

**Courting Respectability:
Women's Basketball in Victoria, 1903-1965**

by

**Emily Boyle
B.A., University of Ottawa, 2000**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of History

**We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard**

**© Emily Boyle, 2004
University of Victoria**

**All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by
photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.**

Supervisor: Dr. Eric Sager

ABSTRACT

Women and girls have been playing basketball in Victoria, British Columbia since the turn of the twentieth century. In various leagues and using several sets of rules, female basketball players have enjoyed playing this popular team sport—and the freedoms that accompanied team membership—for over one hundred years. In choosing to play basketball in an era when sports for women were often considered inappropriate, the young women of Victoria stretched the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour. By clearly maintaining their femininity when they stepped off the court, these women were also instrumental in ensuring that their sport would continue to receive the support of the community.

Examiners:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Brief History.....	23
Chapter Three: Why Play Basketball?	34
Chapter Four: Observers and Observed	74
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	118
Bibliography.....	130
Appendix.....	141

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1.....	57
Figures 4.1, 4.2.....	89
Figures 4.3, 4.4.....	90
Figures 4.5, 4.6.....	91
Figures 4.7, 4.8.....	92
Figures 4.9, 4.10.....	93
Figures 4.11, 4.12.....	94
Figures 4.13, 4.14.....	95
Figures 4.15, 4.16.....	96

Chapter 1

Introduction

Sport is an activity that nearly always segregates men and women, even before any competition begins. Sports such as basketball have been segregated by gender almost without exception, even though both males and females have been joining teams across North America throughout the twentieth century. In sports of all kinds, men's teams have enjoyed the bulk of media coverage, spectator support, and participant interest.

In the last two decades, there has been increasing interest in sport history, and sport has been explored as a part of cultural history, and as a significant factor in the development of gender norms. Still, it seems that many historians of gender are reluctant to study sport. Canadian sports activist and historian, M. Anne Hall notes that "sport and feminism are seen as incompatible, and sport is often overlooked, or at best underestimated, as a site of cultural struggle where gender relations are reproduced and sometimes resisted."¹ British sport historian Kathleen McCrone points out that there are serious gaps in the historiography, arguing that "interpretive accounts are needed, which deal with such topics as power and control, ... female sport's ambiguities and socially disruptive potential, its emancipating and restricting characteristics, and the interaction between feminism and female athleticism."²

Certainly, sporting women can be studied as part of an ever-changing and continually negotiated discourse around gender in society. For North American sport historians, basketball has provided an interesting and important example of a site where

gender roles have been challenged—and resisted—over the course of the twentieth century. The historiography suggests that basketball for girls and women enjoyed great popularity in some periods and in some places, while at other times the sport encountered fierce opposition. Social norms regarding appropriate feminine behaviour led to rule changes, uniform changes, and even bans on competition in some areas, particularly in the United States. Still, the sport persisted and female athletes throughout North America in the twentieth century were able to play basketball, thereby experiencing both the advantages and disadvantages that accompanied membership on a sports team.

Within a year after the invention of basketball by Canadian James Naismith at a Massachusetts college in 1891, the sport gained immense popularity throughout the United States as well as Canada. In this period of enthusiasm for and expansion of physical education for both boys and girls, it is not surprising that the game was being played by both genders in and outside of schools. It is likely that the early female players of basketball did not even stop to consider that the game they were playing could pose a challenge to dominant North American discourses around gender. Despite basketball's popularity among girls and women, early twentieth-century physical educators, particularly in the United States, debated the sport's appropriateness for females. As a result, different rules were developed for female basketball players.

Already in the late 1890s, Senda Berenson, a physical educator, adapted the rules of basketball for her female students at Smith College. She also went on to edit the *Spalding Women's Basketball Guides* from 1901 to 1917, which outlined the rules for women's play. Berenson wrote in the first guide that, "it is a well known fact that

women abandon themselves to impulse more than men.”³ Thus, a separate set of rules for girls and women would curb these impulses and avoid embarrassing outbreaks of emotion on the court. “Girls’ Rules,” as they became known, also limited the strenuous nature of the game by increasing the number of players on each team, limiting dribbling to two or three bounces, and dividing the court into two or three parts, in which forwards, guards, and sometimes centres were required to stay. It was also decided that “snatching and batting of the ball is not allowed.”⁴ Girls’ rules led to a slower and supposedly friendlier version of basketball, with very little dribbling and even less running. In discussing the adaptation of basketball to suit female players, sport historian Steveda Chepko argues that “women female educators, already on the academic and cultural fringes, did not dare risk challenging the male domination of sport. Their alternative solution was to domesticate the game of basketball and keep it in the main stream of social convention.”⁵

According to Nancy Cole Dosch, early twentieth-century physical educators were definitely influenced by medical experts as they debated the appropriateness of competitive girls’ basketball and adapted the rules of the game for women. She notes that arguments in favour of less competition and reducing the strenuousness of the game were based on the perceived inadequacies of female anatomy and physiology, as well as the “peculiar diseases” that affected women, including “menstruation, pregnancy, labor and menopause.”⁶ Basketball played too vigorously, then, could weaken a women’s “vital force” needed for reproduction.⁷ This led to suggestions that girls abstain from basketball during their menstrual periods, that only trained female supervisors be employed for girls’ basketball, and that competition should be avoided, as it “adds

nervous or emotional strain ... capable of causing menstrual irregularities.”⁸ In addition, the rules of basketball were to be modified to suit young women.

Despite the changes in basketball rules to accommodate the perceived weaknesses in female physiology and psychology, there remained a troubling issue: basketball was a competitive team sport. Educational and medical professionals were fearful of cultivating strong, aggressive and competitive girls in an era when feminine gender norms promoted the opposite traits. Paula Welch provides an overview of the actions taken by physical educators in the United States between the 1920s and the 1960s to regulate the rules of basketball and eliminate inter-collegiate competition. Welch cites educators such as Marjorie Bateman, a director of women’s physical education at a teacher’s college in New Hampshire, who complained in 1936 that basketball was “the sacrifice of the maidens, the slaughter of the innocents, one of the most atrocious crimes committed in the name of education.”⁹ As a consequence of such sentiments, American physical educators were for the most part successful in curtailing the competitive character of basketball.

The suppression of inter-collegiate competitive play at some U.S. universities was reflective of this trend. In her study of women’s inter-collegiate competition at Ohio State University from 1904 to 1907, for example, Robin Bell Markels traces the rise in popularity of competitive women’s basketball that, she argues, benefited from immense exposure and institutionalization that would not again be seen in Ohio until the 1980s.¹⁰ She notes that, despite efforts to maintain traditional female roles off the court such as post-game receptions, “basketball’s physicality, its potential for player contact and public spectacle, challenged gender orthodoxies which, for some people, no post-game selection

of tea and cookies could domesticate.”¹¹ For these reasons, the first attempt at introducing women’s competitive basketball at Ohio State was ended by physical educators who doubted that the benefits of basketball could outweigh the negative social ramifications that would result from public displays of female athleticism and competitiveness.

Another strategy employed by physical educators to make basketball more appropriate for female players was the “play day.” Rather than competitive basketball games and tournaments, the sport was incorporated into non-competitive recreational events geared toward female participation. This strategy is outlined in Pamela Grundy’s study of women’s basketball in North Carolina. Grundy points out the attention given to the femininity of the athletes, which included pre- and post-game parties, the introduction of non-competitive, multi-sport “play days” in the 1950s, and a general effort to promote “an atmosphere of dignity, courtesy, and refinement.”¹² Despite efforts to feminize the sportswomen, Grundy has found a rich history of women’s basketball that at times enjoyed immense popular support, and, she argues, “added definition to the multiple ideas of womanhood” in the United States that included both cheerleaders and female athletes.¹³ In Grundy’s study, however, the fall of competitive women’s basketball in North America was inevitable by the mid-twentieth century. She writes that, “the school athletic model that crystallized throughout the country during the 1950s—a ritual in which young men competed and young women cheered them on—took on enormous force, coming to seem for many a timeless reflection of gender roles and expectations, a physical embodiment of a supposedly natural order.”¹⁴

That female basketball players were competing in a complex and contested field

of gender behaviours is again evident in Rita Liberti's article about African-American women at Bennett College who played basketball in the first half of the twentieth century. The transition, in the early 1940s, from competitive leagues to play days that would be less likely to masculinize female students occurred in the context of on-going concerns about appropriate female, middle-class behaviour in North America. In this case, the factor of race played an important role in African American educators' efforts to present an image of young black Americans as upstanding and model young men and women.¹⁵

The rise and subsequent fall of competitive women's basketball in favour of non-competitive play days on the United States' West coast is also documented by Lynne Farley Emery and Margaret Toohey-Costa. Interestingly, these authors point out that the decline of school competition for girls and women in Western states was accompanied by the emergence of private athletic clubs in the 1920s. By the latter part of the decade, industrial and church leagues were created for women in California, as well as a league for YWCA teams. Even Chinese women were creating a space for themselves to play basketball; the Mei Wah Club was founded in 1931.¹⁶ It is possible that non-school basketball leagues were in existence across North America at this time, although there is little historiography on the subject.

There were exceptions to the trend towards suppressing basketball for young women at the collegiate or high-school level. Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith document the history of one early female basketball team. The girls from Fort Shaw Indian boarding school in Montana were quite successful at basketball, and even claimed to be world champions after winning a tournament at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in

1904. Peavy and Smith write that these girls took great pride in their achievements, competing against the state college and high school teams of their era in front of hundreds of spectators. Prior to the closure of the school in 1910, the superintendent of the school, Fred Campbell, was a strong supporter of physical education for the general improvement of his students, and his female athletes took to the sport with enthusiasm.¹⁷

In her dissertation on women's basketball at Immaculata College near Philadelphia, Julie Elizabeth Byrne investigates how the young women "negotiated the rhythms of practice, games, and travel alongside traditional obligations to school, church, and family."¹⁸ Based on extensive interviews and surveys with former basketball players, she found that it was primarily the "fun," or pleasure, of basketball that these women remembered, and that this pleasure came from a number of factors that were associated with being on the team.

Byrne argues that the players at Immaculata loved the physicality of the game of basketball, and in playing, they pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable for a young woman to be doing in that time period. Still, she is clear that "alternative physical experiences and gender traits in basketball offered only the merest loophole in an overarching Philadelphia Catholic ideology of gender".¹⁹

Byrne also notes that Immaculata College—and the Philadelphia area—was a place where the continuation of girls' and women's basketball throughout the middle of the twentieth century was acceptable. Although not the primary thrust of her dissertation, Byrne notes that the members of Immaculata's basketball team always acted as ladies, especially at away games, and generally prided themselves on their lady-like, and sportsman-like, comportment on the court and off. When they went out to dinner after a

game, for example, they “dressed and went out the right way.”²⁰ The sisters in charge of the team “loved basketball, but only if the girls played it without any urban, lower-class mannerisms.”²¹ In addition, the team played girls’ rules, consistent with the standards of intercollegiate play until 1971²², and remarkably, their uniforms included very modest skirts until 1974.

