hundred Years of Lacrosse in B.C.* (Victoria, 1990), 14.
114. *Vancouver Daily Province*, June 14, 1912.
115. Dheensaw, 14.
116. *Vancouver Daily Province*, May 2, 1912.
117. *Ibid.*, January 6, 1910.
118. R.A.J. McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver, 1886–1914: Urbanism and Class in British Columbia" in R.A.J. McDonald & J. Barman, ed.'s, *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History* (Vancouver, 1986), 35. The value of building permits increased by 233% between 1908 and 1912. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 125.
119. *Vancouver Daily Province*, September 28, 1909.
120. CVA, M. 7873, Recreation Park. "From Catcher to Owner in Eight Years for Bob Brown." April 17, 1951.
121. CVA, "Parks – Named and Unnamed." Recreation Park. Ref. man. 54, Vol. 19, Box 8.
122. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, xix.
123. CVA, "Parks – Named and Unnamed." Recreation Park. Ref. man. 54, Vol. 19, Box 8.
124. Schrod, "Control of Sports Facilities," 41.
125. *Vancouver Province*, June 13, 1912.
126. *Ibid.*
127. Dheensaw, 15.
128. *Ibid.* According to Humber, Brown was able to build Athletic Park using pension funds he received for his service in the Spanish American War. Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 102.
129. *B. C. Magazine*, 5.
130. *Ibid.*
131. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 64, xii.