That the sisters at Immaculata and the Catholic community in Philadelphia felt comfortable in allowing their students to play intercollegiate basketball was indicative of the degree of control they felt they had over the potentially detrimental effects of the game on its female players. The members of Immaculata’s basketball team wore skirts at all times, did not swear, engage in dirty play, or chew gum, and supposedly carried themselves with restraint and an air of femininity. Because they were able to do so while winning most of their games, these young women were allowed to play basketball throughout the mid-twentieth century with the full support of their school and community.

Another example of the continuation of girls’ basketball in the mid-twentieth century can be found in Iowa’s school system, and has been written about by a number of historians.²³ Jan Beran investigates the history of girls’ basketball in Iowa, demonstrating that in Iowa, inter-collegiate competition continued while it was suspended in most of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. She argues that this was largely because girls’ rules were always played in Iowa, making the game distinct from that of the boys, and because small farming communities usually gave great support to their local girls’ basketball team.²⁴

The remarkable popularity of girls’ basketball in Iowa amongst both participants

and spectators throughout the twentieth century was a unique situation in the United States. As at Immaculata College, the Iowa girls did not call into question their femininity by participating in the game; basketball in Iowa was known as a girls' sport. It is evident that, in the places where girls' and women's basketball remained acceptable and popular in schools between the 1940s and the 1960s in the United States, the boundaries of appropriate feminine behaviour for basketball players were very clearly defined. At Immaculata College and within the State of Iowa, girls could play competitive basketball, but not using the same rules as boys, and while practising very sportsmanlike behaviour.

Although it has not been the subject of as much historical scholarship as in the United States, competitive basketball for women in Canada was a popular sport throughout the twentieth century. The history of physical education programs for girls has been examined by Canadian historians such as Helen Lenskyj, who wrote an article about the gender-specific physical education programs for girls in Ontario at the turn of the century.²⁵ In a similar vein is Michael Smith's article about "the Sporting Culture of Women in Victorian Nova Scotia" at the turn of the twentieth century. Smith writes, "reformers worked to develop a feminine sporting tradition distinct from that of male athletics. In the process they emphasized appearance, demeanour, and sexuality in women's sports, diminishing in turn the importance of women's athletic prowess and skill."²⁶ Despite their efforts, however, female physical educators in Canada were not generally organized or uniform in their efforts to suspend competitive play. Although there were concerns throughout Canada about preserving the femininity of female basketball players, there tended to be less controversy or conflict surrounding the

appropriateness of young women playing basketball in Canada than in the United States. Women's sports historian M. Ann Hall points out that in the 1930s there were a number of female physical educators in Ontario who withdrew their teams from competitive programs in favour of non-competitive, participation-based games. However, the vast majority of Ontario schools continued to support girls' teams that competed against other schools.²⁷

In Canada, as in the United States, both academic and non-academic basketball leagues were becoming popular in the 1920s in Canada. In 1921, the Canadian Intercollegiate Women's Basketball League was created, and games in Eastern Canada were played under girls' rules for a number of decades. However, the famous Edmonton Grads basketball team, and teams from Western Canada in general, tended to use boys' rules, and when eastern teams met Western teams for tournaments, the better-skilled Western teams generally won.²⁸ John Dewar's article about the Grads and their social significance provides abundant statistics that demonstrate the team's incredible winning record, as well as fairly extensive citations from various admirers of the Grads in their day. Dewar writes that the Grads "showed that there was no dichotomy between strength and beauty. They gave a new, true and lasting dimension to the game of women's basketball."²⁹

Elaine Chalus documents the rise of the Edmonton Grads, comprised of graduates from McDougall Commercial High School who successfully played basketball under coach, Dr. Percy Page. Chalus points out that from 1915 to 1940, Page coached the Grads through numerous national and international championships, losing only a handful of games over a twenty-five year period. Although they played aggressively and

sometimes played against young men's teams that they usually beat, the Grads did not become the focus of debate over the appropriateness of their participation in competitive basketball, or about the danger of losing their feminine charms. In large part this was due to the careful supervision of Percy Page. According to former athletes, Page chose young women to join the team who would be "ladies first and basketball players second," which meant that some talented, but less "lady-like" athletes were not permitted to join the Grads.³⁰ Chalus writes, "According to the Grads, a 'lady' (in Mr. Page's eyes) didn't drink or smoke, neither was she vulgar nor loud. She was polite, respectful, considerate, and discreet. She was to be an example of womanhood for the community." Likewise, a "lady" would demonstrate "dedicated, sportsmanlike behaviour" on the basketball court.³¹

Kevin B. Wamsley has also investigated the ways in which coach Percy Page regulated the lady-like image of his athletes, arguing that Page has been constructed by sports historians as a great coach without adequately analyzing the athletes who played for him. Wamsley notes that Page's code of conduct for the Grads included requirements that the athletes be single, refrain from smoking and drinking, never question coaching decisions or playing time, and remain employed while they were members of the team. Wamsley writes, "What is significant, more broadly, is that Page's private and public management of the team was based on 'feminizing' the athletes according to popular perceptions of what women should be. Not only were the Grads' physical and emotional experiences pre-structured, but the boundaries of pleasure were also tempered by imposed standards of femininity."³²

While it may never be known how all of Percy Page's athletes felt about their

coach, it seems that his methods of coaching women's basketball worked in favour of both winning and making the game enjoyable for a wide range of spectators. Elaine Chalus notes that when basketball's inventor, James Naismith, attended a game played by the Grads in Oklahoma, he was so impressed that he wrote to Percy Page. An excerpt from the letter read as follows:

In 1892, at the request of a group of teachers, I organized two girls' basketball teams playing the boys' game, and I found that ... the reaction of the girls to the game was vastly different from that of the boys. I was particularly anxious, therefore, to see how the boys' style of game affected the social attributes and the general health of your players, and I can assure you that it was with no little pleasure that I found these young ladies exhibiting as much grace and poise at an afternoon tea as vigorous ability on the basketball court ... I would like to congratulate you and your team on the fact that while retaining their fine womanly instincts they have been able to achieve such marked success.³³

Somehow, it seems that the Edmonton Grads were able to maintain their lady-like demeanour, despite the dangers of participation in strenuous competitive sport. In doing so, they certainly contributed to the popularization of basketball and provided examples for other young Canadian women to follow who may or may not have emulated the Grads' womanly graces.

Basketball for girls and women was certainly becoming quite popular in British Columbia throughout the period of the Grads' dominance and beyond, as has been documented by both Louisa Zerbe and Barbara Schrodt. Louisa Zerbe documents how the University of British Columbia women's team came to represent North America at the Women's World Games at Prague in 1930. Although the Edmonton Grads had beaten UBC, Percy Page was reportedly so impressed by the quality of the games that UBC was asked to represent North America at the World Games when the Grads were unable to attend.³⁴ Zerbe's study indicates that the quality of women's basketball was

quite high in British Columbia during the 1930s, and that the opportunity existed for Vancouver teams to play against high quality teams from across Canada and around the world.

Barbara Schrodt has outlined Western Canada's dominance in national basketball competitions from 1942 to 1967, and writes that teams from Vancouver—and one from Victoria—won the national championships for nearly the entire twenty-six year period studied.³⁵ All the teams were sponsored by local businesses that, it may be assumed, recognized the potential for commercial gain from the sponsorship of a popular local sport. The team sponsored by Hedlund's Meat Packers, for example, was quite successful from 1940 until 1946. Other teams included "Nut House," "Montgomery Maids," Victoria's "Cec's U-Drive," and the Vancouver "Eilers," sponsored by the local jeweller's firm.³⁶ Schrodt notes that the basketball leagues in the West were generally labelled "commercial" because of the mostly commercial sponsors, although there were also teams sponsored by churches, community centres, universities, YMCAs and clubs.³⁷

The existence of such a variety of teams and sponsors between 1942 and 1967 seems to indicate a healthy and competitive basketball league in Western Canada during exactly the time period that American sports historians have documented a sharp decline in women's basketball at the collegiate level. Schrodt points to a number of conditions that lead to Western successes over Eastern Canadian teams, including a strong high school physical education program in girls' basketball as well as spectator support in an era of non professional sports teams and few available recreational options.³⁸ A major factor in the national success of Western Canadian teams, however, was the women's style of play. Schrodt argues that in central and Eastern Canada, most women were

playing “girls’ rules” basketball until the late 1960s, and their physical education teachers were committed to the principle that a game played by girls should be modified to suit limited feminine physical capabilities.³⁹ Conversely, in British Columbia, girls’ rules were apparently never played in women’s competitive commercial leagues. This meant that when Western and Eastern teams met for their annual national championship tournaments, Eastern teams were generally slower, less aggressive, and played with less complex tactics. Schrodt cites an interview with one former Vancouver basketball player, Nora McDermott, who remembered, “We did screens and roll-offs, and ... we did perfectly legal screens and they were blocked out. They had never seen those things before.”⁴⁰

While the Western team’s style of play was clearly a factor in their extended success, Schrodt does not explore the reasons why girls’ rules were never adopted in British Columbia’s commercial women’s leagues. This issue is briefly addressed by M. Ann Hall, who writes, “in Western Canada, especially due to the influence of the Edmonton Grads, who switched to boy’s rules in 1922, and also to the relative scarcity of women physical education teachers, most teams were coached by men and played the so-called men’s game in both educational and community settings.”⁴¹ Hall argues that because of their experience with boy’s rules which led to a quicker, more complex game, the Western women’s teams were nearly always victorious over their eastern counterparts who played girls’ rules in their regular season.⁴²

Despite the aggressive nature of the Western women’s play, they were still very much ladies after the games when they attended banquets and received gifts. Barbara Schrodt notes that, “Eilers ... staged banquets for teams when they won the Canadian

title, and presented players with attractive gifts from his jewellery store.”⁴³ Although Schrodts does not engage in a gender analysis of the athletes involved in Vancouver women’s basketball, it is reasonable to assume that considerable care was taken to ensure that the athletes behaved in a manner befitting young ladies. Furthermore, as young ladies of often lesser means, their basketball careers gave them opportunities that they would not have otherwise enjoyed. Schrodts cites, “camaraderie, the wonders of train travel across Canada, the excitement of visiting new cities,” as well as the thrill of basketball successes as some of the experiences the women gained from their athletic endeavours.⁴⁴

A few general conclusions may be drawn from the small body of scholarly work on women and basketball in North America. Sports historians have shown that girls and women throughout the continent enjoyed basketball immensely, and they played on teams in and outside of school, year after year, from the game’s invention until the present day. In some regions such as Philadelphia and Iowa, competitive basketball thrived for the duration of the twentieth century, while in others, like North Carolina, the game was suppressed for a number of decades as physical educators decided that the game was unsuitable for young ladies. Other studies show that while basketball for girls and women survived, the ongoing existence of modified rules reflected assumptions about female physical capabilities and expectations about appropriate feminine behaviour.

The availability and popularity of basketball for women was always subject to the dominant discourses surrounding gender at a particular place and time. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Victorian ideals of femininity were still prevalent in

North America. Womanliness and manliness were seen as starkly dichotomous, and women were supposed to embody “grace and beauty, leading to mutual sharing and intimacy in the domestic sphere.”⁴⁵ Although competitive sport was intended to maintain and augment masculinity, and was generally seen as inappropriate for women, femininity was not an uncontested notion in this era, and some sports for women were popular. As well, physical education programs for girls were being increasingly implemented throughout North America, and much of women’s sports experiences came in an academic context.⁴⁶ Still, as sport historian Colin Howell points out, “In Canada, ‘respectable’ sports were more likely to involve men rather than women; the English rather than the French, whites rather than Blacks and Native people, Protestants rather than Catholics, and middle-class rather than working-class athletes” at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁷

The 1920s, known as the “golden age” of Canadian women in sport,⁴⁸ saw a limited but significant loosening of social restrictions for women in general, and a rather short-lived idealization of a more “boyish” and athletic figure for women.⁴⁹ Women’s participation and visibility grew considerably in the sporting world, and sports such as swimming, hockey and baseball became accessible to women outside of schools. As well, a number of sporting heroines emerged, especially after the 1928 Olympic successes of a number of women.⁵⁰

Despite advances made by sportswomen in the 1920s, there was a return to somewhat more Victorian ideals of womanhood in the thirties. Even in the 1940s, fifties and early sixties, the feminine ideal with regard to sport may be summed up by the title of M. Ann Hall’s chapter on the subject, “Sweetheart Heroines: Athletic and Lovely.”⁵¹

Hall writes that the model sporting woman in this period was embodied by champion figure skater Barbara Ann Scott, who was well-groomed, beautiful, talented, graceful and charming. “Feminine” sports such as figure skating, gymnastics, and synchronized swimming were considered very appropriate for girls and women in this era, while competitive team sports were less acceptable, though still tolerated in many cases.⁵²

In short, historically and socially rooted notions of femininity impacted the accessibility and acceptability of girls’ and women’s sports. In areas where and at times when it was socially acceptable for girls and women to play a competitive sport, young women were generally subject to the social restrictions placed on females in general, but these women were also able to push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour through their actions on the court, and gain some of the privileges inherent in being part of a sports team that were traditionally reserved for men.

It is clear that in Western Canada, as in the rest of North America, young women were taking up the sport of basketball with enthusiasm as early as the late nineteenth century. As in Vancouver, Victoria’s commercial or city basketball league for women never adopted girls’ rules, for reasons that may never be fully known. Most, if not all, elementary and high schools in Victoria did use girls’ rules for several decades, indicating the existence of a discourse surrounding the appropriateness of basketball for girls and women. Still, the fact that a competitive, boys’ rules basketball league for girls and women existed and was supported by the community throughout the twentieth century in Victoria is indicative that a significant portion of the population accepted sports for women as a beneficial activity, unlikely to de-feminize or physically harm the

girls who played.

The question, then, is why were young women in Victoria able to play competitive basketball throughout the twentieth century with the support of their community? The answer lies, at least in part, in the silent but successful negotiation that occurred between the basketball players and their community; the young women constantly reaffirmed that they were maintaining their femininity off the court, and in return they were allowed to continue to play competitive basketball on the court. And by playing basketball, these women pushed the boundaries of acceptable femininity in their community.

This thesis will begin with a very brief chronology of women's basketball in Victoria in chapter two. In chapter three, a number of the women who played basketball in Victoria before 1965 will speak for themselves about why they chose to play basketball in the city at a time when most young women were not athletes, how they acted on and off the court, and what they gained from their sporting experiences. Chapter four, entitled "Observers and Observed," will investigate the complex gendered relationships between the athletes and their communities in Victoria. Using evidence from photographs, newspapers, interviews, and personal scrapbooks, it documents the extent to which basketball for women was a popular and celebrated sport in Victoria from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1960s. The concluding chapter includes some suggestions for further study on the topic.

This thesis is intended to add to the limited historiography in Canada about women in sport in general, and women's basketball in particular. Although this is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the topic, hopefully it will demonstrate that there is

a vibrant history of women's basketball in Victoria during a period that is not known for women's sports. As well, evidence will be provided that the mostly working-class women who played the game demonstrated considerable agency in choosing to participate in an aggressive, competitive sport, and in maintaining the sport's acceptability in the community.

Notes

- ¹ M. Anne Hall, Feminism and Sporting Bodies (Windsor: Human Kinetics, 1996), 90.
- ² Kathleen E. McCrone, "Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public Schools," in From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras, eds. J.A. Mangan and Roberta Park (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 97-129, 98.
- ³ Steveda Chepko, "The Domestication of Basketball," in A Century of Women's Basketball, eds. Joan Hult and Marianna Trezell (Reston, Va.: NAGWS, 1991), 109-124, 111.
- ⁴ Joanna Davenport, "The Tides of Change in Women's Basketball Rules," A Century of Women's Basketball, 84-85.
- ⁵ Chepko, "The Domestication of Basketball," 121.
- ⁶ Nancy Cole Dosch, "'The Sacrifice of Maidens or Healthy Sportswomen?' The Medical Debate Over Women's Basketball," in A Century of Women's Basketball, 125-136, 129.
- ⁷ Dosch, "'The Sacrifice of Maidens or Healthy Sportswomen?'," 129.
- ⁸ Dosch, "'The Sacrifice of Maidens or Healthy Sportswomen?'," 130.
- ⁹ Paula Welch, "Interscholastic Basketball: Bane of Physical Educators," in Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthropology of Women in Sports, ed. Reet Howell (West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1980), 424-431, 425.
- ¹⁰ Robin Bell Markels, "Bloomer Basketball and its Suspender Suppression," Journal of Sport History 27 (1) (Spring 2000): 31-49, 36.
- ¹¹ Markels, "Bloomer Basketball and its Suspender Suppression," 37.
- ¹² Pamela Grundy, "From Amazons to Glamazons: The Rise and Fall of North Carolina Women's Basketball," Journal of American History 83 (1996): 112-146, 119.
- ¹³ Grundy, "From Amazons to Glamazons," 115.
- ¹⁴ Grundy, "From Amazons to Glamazons," 114.
- ¹⁵ Rita Liberti, "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Men': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942," Journal of Sports History 26 (3) (Fall 1999): 567-584.
- ¹⁶ Lynne Fauley Emery and Margaret Toohey-Costa, "Hoops and Skirts: Women's Basketball on the West Coast, 1892-1930s," in A Century of Women's Basketball, 137-154, 151-152.
- ¹⁷ Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, "World Champions: The 1904 Girls' Basketball Team From Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School," Montana 51(4) (Winter 2001): 2-25.
- ¹⁸ Julie Elizabeth Byrne, "'O God of Players': Immaculata College Basketball and American Catholic Women's Pleasure, 1939-1975" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2001), iv.

-
- ¹⁹ Byrne, "'O God of Players'," 254.
- ²⁰ Byrne, "'O God of Players'," 153.
- ²¹ Byrne, "'O God of Players'," 153.
- ²² Byrne, "'O God of Players'," 231.
- ²³ Janice Beran, "From Six-on Six to Full Court Press: A Century of Iowa Girls' Basketball" (Ph.D. diss., Iowa State University, 1993). See also, David McElwain, "The Only Dance in Iowa: A Cultural History of Iowa Six-Player Girls' Basketball" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2001); Shelley Marie Lucas, "Courting Controversy: Gender and Power in Iowa Girls' Basketball" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2001).
- ²⁴ Jan Beran, "The Story: Six-Player Girls' Basketball In Iowa," in Her Story in Sport, 552-563.
- ²⁵ Helen Lenskyj, "Training For 'True Womanhood': Physical Education for Girls in Ontario Schools, 1890-1920," Historical Studies in Education 2(2) (1990): 205-223.
- ²⁶ Michael Smith, "Graceful Athleticism or Robust Womanhood: The Sporting Culture of Women in Victorian Nova Scotia, 1870-1914," Journal of Canadian Studies 23 (1&2) (Spring/Summer 1988): 120-137, 133.
- ²⁷ M. Ann Hall, The Girl and the Game (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 56.
- ²⁸ Hall, The Girl and the Game, 56.
- ²⁹ John Dewar, "The Edmonton Grads: The Team and its Social Significance From 1915-1940," Her Story in Sport, 541-547, 546.
- ³⁰ Elaine Chalus, "The Edmonton Commercial Graduates: Women's History, An Integrationist Approach" in Winter Sports in Canada, eds. Elise A Corbet and Anthony W. Rasperich (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1990), 69-86, 81.
- ³¹ Chalus, 81.
- ³² Kevin B. Wamsley, "Power and Privilege in Historiography: Constructing Percy Page," Sport History Review, 28 (1997): 146-155, 152-153.
- ³³ Chalus, "The Edmonton Commercial Graduates," 80; also in Dewar, "The Edmonton Grads," 541.
- ³⁴ Louisa Zerbe, "The 1930 University of British Columbia Women's Basketball Team: Those Other World Champions," in Her Story in Sport, 548-551.
- ³⁵ Barbara Schrodtt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," Canadian Journal of the History of Sport 26(2) (1995): 19-32.
- ³⁶ Schrodtt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 20.
- ³⁷ Schrodtt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 23.
- ³⁸ Schrodtt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 27.

-
- ³⁹ Schrodt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 28.
- ⁴⁰ Schrodt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 28.
- ⁴¹ Hall, The Girl and the Game, 56.
- ⁴² Hall, The Girl and the Game, 123.
- ⁴³ Schrodt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 30.
- ⁴⁴ Schrodt, "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967," 31.
- ⁴⁵ Hall, The Girl and the Game, 26.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, Michael Smith, "Graceful Athleticism or Robust Womanhood," 120-137. Also see Helen Lenskyj, "Training for 'True Womanhood'," 205-223.
- ⁴⁷ Colin Howell, Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 28.
- ⁴⁸ For example, see David McDonald, "The Golden Age of Women and Sport in Canada," Canadian Woman Studies 15(4) (Fall 1995): 12-15.
- ⁴⁹ See, for example, Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1988).
- ⁵⁰ Howell, Blood, Sweat, and Cheers, 116-118.
- ⁵¹ Hall, The Girl and the Game, 104-134.
- ⁵² Hall, The Girl and the Game, 110.

Chapter 2

A Brief History

The game of basketball was invented in 1891 in Massachusetts by Canadian James Naismith, but apparently the sport did not come to Victoria until 1897, after local school board employee, Carey Pope, had witnessed the game played in Portland and taught its rules to some local athletes. According to an article entitled “Our Basketball History,” published in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* in March of 1934, Pope and some others covered the windows of the James Bay Athletic Association Hall with chicken wire, marked the floor, put up two iron hoops, and learned to play basketball with a soccer ball.¹ By the fall of 1897, six men’s teams had formed a league that enjoyed great spectator popularity. They played and practised in a variety of spaces over the next few years, ranging from the popular military drill hall to an outdoor court to an empty bottling works shed.

With the exception of a few years at the end of the nineteenth century when many young men left Victoria for the Yukon gold rush, basketball continued to gain popularity among both athletes and spectators, and tournaments involved teams from increasingly distant locales. As schools from Victoria began to include basketball in their physical education programs by 1907, the sport became firmly incorporated into the mainstream of sports played in the town.²

Photographic evidence points to a 1903 team from the “Work Estate Young Ladies Basketball Club” as being one of the first women’s teams to play in Victoria. As there are twelve members shown in the team photograph, it is unknown whether this

basketball club had two teams that played against each other, or if there were other teams in the city that also competed.³ Whatever the case, it is probable that in Victoria, as in other parts of North America, girls and women learned to play basketball not long after the game arrived in the city. It is also likely that they played girls' rules, as there already existed an "official" book of rules for women, written by physical educators in the United States and first edited by Senda Berenson in 1899.⁴ In addition, early photographs from Victoria usually show six athletes per team, rather than the five required for standard boy's rules.

Photographs show that by the 1911-12 season, Victoria College had put together a girl's basketball team that must have played against other local teams, as there were only six members.⁵ As Victoria College was a respected institution, still affiliated with McGill University at this time, it is reasonable to assume that basketball was an acceptable sport for young women to participate in, although the style of their play is unknown. The length of their dresses, along with newspaper reports of games where no more than five points were scored, indicate that women who played basketball before the 1920s did not play very aggressively. It is also possible that the ever-changing rules for girls that limited dribbling and court area were such that scoring was difficult. Still, some newspaper reports indicate that young women in Victoria had a skilled style of play quite early in the century. In December 1914, for example, the *Daily Colonist* reported that the girls' team from Victoria High School won a tournament in Vancouver. The article states that, "The visitors defeated the locals here tonight by a score of 23 points to 3. The Vancouver girls were completely outclassed."⁶

In 1913, a Sunday school basketball league was formed in Victoria, which

eclipsed the city men's league over the next few years as it gained immense popularity.⁷ By 1914, there was sufficient interest to include a girls' division in the league, as reported by the *Daily Colonist*: "A decided innovation planned is the formation of a Ladies' League, which is almost sure to be carried out, as already four teams are ready to play."⁸ The league for young women did indeed begin that year with teams from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, St. Mary's Anglican, First Presbyterian, and Centennial Methodist Churches.⁹ Subsequently, it grew and flourished for the decades to come. Although the ladies' teams in the Sunday school league still had no age or weight classifications in 1919, eligibility in the league for all participants was restricted to members of a congregation and subject to a number of regulations. The main rules were as follows: "Any amateur who has attended Sunday school six times during the three months preceding the opening of the League shall be eligible for registration. This percentage of attendance must be maintained. Each applicant must present a certificate signed by the pastor or super-intendant asserting his good standing in the school." The cost of registration in 1919 was ten cents.¹⁰

It was clearly in the best interests of many churches in Victoria to motivate young members of their congregations to maintain good standings in their Sunday schools in order to play basketball. Church organizers may also have hoped to recruit new parishioners in the form of friends of young basketball players who wished to join a Sunday school team.¹¹ In addition, churches often saw sport as a way to draw people together, and, when in a clean, well-regulated form, sport was seen as a "powerful agency for true and upright living."¹² By the 1940s or earlier, church organizers hoped that basketball would have the beneficial effect of alleviating problems of neglected children

and juvenile delinquency.¹³ In return for possible new converts and the various other potential benefits of sport, churches in Victoria subsidized basketball for both boys and girls for many decades. As church involvement lessened, however, rules about Sunday school attendance were relaxed by the early 1950s or earlier.¹⁴ In addition, beginning in 1924, senior teams in the Sunday school league gradually moved to the city league, and eligibility in the Sunday school league was limited to junior and intermediate B teams only.¹⁵

In February 1914, a new gym was opened in Victoria High School that was thought to be the largest and nicest on the west coast, and would be used for important basketball games into the mid-twentieth century. The gym was opened early for a basketball championship game between Victoria High's girls' team and a team from Vancouver, at which the Victoria girls won the provincial basketball championship.¹⁶ This British Columbia championship was one of many the girls at Victoria High School would win over the next decades, and showed that a physical education program existed at the school that emphasized good skills in competitive girls' basketball.

By 1925, Victoria's city basketball league boasted both Senior A and Senior B ladies' divisions, in which teams sponsored by local businesses and organizations as well as local school teams competed. In a listing of the "City Basketball League Schedule," Senior A teams included Victoria College, Normal School, Civil Service, and B.C. Telephone; the B Ladies teams were Victoria Steam Laundry, Hudson's Bay, Spencer's, Woolworth's, and a James Bay Methodist team.¹⁷ Games were held nearly every weekend from January until the beginning of April, culminating in city and provincial championship tournaments. The variety of sponsors of women's basketball teams

indicates at least moderate spectator interest in the game, as sponsoring businesses and organizations used sport as an opportunity to advertise their positive community involvement. Some sponsors also created teams comprised of employees as part of an effort to create a positive and cooperative work environment. Two possible examples were The Hudson's Bay Company, or "The Bay" team between the 1920s and the 1940s, and the BC Telephone Company "hello girls" team in the 1920s.

Dedicated and talented coaches were certainly a significant factor in the ongoing achievements of women's basketball teams in Victoria, and the successes of teams were always a reflection of the great efforts of coaches. As stated earlier, the Victoria High School girls enjoyed considerable success, especially in the 1920s when they won the BC title in 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1926.¹⁸ The 1922 Victoria High School yearbook, the *Camosun*, refers to the victorious championship game. "No more exciting game was ever witnessed between ladies' teams, St. Mark's showing great checking ability, while the speed and combination of the High Girls always baffled the visitors."¹⁹ Mr. Bob Whyte, a distinguished basketball player, was the coach of this winning team, and continued to coach girls' and women's basketball in the high school, city and Sunday school leagues well into the mid-twentieth century. A mainstay of women's basketball, Bob Whyte coached such teams as the Comets, Hotshots, Rookies, Adverts, Cardinals, Harmony, Live Wires, and Fidelis over the years, until his death in 1961.²⁰ One woman who played for Bob Whyte recalls that he started coaching when he recognized a need for instructors in girls' basketball, and stayed with girls' teams for his entire coaching career. In addition to coaching as well as refereeing, Bob was always looking for new talent to recruit to his favourite sport. A former athlete remembers that he would often inquire

about younger sisters or friends of his players who might like to learn to play competitive basketball.²¹ Whyte would also drive all of his athletes to and from practices and games, and he would provide the members of his team with tickets to watch basketball games when a good men's team came to town.²²

In terms of dedication and service to young women's basketball teams in Victoria, only one other coach rivalled Bob Whyte. Walter Yeamans married a woman who played for the successful BC Telephone company team in the 1920s, and began coaching women's basketball in the early 1930s. Yeamans coached teams that included the Unitys, the Eaglettes, the Hepcats, Co-Eds, MacDonalds, King Realty, the Victoria "B's," the Trafalgars, and the Naval Vets. He also coached the University of Victoria Vikettes from the official creation of the University in 1963 until his retirement from basketball in 1968. Yeamans led the Vikettes to three national finals and one Canadian championship, held in Montreal in 1965.²³ Throughout his forty years of coaching in Victoria, Walter Yeamans had an enormous impact on the young women athletes he worked with, as did his ever-supportive wife, Charlotte. Like Bob Whyte, the Yeamans drove athletes to and from practices and games, and they provided countless meals as well as useful gifts to young women who had little time to spare between work, school and basketball.²⁴

Between them, Bob Whyte and Walter Yeamans coached teams in all of Victoria's popular girls' and women's basketball leagues of the twentieth century: high school, city league, Sunday school league, and University division. During their lives, they saw the rise of young women's basketball in the early years of the twentieth century, the increase in the popularity of city league teams in the 1920s and beyond, and the development of young athletes in the Sunday school league which was often the first

exposure girls had to competitive basketball in Victoria. They saw their own teams win city or commercial, coastal, and British Columbia championships throughout the century. Both coaches, for example, saw their teams win Coast finals in March 1941. Cheered on by fans at Victoria's Willow's Sports Centre, the city league Unitys under Yeamans, and the Sunday school league Adverts under Whyte won the senior B and intermediate A Coast championships respectively.²⁵ The two coaches often had teams in the same league, and both men fostered a healthy and sportsmanlike rivalry between their teams. Some athletes played for both Whyte and Yeamans over the course of their basketball careers, but all women interviewed remember the two coaches as uniquely wonderful and generous instructors in basketball and in life.²⁶

Yeamans and Whyte were probably watching when the team sponsored by Victoria's Cec's U-Drive won the national Senior A women's basketball title in 1949 at the Victoria High School gym. It was not until 1965 that a Victoria women's basketball team won another national title, and Walter Yeamans was the coach of the successful Vikettes, winners of Canada's junior basketball championship in Montreal. The Vikettes became increasingly important in high-level women's basketball in Victoria as the city league deteriorated in the later twentieth century.²⁷

The Vikettes had a long history as the women's basketball team for Victoria College that existed from about 1910. By the 1950s, the Victoria College team was quite competitive, as can be seen in reports in *The Tower*, the College's yearbook. In 1954, it is reported that "The College Women's basketball team was undefeated in Victoria except for an early loss to Normal School." They also had considerable success at a UBC invitational tournament, "unaccustomed as they were to playing girls' rules."²⁸ Like

nearly all girls' basketball teams in Victoria at this time, the Vic College girls would have played the more physical "boys' rules" in regular games and tournaments.

In 1956-57, the women's team at Victoria College became the "Vikettes," and as they won "handily over all city high school teams in early play, the girls turned to commercial Junior and Senior competition."²⁹ Although they did not win the BC title that year, in the 1957-58 season, the Vikettes played regular games in the city Senior B women's league and were victorious at the Junior B Basketball championships in Vancouver.³⁰ This basketball success was certainly in large part due to athletic talent and good coaching, but it may be no coincidence that 1956 was the first year that there was a co-ordinator of athletics at Victoria College and a formal organization of sporting activities. As well, the Normal School was amalgamated with Victoria College in 1956, and the pool of available athletes increased. There were also two new physical education instructors, one male and one female, who came to Victoria College with the Normal School in 1956 and may have helped to build a strong women's basketball team over the next decade.³¹

The creation of the University of Victoria in 1963 created a logical next stage for girls coming out of successful high school and Sunday school basketball teams who wanted to continue their basketball careers. It should have been no surprise that the University women's basketball team enjoyed immediate success under seasoned coach, Walter Yeamans. Although the Victoria College team and then the Vikettes had to play against local high school and commercial teams in order to practice their skills, they had ample opportunity to test their abilities at Island, B.C., Western, and Canadian Championships.

The strength of the Vikettes in the 1960s and beyond was part of a tradition of young women's basketball in Victoria that started at the beginning of the twentieth century. Female basketball players in Victoria in the 1960s could look back to the generations of their mothers and grandmothers to find skilled and competitive female role models in their sport of choice. Arguably, no other twentieth-century competitive sport was played continuously by women in Victoria with as much popularity and enthusiasm as basketball.³² Taught in physical education classes in both public and private schools, basketball was one of the few sports that nearly every girl learned to play as early as the 1930s, and those who enjoyed the sport had the opportunity to play it competitively for their schools, their churches, and in the city league, in front of cheering spectators. Some young women in mid-twentieth century Victoria even played basketball for more than one team at once!³³ Girls could play basketball in their early teens for school and Sunday school teams, and continue playing even after they were married (if their husbands approved) and had children. In an era before sports for women in general became popularized and acceptable,³⁴ basketball was one of only a handful of options available to women who wanted to play sports.

That basketball enjoyed high participation and popularity throughout the twentieth century in Victoria is evidence that there were ample numbers of young women who loved to play the game in a team setting, and the community was supportive of female involvement in this highly competitive sport. The next two chapters will explore why so many women chose to play basketball throughout the twentieth century, and why the community of Victoria supported these young women, even though the game they were playing did not fit traditional notions of proper feminine behaviour.

Notes

¹ “Our Basketball History,” Daily Colonist, 11 March 1934, Third Section, 1. Updated printout courtesy of Dave Unwin, archivist for Victoria Sports Hall of Fame.

² Daily Colonist, 11 March 1934, 1.

³ British Columbia Archives, “Work Estate Young Ladies Basketball Club,” Victoria B.C. 3/7/1903, #44463.

⁴ Joanna Davenport, “The Tides of Change in Women’s Basketball Rules,” in A Century of Women’s Basketball, eds. Joan Hult and Marianna Trekell (Reston, Va.: NAGWS, 1991), 83-108, 84-85.

⁵ British Columbia Archives, “Victoria College Girls’ Basketball Team, 1911-12,” #8106.

⁶ “Victoria Scores in Thompson Cup Sport,” Daily Colonist, 5 December 1914, 9.

⁷ “Our Basketball History,” Daily Colonist, 11 March 1934, Third Section, 1.

⁸ “Basketball Leagues plan three divisions,” Daily Colonist, 27 November 1914, 11.

⁹ “Basketball Entries Close Next Monday,” Daily Colonist, 19 December 1919, 10.

¹⁰ “Basketball League Will Start Play Early in New Year,” Daily Colonist, 2 December 1919, 10.

¹¹ Charles S. Prebish, Religion and Sport (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 95.

¹² Prebish, Religion and Sport, 90.

¹³ For example, see reports such as “Moral Issues,” The United Church of Canada, The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Vol. 19, 1944, 39.

¹⁴ Interviews, Victoria, 9 July 2004; Victoria, 3 June 2004; Victoria, 4 May 2004. No women interviewed recalled having to attend Sunday School in order to participate in the basketball league.

¹⁵ “Our Basketball History,” Daily Colonist, 11 March 1934, Third Section, 1.

¹⁶ Peter Smith, “Physical Education and Athletics at the New Vic High,” in Come Give a Cheer! One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976 (Victoria: Victoria High School Centennial Celebrations Committee, 1976), 86-90, 87.

¹⁷ “City Basketball League Schedule,” Daily Colonist, 30 January 1925, 11.

¹⁸ Smith, “Physical Education and Athletics at the New Vic High,” 86.

¹⁹ “Girls’ Basketball,” The Camosun, 1922, 37. Also included is a photograph of the team on page 35.

²⁰ “How Basketball Memories Began,” Daily Colonist, 24 February 1962, 8.

²¹ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.

-
- ²² Interviews, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004; Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ²³ Courtesy of scrapbook from Pat Metcalfe, chronological listing of teams coached entitled "Basketball".
- ²⁴ Interviews, Victoria, 16 April 2004; Victoria, 4 May 2004; Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ²⁵ "Local Girls Win Titles," Daily Colonist, 16 March 1941, 13.
- ²⁶ All Interviews, especially Victoria, 16 April 2004; Victoria, 5 May 2004; Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ²⁷ The Sunday school league, later known as the Night League, also gained popularity and the "Maplettes" won the national women's title in 1969. See "Mary Pearson Coutts, Basketball, 1960's-1970's," courtesy of Dave Unwin, Victoria Sports Hall of Fame.
- ²⁸ "Women's Basketball," The Tower, 1954.
- ²⁹ "Girls' Basketball-Vikettes," The Tower, 1956-57.
- ³⁰ "Women's Basketball," The Tower, 1957-58.
- ³¹ Fred L. Martens, A History of Physical Education in the University of Victoria (Victoria: Morriss Printing Company, 1984), 7-8.
- ³² A commercially-sponsored softball league for women existed from around the 1920s, and grass hockey was played in schools from the turn of the twentieth century, but no sport enjoyed as much continuous participation in such a variety of leagues as basketball.
- ³³ Interviews, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004; Victoria, 12 May 2004.
- ³⁴ In the 1964 Olympics, there were only 678 female and 4473 male competitors. Men's basketball was introduced to the Olympics in 1936, and women's basketball in 1976. www.cbc.ca/olympics/history, Accessed 1 August 2004.

Chapter 3

Why Play Basketball?

Only recently have female athletes enjoyed sufficient success and popularity to be considered equivalent to their male counterparts. Even with increases in the funding for and participation in female competitive sports, the activities of male athletes are generally more closely monitored in today's media. In addition, participation in professional North American sport, along with the promise of fame and fortune for the star players, is almost exclusively a male domain. Knowing that the odds are still against the successful participation of women in sport today, it is difficult to imagine what prompted female athletes to become—and stay—involved in sport forty years ago or more. With few female role models in the sports world,¹ and certainly no promise of fame or fortune, scores of girls and women played competitive basketball in Victoria throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the women interviewed who played basketball before 1965 look back on their experiences in the sport with incredible fondness.

Eleven women were interviewed about their memories of playing basketball in Victoria between 1935 and 1965, though most played primarily in the forties and fifties. One man who refereed for the women's leagues in Victoria¹ was also interviewed. The subjects were all white and Protestant, and ranged between 57 and 84 years of age at the time of their interviews. All played competitive basketball for their high school teams, as well as for city league, church league, and/or college teams. I was unable to locate any women of colour who played basketball in Victoria before 1965, and in fact all of the

women pictured in team photographs appear to be of European descent. The interviewees were located by word of mouth, and many former basketball players maintain friendships with each other. I tried to select women who remembered basketball as a significant part of their lives. The questions were intended to provide me with an overview of the athletic career of each basketball player, and then to determine how the interviewee felt about her basketball experiences. I tried to establish what she gained from these experiences, how she felt her participation and accomplishments were perceived by the community, and how she felt her gender affected her involvement in the sport. The basic outline of questions that I asked each interviewee can be found in Appendix A.

From the interviews, I discovered that so many girls and women loved to play basketball because of the many factors that made experiences on and around the basketball court particularly enjoyable throughout the twentieth century. In their oral testimonies, women who played basketball in Victoria between the 1930s and the 1960s shared their motives for playing, and the many satisfactions they derived from their involvement in the game.

The era in which they played was one of distinct male and female gender roles. The boyish fashions and less restrictive lifestyles enjoyed by some women in the twenties had given way to increased conservatism in the economically-strapped thirties. During the Second World War a significant number of women entered non-traditional jobs in the armed forces and industry.² Despite women's continued presence in the labour force after the War, the late 1940s and the 1950s saw an emphasis on the merits of "traditional"

female roles for women as “happy homemakers, winsome wives, and magnanimous mothers.”³ For young women, getting married one day was generally a high priority, and attracting a future husband depended on cultivating feminine charms. In the sporting world, this translated to an appreciation of “beauty producing” sports such as figure skating and gymnastics, and a somewhat less enthusiastic accommodation of less “feminine” sports like basketball.⁴ Still, ideals of femininity were contested in this era, and basketball was an accepted competitive sport for young women in Victoria. The women who joined basketball teams loved to play, even if they knew they would never be as beautiful and graceful as champion figure skater Barbara Ann Scott.

If the interviewees’ memories about playing basketball seem overly positive, it is likely because these early years of their lives contrasted so sharply with the everyday constraints of being mothers, wives and employees that became the norm after their basketball careers were over.⁵ Simply, basketball gave young and usually working-class women freedom. They could create lasting friendships, travel, have adventures and be publicly recognized for their physical accomplishments. Basketball allowed young women to play a sport aggressively and without many of the gender constraints usually present in their lives. At the same time, these young women made the basketball court a space of their own for the duration of their games and practices. In short, the basketball court and its surroundings gave young female athletes in Victoria a setting where they could enjoy themselves, and a space where they could stretch the boundaries of their gender. And because they liked it so much, young women in Victoria chose to play

basketball year after year, creating a demand for coaches, teams, leagues, gym space and sponsors.

It should be noted that not all girls who wanted to play basketball in Victoria enjoyed the same degree of support from their families, and city-league basketball was not deemed appropriate for many girls who came from wealthy families. In Victoria, class may have been an even greater stumbling block than gender for young women who wanted to play competitive basketball. Working-class girls fighting over a basketball in front of spectators may have been accepted in part because historical notions of female debility and frailty never applied to the lower classes.⁶ For young ladies from upper-class homes, however, public displays of competitiveness and physicality in basketball were not generally encouraged, or even allowed before 1965.

Elizabeth⁷ recalled that, though her own parents supported her participation in a city league team without actually going to her games in the late 1930s, there were other girls who were forced to quit. She said, “some parents took their girls out of the team, they thought it wasn’t very feminine to play.”⁸ A decade later, in the late 1940s, Audrey recalled that the girls who were considered more ladylike and had more money “were into other things like horseback riding,” although they would all participate in the “girls’ rules” intramural basketball games at Victoria High School.⁹

Muriel, who remembered her family as being upper-middle class when she was growing up in the thirties and forties, recalled that she was lucky to have been allowed to play competitive basketball. She said, “I was spoiled, because I had a father who believed in anything for girls, and a mother who was very definite that her daughter

should learn to sew and cook, and all the things that kept me inside when I wanted to be out.”¹⁰ Diane, who attended a respectable all-girls’ high school and then Victoria College in the 1940s, played basketball, but only using girls’ rules, and only for her school teams. Her parents never attended her games, and she was not even aware of the existence of a competitive city league for women’s basketball.¹¹

In the 1950s, Ruth first came into contact with young women from wealthy families when she went to Victoria College. Now 68, Ruth recalled that these young women who enjoyed sports had only played girls’ rules basketball, and “would have been on the tennis team, and field hockey,” rather than basketball.¹² Even Ruth, who described her family as working class in the forties and fifties, recalled that “the only confrontation I remember having [with my parents] was wanting to play night league [basketball] in grade nine and having a fit and storming off.”¹³ For Ruth, this confrontation worked in her favour and she went on to play city league basketball for the next decade, but many young women either chose not to play, or would not have been permitted to play because parents saw the game as unsuitable for their daughters.

It appears that the opportunity for young women to play competitive and aggressive city league basketball was limited to those whose families were aware of the league, and approved of their daughter’s participation in it. Sports historian Donald J. Mrozek points out that in general, “the mantle of middle- and upper-class respectability did not fall on the female athlete” in the first few decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Wealthier women tended to participate in sports with restricted membership such as tennis and golf, while basketball for women developed as a largely working-class

activity.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the girls who played competitive basketball in Victoria were primarily members of white working-class families who saw the benefits of their daughters belonging to a basketball team as greater than the risks of participation in a potentially de-feminizing sport. And certainly, the basketball players' memories were in part shaped by their identities and experiences as white, working-class young women.

Although sports in general have often been considered a male domain throughout the twentieth century, it is undeniable that women's sports have likewise created an all-female space. For the girls and women who played basketball in Victoria, it is usually the friendships created in this positive space that are remembered with a particular fondness. In fact, every woman interviewed about her basketball experiences before 1965 remembered friendship or camaraderie with her teammates as being one of the most important benefits derived from playing competitive basketball. Basketball gave many young women the opportunity to create bonds with each other that would last entire lifetimes.

When asked about the most important benefits she derived from playing basketball, 84-year-old Elizabeth simply stated, "camaraderie, friendship, being with the girls. We had good times."¹⁶ Likewise, Kathleen, aged 74, believed that "...we did it because it was fun and we were together and we loved to play ... I think the first thing is the friendships. I feel that in the era that I played that the friendships were very close, and kept me healthy—I do feel that very much."¹⁷ Isabel, now 57, recalled that the people in basketball were the most rewarding aspect of her participation in the sport,

including the feeling of working together towards a common goal.¹⁸ Many of these women whose friendships began on a basketball court decades ago still get together on a regular basis. When talking about her continued relationship with the members of her basketball team from her teenage years, 72-year-old Sue exclaimed,

this has gone on for fifty years! We used to meet once a month and everybody chipped in and whoever hosted the party would buy a bottle of rye ... We never played cards, we never did anything, just talk! Past, present and future. We know each other's children, grandchildren. We go to anniversaries, weddings, funerals. It's wonderful! I hope you're as fortunate.¹⁹

Certainly, friendships were a strong motivational factor in the decisions of girls and women to play basketball on competitive teams year after year. Basketball gave these young women the opportunity to be together on a regular basis in a socially acceptable space, to develop and solidify their relationships with each other in an atmosphere of social acceptance.

Besides friendship and camaraderie, female basketball players in Victoria took pride in their athletic skills, and enjoyed the respect and recognition that they received because of their talents and successes. Audrey, now 73, saw one of the most important benefits from her participation in basketball and other sports as, "just to be recognized as a player ... I walk down the street, and someone says, 'here comes slugger now!' They all remember me."²⁰ Similarly, Isabel recalled that being good at sports made her more popular among her friends, and others who knew her as an accomplished athlete. And even today, Isabel encounters acquaintances who remember that she played basketball.²¹

When Doris's team, named for sponsor Cec's U-Drive, won the 1949 national Senior A Women's Basketball Championships at Victoria High School, this achievement

was met with considerable fanfare. She recalled that the fans in the community “couldn't believe that the Canadian Champs came to Vic High. It was packed. They thought that for a girls' game, when we went to the third game [and] won when Marg shot a free shot at the end of the game ... that was the most exciting thing of the whole championship.” After they won the trophy, Doris remembered that they “got a gold chain with a gold basketball on it [but] the mayor decided there wasn't enough done for these girls ... and we went down to the city hall and they had a reception for us there, and they presented us all with a corsage, and [the last of the remaining City of Victoria medals for returning war heroes]. They're sterling silver. And we had a banquet and a dance ... and we were the guests of honour.”²²

Doris remembered that championship and its ensuing celebrations clearly, and she still has her basketball pendant and inscribed City of Victoria war medal. She has also kept the letter she and her teammates received from the Mayor of Victoria commending them for their success. It is very likely that all of the members of that winning team gained an enormous sense of self-worth, as a result of their personal and team performances during the 1949 basketball championship, and the recognition they received afterwards. Their feelings of social acceptance would have been reinforced by their teammates, the spectators, and by the recognition they received from the community.

Some young women were able to use their higher status as members of the basketball team in order to gain special privileges. Sue recalled,

Probably because you're on winning teams, you got away with it a little more in school than other kids did, you know, if there was an event on and you wanted to

go to it, you'd go to the principal and tell him what you wanted to do, and he'd probably let you go because you're a basketball player or a softball player or you're an athlete.²³

Perhaps because she played almost a decade before Sue and basketball was not yet an acceptable reason for a young woman to miss classes, Doris had a different experience with her principal at Victoria High. She recalled,

In high school, I was playing for the Rookies and we had to go up to Courtenay for the Island Championships and ... I didn't go to school that Friday. Of course on Monday, my name was in the paper, my scoring so many points, and the principal had me down in his office, asking how come I had a letter from my mother saying I couldn't come to school when I had obviously been up Island playing basketball.²⁴

Newspapers certainly reported on girls' games, and there was significant coverage of the 1949 championships at Vic High. Doris remembered that, "in those days, the reporter always came and sat behind the bench or on the scoring table and then the radio station would announce the game [at the championship tournaments]."²⁵ Doris put together an extensive scrapbook comprised mostly of newspaper clippings about her games, as did other players, who took great pride in the recognition of their basketball accomplishments.²⁶ Dr. Norma Mickelson, in her eighties, still remembered her years with the Vic High basketball team well. In the Victoria High School's 125th anniversary souvenir program, Norma wrote:

Playing on one of the teams was an honour, and earning a big 'V' as a team member was a joy to many of us who had so little in those days. For me it was basketball and I still have my 'V.' I can remember hearing the crowd chant 'Come give a cheer for Victoria High,/ We never falter, we never die!'²⁷

Some girls and women enjoyed enormous support from their families during their basketball careers. Audrey kept a pile of newspaper articles about her sporting

accomplishments that were clipped by her mother, who herself had played fast-pitch baseball in the prairies in the 1920s. Audrey must have felt particular satisfaction in her busy mother's pride, as she was the sixth of thirteen children in a poor, working-class family. Audrey clearly remembered that her mother was able to come to only one basketball game during her ten-year career, and during that game Audrey fouled out.²⁸

Kathleen, who played in the 1940s and 1950s, is the daughter of Walter Yeamans who was a fixture in the Victoria sports community and coached girls' and women's basketball for more than 40 years, from the late 1920s until 1970. For Kathleen, basketball was a huge part of family life for as long as she can remember. Of her games, she remembered that, "The crowds were mostly family, but family was big. I don't think my mom ever missed a game ... My mother yelled a lot. And then there was another girl, and her mom came, and my mom and her yelled at each other every time ... We had a lot of laughs about my mom."²⁹

As indicated by Kathleen, Mrs. Charlotte Yeamans, who herself played basketball for the B.C. Telephone Company in the 1920s, was a very reliable supporter of her husband's basketball teams for the duration of his coaching career. Even if their own mothers could or would not come to games, Walter's girls could count on Charlotte to cheer them on with enthusiasm at every game her husband coached. Bette, who played basketball in the late 1950s and early 1960s, remembered that, "if you played for Walter, Charlotte was your champion, no matter what. It didn't matter if you were right or wrong, you were right in her eyes." Bette also recounted one instance at a game at UBC, when "Charlotte was yelling at the referee ... So she was yelling and screaming, and

Walter said, ‘Charlotte, get up in the corner!’ So she marched up to the farthest corner, and continued yelling. I never ever forgot that.”³⁰

The highly vocal support of Charlotte and others like her must have given many of Walter Yeamans’ athletes some extra confidence to play their game well, year after year. Surely there were not many instances in these working-class young women’s lives when their actions were cheered loudly in a public space, and certainly not by a woman. For those girls who thrived in this environment, there would have been few alternatives to basketball where they could enjoy such positive and exciting feedback. What’s more, many of the women who once experienced the cheers of Charlotte Yeamans went on to attend their own children’s basketball games with great enthusiasm in the sixties and seventies. For example, Mabel sheepishly related that her daughter often accused her of causing fouls in playoff games: “we thought the referee wasn’t too good ... [my daughter] claims that she got a penalty because I was yelling something.”³¹

Charlotte Yeamans would do more than come to games. She accompanied the teams on road trips, and she provided dinners in her home to those girls who lived too far away to go home between work or school and evening practices or games.³² Charlotte also provided other perks to the members of her husband’s teams, as Audrey remembered: “I’d work and go to their place for supper on Quadra ... and I always took [Charlotte] something, like maybe flowers ... and she’d say, ‘Okay [Audrey], every time you get over twenty points, I’ll buy you nylons,’ and boy I could get nylons free!”³³ Charlotte was still a staunch supporter of her husband’s teams when he coached for the University of Victoria women’s basketball team in the mid 1960s. Isabel, a member of

the Vikettes at this time, recalled Charlotte, then in her late sixties, as a remarkably supportive mother figure for the team. Isabel also remembered Charlotte's very vocal presence at "every practice and every game" the Vikettes played under the leadership of Walter Yeamans.³⁴

Charlotte and Walter Yeamans were not the only fixtures in women's basketball in Victoria in the mid-twentieth century. Bob Whyte also coached girls' basketball as well as softball, from the 1920s until the 1960s, and he was very much loved by all his athletes. The women who were coached by Bob Whyte remember him as a dedicated coach who went out of his way to pick up and drop off all the girls on his team so that they could come to every practice.³⁵

When asked about the most important benefits she got from playing basketball, Sue became very emotional. She stated that she learned "a philosophy, but that was from Bob. Love the game, but it's not the most important thing. Love yourself and do the best you can ... I don't think anybody affected my life the way he did ... Many of us, we became teachers, and it was because of Bob."³⁶ For Sue and others, Bob Whyte helped to make basketball much more than a game; Bob was instrumental in making basketball experiences a part of his athletes' identities, and a positive influence in their senses of self.

In an era when most competitive female basketball players in Victoria had very little money, both Bob Whyte and Walter Yeamans found ways to outfit their teams with uniforms and even shoes. Sue remembered, "our uniforms were made up of whatever [Bob Whyte] could scrounge."³⁷ Similarly, other women remembered that Yeamans had

provided their clothes and shoes out of his own pocket.³⁸ These acts of kindness were especially appreciated, as money was so tight for many athletes who could never have afforded their own uniforms.

For young athletes of lesser means, the uniforms, meals, rides to practice and games, and unwavering support provided by a coach meant a great deal, and allowed them the opportunity to pursue an activity that they enjoyed very much. Coaches were often seen as father figures, and are credited by many of the women as being major influences in their lives, both during and after they played basketball. Certainly, the bonds that developed between coaches (and their wives) and athletes kept the young women who played basketball in Victoria coming back year after year.

Another factor that contributed to young women's enjoyment of competitive basketball was the pleasure derived from trips to games out of town. There were a number of reasons why the athletes enjoyed traveling with their teammates, including the chance to see new places, the thrill of playing in front of a new crowd, the freedom of being out of town with a group of friends, and the opportunity to socialize with boys.

Many of the women who played basketball also played on other teams, which were generally limited to either softball or grass hockey, and their memories of traveling to tournaments include their experiences in all sports. Doris clearly remembered that her first train ride was from Victoria to Shawnigan Lake to play against the private school in a grass hockey game.³⁹ On a larger scale, Audrey recalled the bright lights and excitement when she and her softball team, "the Beavers," emerged from the tunnel

under a stadium in Phoenix, Arizona to play the main event against the top-ranked “Queens” in front of ten thousand fans.⁴⁰

Bette remembered that her trips with the basketball and softball teams were particularly exciting because her parents did not have the money to travel out of town as a family: “Oh yeah, for me it was [a big deal] ... because of my upbringing, we didn’t ever go on holidays, so to go away for a weekend was really big.”⁴¹ Bette was certainly not the only woman who thought trips with her sports teams were a big deal; nearly all of the other women interviewed grew up during the depression years of the 1930s and did not have the opportunity to travel often. Most women remembered their families as being working- or lower-class, and many told stories about how little they and their friends had while they were growing up. Travel out of town to basketball tournaments was usually achieved by piling as many girls as possible into the one or two cars available to them, as most of the athletes’ families did not have a vehicle. These weekend outings were extremely memorable and fun experiences for young women who rarely traveled outside of Victoria.

Of course, it was not just the thrill of travel and playing in new places that delighted the young women who earned the opportunity to stay over night in other towns. These young women went away and had exciting adventures with their friends! Audrey remembered that trips away were her chance to spend time with friends in the evenings instead of working at her part-time jobs. She said, “usually after a game, where would we go? You were usually busy every night, I was usually babysitting. So away, it was fun. As you got older and had a couple of dollars at least you felt you could do

something.”⁴² The women’s memories of these trips often did not even correspond with the location of the event, but rather with other, fun things that happened. Sue, for example, remembered going away as “huge, just a lot of fun. I don't remember where we were going, but one girl got in with this great big tin of chocolate cookies...”⁴³

Sometimes the adventures included comic misfortune, as Sue recalled:

One night, we got undressed and went asleep, and we got robbed of our engagement rings and boat tickets and everything. The next night we set it up so that if anybody came in, we’d catch him. We had the wardrobe door open with beer bottles along the top, so if he hit that, the bottles would crash. Well, [the coach] came in to say good night and hit the bottles, broke the glass, just a total mess!⁴⁴

Coaches had to deal with, among other things, booby-trapped rooms, huge tins of cookies, and athletes’ encounters with young men on trips out of town. Kathleen remembered her father, Walter Yeamans, being particularly irate when a few of his players decided to go on motorcycle rides with local boys before a game north of Victoria.⁴⁵ Sue recalled that part of the fun of trips included going to “find the boys that were also over” for a basketball tournament. Still, she insisted on the innocent nature of the relationships between the members of the boys’ and girls’ teams: “it was nothing sexually going on or anything like that, it was just a good time. We didn’t have much money, so there wasn’t much alcohol, because you couldn’t afford it.”⁴⁶

The promise of mingling with young men was a perk for many girls who won the opportunity to travel to away games. Ruth, now 68 years old, remembered that Victoria College would have an annual “UBC Invasion”. She recalls that, “all the [boys’ and girls’] teams would go, and we used to have the overnight ferry to Vancouver, downtown to downtown, so we’d party all night.”⁴⁷ For the girls who played on teams with now 72-

year-old Sue, travel with boys was a big part of being on the girls' basketball team.

She said, "We were king of the hill! We were with all the jocks. We went on a trip, and there was a bus that contained nothing but girls and boys! ... You got to meet the greatest guys!"⁴⁸ 79-year-old Mabel recalled that "we sort of mingled with the boys" and that she enjoyed watching the boys' basketball games. Mabel also clearly remembered being carried up the stairs by her tall, attractive coach after she injured her ankle in a basketball game in Vancouver.⁴⁹ For Elizabeth, who is now 84 years old, traveling with boys was a memorable and unique experience; she said, "We went to Penticton on a bus tour with boys teams!"⁵⁰

Travel away from Victoria with basketball and other sports teams gave the young female athletes of Victoria throughout the mid-twentieth century unforgettable experiences, and it was in part the promise of travel that kept young women playing competitive basketball throughout their teenaged years and into their twenties. Many women remember that their teams strove to win basketball games simply in order to gain the privilege of traveling out of town to represent the city at regional tournaments. When recounting the excitement and glory of winning the national championships, Doris could not help but lament that, because the event was held in Victoria, "we didn't get any traveling out of it."⁵¹ For the girls whose parents did not have the money to go on vacations out of town, traveling to other cities with a basketball team offered special excitement and joy. That they were able to share the excitement with their friends on the team, and with the boys they met while out of town, made their experiences all the more fun.

Basketball is a sport that requires stamina, skill, and teamwork. Competitive, “boys’ rules” basketball also demands a certain amount of aggression of its athletes, as well as a limited amount of physical contact with players on the opposing team. Whether or not they readily admit it today, the young women who played competitive basketball in Victoria in the middle of the twentieth century must have enjoyed the physicality of the game they played enough to keep playing it year after year. And even if they did not see any wider implications of what they were doing on the basketball court in front of spectators, these young athletes were in fact pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable for female bodies to be doing in a public space. In doing so, they entered into an ongoing negotiation about the nature of femininity and acceptable female behaviour in this period. Although there were dominant discourses about femininity in the mid-twentieth century—and especially in the post-war period—that included the “lady-like” ideals of female grace, beauty, morality, and utility in the role of wife and mother, there were also women who challenged those ideals in myriad ways. Historian Valerie Korinek, for example, has shown that the readers of *Chatelaine* magazine were active in resisting, criticizing and re-shaping post-war notions of the ideal homemaker, and notes that there was a “general dissonance in postwar society over the appropriate roles of women.”⁵² Similarly, competitive female basketball players were part of the continual re-working of femininity with regard to physicality, competitiveness and athleticism.

When thinking about her teammates, Kathleen recalled that, “we were all ladies, and we tried very hard to be that, but there weren’t a lot of ladylike people who played

basketball. I mean you had to have a certain tenacity ... you were lost if you didn't."⁵³ 51

It seems that for many of the women who played basketball in Victoria in the mid-twentieth century, being a "lady" and being "lady-like" were two different things.

Possibly, these young women associated social class with being "lady-like." Audrey recalled that the lady-like girls in her high school "never even spoke to me because they were above my thing, they were ladies, I guess ... they dressed better, cashmere sweaters and things like that."⁵⁴ While Audrey was never concerned about being seen as tomboyish because of her involvement in sports, Doris wished to avoid being thought of as a jock because she played basketball. In order for Doris and her teammates to avoid the stigma of being a "jock," she said, "we just played our game, and we tried to act like ladies at all times."⁵⁵ Similarly, being a lady on the court was not problematic for Mabel. She recalled that "we behaved ourselves ... I don't remember a lot of fouls, I don't remember any fights between girls. I basically just remember everybody enjoying and working hard at it."⁵⁶

The oldest woman interviewed, Elizabeth, recalls that, "I guess I was tomboyish maybe ... I loved sports, I never thought—and I met nice boys through basketball." Being seen as tomboyish was not a big worry for Elizabeth, but she also pointed out that basketball "wasn't that rough then."⁵⁷ For her, the idea of "win at all costs ... wasn't that important," and perhaps as a result, she does not remember the game being played very aggressively in the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁵⁸ This description of girls' basketball does not necessarily correspond with a newspaper report about a game in which Elizabeth scored four points against the Vancouver I.X.L's. The game was being played for the

British Columbia Championship trophy and for the right to travel across the country to play for the national championship in 1941. In a *Daily Colonist* article entitled, “Vancouver Girls Defeat Victoria In Final Tussle,” it was reported that “the teams went at it hammer-and-tongs from the starting whistle. It was the first loss for the (Victoria) Cardinals in 20 games, but they went down fighting in one of the hardest-fought last quarters seen on a basketball floor this season.”⁵⁹

Other women did remember the basketball games that they played as being rough and aggressive. One particular instance involving unnecessarily rough play stood out in Audrey’s memory: “the only one I could have clouted was in Courtenay—I went up for a shot and the gal hit me right in the back and I had to come home laying flat across the seat of the car ... I was getting a lot of points and I guess she was going to stop me and she did.”⁶⁰ Likewise, Kathleen believed that “I really think that women were very competitive ... I saw girls fisticuff at one point ... it was just as aggressive as it is now.” When asked about the nature of the roughness she experienced, she explained, “there was a lot of pushing and shoving, the girls that played what they call the post now, the other one pulling their shorts. It wasn’t ladylike at all, I mean basketball isn’t a ladylike game ... you shouldn’t be out there if you’re not [aggressive].”⁶¹ Audrey remembered that she “pulled shorts against these tall girls.”⁶² Likewise, Doris recalled that “we always used our elbows to our advantage,” though this was partially because her coach told his athletes to hold up their elbows to protect their breasts⁶³ (apparently he was not concerned about the safety of the chests of the opposing teams).

After playing against a team from Toronto for the national championships, Doris remembered that “the team from there said that the team from Victoria plays like a bunch of boys.”⁶⁴ For Doris, this comment indicated that her team’s style of play was more skilled, and more aggressive, than the Eastern teams. When asked whether she played the same as the male basketball players of her era, Bette recalled that, “Yes, maybe a little tougher, I was.”⁶⁵ Sue remembered wearing boys’ basketball uniforms “with little fly fronts and padding on the hips” at one point in her basketball career, though they later switched to boys’ singlets with blouses underneath. And when asked if her skill level was similar to that of the boys’ teams she sometimes practiced against, Sue simply replied, “Yes.”⁶⁶ Still, when considering how the people in the crowd expected women to play basketball, Doris said, “I think they figured we were a step below the boys ... trouble with the women of the world.”⁶⁷

Being a girl in mid-twentieth-century Victoria did not mean that you had to play girls’ rules basketball, as it did in many other parts of North America. In fact, one thing that all the women interviewed adamantly agreed on was that girls’ rules, which were designed to make basketball slower, less aggressive and less physically demanding for female players, were not much fun, and these young women made their feeling known about their preference for boys’ rules. Generally, playing girls’ rules in Victoria meant that there were six players on the floor per team, comprised of three guards and three forwards who each were limited to two thirds of the court. Sue recalled that “the game starts with the ball being thrown in by the umpire to the centre forward ... After the basket was scored it was taken off to the side and the referee threw it back in to the

opposing centre, so there was all this stoppage of play. You could only dribble the ball twice.”⁶⁸ There were also rules to limit the roughness of the game. For example, players were not allowed to run through the outstretched arms of their opponents.

When Ruth arrived at Vic High in 1950, she refused to play basketball for the school team after realizing that she would have to play girls’ rules after having played boys’ rules at her elementary school. She remembered that, “what I didn’t like about [girls’ rules] was you could only play two thirds of the floor. I didn’t want to play all defense—I was a natural shooter!”⁶⁹ Kathleen remembered that girls’ rules were “just a nightmare.”⁷⁰ Likewise, Audrey recalled that girls’ rules “were no fun as far as I was concerned, but we did it well. We were fast and furious.”⁷¹ Sue remembered having to play girls’ rules for certain tournaments at Vic High and running into problems when they accidentally “took that third bounce or crossed the line.” She remembered, “if you were a guard, basically you couldn’t get close enough to that two-thirds line to shoot. In the middle, there were twelve players running around, which was bizarre.”⁷²

The young women who played city-league basketball in Victoria saw girls’ rules basketball as strange, limiting, and inferior to boys’ rules. In deciding to play in the city league, they chose to play the type of game that allowed them to be more physical and more aggressive on the court. In effect they were implicitly challenging the efforts of North American physical educators to enforce rules for basketball that were supposedly more suitable to the skills and weaknesses of girls.

Some women had the opportunity to test their skills against boys' teams during fun practices, or at outdoor hoops. Sue recalled playing against boys, usually with humorous results:

There was one boy ... we called him Stretch, and the only way to stop him was to pull his shorts down! The boys ... didn't know what to do with us. At that time, we were girls, and we could do anything to them, and they couldn't do anything back ... they were even afraid to get too close to us ... If you fell on the floor, they wouldn't fall to get the ball, because they might touch you, and you got it. So you usually won, one way or another.⁷³

It seems that young women could enter a basketball court and play like boys, but still had to be treated like ladies by their male peers, at least in Sue's sporting community in the late 1940s and early fifties. The basketball court in fact created a strange space within which young women were free to step outside of their prescribed female roles, and act like boys for a prescribed period of time. While playing basketball, even against boys, young women were allowed to elbow each other, push each other around, sweat, get angry, and strive to win at a physical contest. When they stepped off the court, these same young women were attractive and outstanding members of their communities. Indeed, even if these girls were not considered to be real "ladies," or members of the higher social classes, they still were expected to be feminine in their appearance and behaviour in their daily activities. M. Ann Hall writes that in the forties and fifties, "Strength, muscles and beauty were strangely incompatible, and, when present, femininity and womanliness needed to be constantly reasserted."⁷⁴ For the basketball players of Victoria in this era, maintaining a feminine appearance was an ongoing task.

Audrey, by all accounts a great athlete, went to great lengths to continue a relationship with a boy who disapproved of her involvement in a local softball team. She would bring nice clothes to change into after practice before racing off to meet him to watch a lacrosse game, knowing that he would never expect that she could have fit both events into one evening.⁷⁵ Mabel, also a fierce competitor, remembered herself and her teammates taking great care to look nice at all times, and to act as ladies. She recalled that the whole team would take their time in the locker room after games to shower and do their hair, makeup, and dress up for evenings on the town. She also remembered being “dressed to the nines” whenever the team traveled.⁷⁶

Kathleen recalled her teammates being “very conscious of their looks,” and they would usually go up to the showers at Victoria High School after games to do their hair and get dressed properly before doing anything else that evening.⁷⁷ Kathleen supposed that her father, Walter Yeamans, was also conscious of the feminine side of his athletes. Walter Yeamans had a series of photographs taken of his athletes in about 1950, showing the young women in their satin uniforms while doing things that they might enjoy during their free time. Individual shots show one glamorous girl talking on the phone, another reading a magazine. One athlete is pictured, already married and after the birth of her first son, playing cards at a table, and one of her teammates is knitting (see Figure 3.1).

Walter Yeamans’ intentions in hiring a photographer to take these pictures may never be known, but the results are humorous. When Kathleen showed the photos, she said, “Isn’t that a hoot?”⁷⁸ But what makes the pictures funny isn’t that the young women are in their uniforms, or that they are talking on the phone or knitting. Rather, it



Figure 3.1

is the juxtaposition of a woman sporting an (outdated) athletic uniform performing a traditionally feminine leisure activity in a home setting that makes people chuckle. Muriel explained that, in her experience of coaching from the 1950s on, an athlete's personality undergoes significant change when she puts on her uniform. Muriel said, "it starts when they go into the change room to get changed into their uniforms ... Their attitude changes and their thoughts change ... they forget the outside world and come into the world of basketball."⁷⁹ A woman knitting or talking on the phone should not be wearing a basketball uniform, but rather she should be focusing on her sport.

Many young women who played basketball in the mid-twentieth century in Victoria had to have two different personalities: the regular girl, and the aggressive ball-player. For some women, this dual version of themselves was relatively easy to reconcile. Sue recalled that, "I'm aggressive everywhere, so it doesn't matter" that her level of aggression was high on the basketball court.⁸⁰ Elizabeth recalled that the idea of winning at all costs was not particularly important to her, and she did not feel that her personality was altered when she played basketball.⁸¹ Mabel also thought that her personality did not change when she was on the basketball court, but she added that, "maybe somebody else would see me that way."⁸²

Kathleen felt that her personality changed very much on the basketball court, and that she was a "big competitor."⁸³ Similarly, Bette said that "I have a very competitive streak in me, and it ends when I walk off the floor ... when I'm out there, look out!"⁸⁴ Audrey recalled that one of her teammates would often get fouls because she "used to

swear a lot” on the basketball court.⁸⁵ Certainly, it is unlikely that this young woman would have been swearing loudly in other contexts of her life.

Whether or not these women’s personalities actually changed while they were playing basketball may be subject to debate, but it is undeniable that they were practicing a specific set of skills, and that when they played a game in front of spectators they demonstrated their ability to perform these skills in a uniquely stressful and competitive context. Notably, the skills needed to play basketball were entirely different from those required to act like a lady. When the game was over, these same young women would go to the locker rooms and do their hair, put on make-up, and dress like their female peers in order to reaffirm their identities as young women.

Significantly, several of the women interviewed felt that participation in sports had in fact changed their personalities and made them more confident. Bette recalled that, “sports in general have taught me quite a lot. They have made me believe in myself. Even as a child, I tended to be quiet ... sports have taught me to believe in me, that if I don’t believe I’m good, nobody else will.”⁸⁶ Similarly, Mabel felt that her success as a basketball player gave her feelings of accomplishment that contributed to increased self-esteem.⁸⁷ Ruth agreed: “I always say what I think ... most of the people I’ve known who played sports don’t take a back seat ... that’s the kind of thing we got from just being aware of who we were, we weren’t inferior to anyone.”⁸⁸ Kathleen, who maintained that her personality did change on the basketball court, also felt that, “I’m the same in everything. I think when you’ve done a lot of sports, you want to excel and to compete.”⁸⁹ Playing basketball gave some women a sense of self worth that they were

unable to obtain anywhere else in mid-twentieth century Victoria. For some, this heightened self-confidence and assertiveness may have first developed as a separate personality that came out only on the basketball court. As time went on, being confident in everyday life may have come naturally to women who played basketball.

When women put on a basketball uniform for a city-league team in Victoria in the mid-twentieth century, they would walk onto a basketball court and play as aggressively as a boy would. Audrey recalled that when she was a young girl, she “wanted to BE a boy ... because they got to do things that I couldn’t.”⁹⁰ On the basketball court or the softball field or the track, in some ways, she *could* be a boy, if only temporarily, and she was admired for her sports successes. Arguably, the basketball court was one of the few places where these young women could transcend, or subvert, the gender norms of their society. For the girls and women who played basketball, this subversion was not only tolerated, but admired by fans, parents, teachers, and news reporters. The gender boundaries expanded by female basketball players constituted, in historian Joy Parr’s words, a “briskly accommodating resistance”⁹¹ against the norms of feminine conduct. These young women took an activity that was available to them—basketball—and altered their behaviour to better play the game, just as they re-shaped the game to fit their needs.

Doris recalled that the coaches would accept absences from practice, “if we weren’t feeling very good with the monthly things,” though she always played while she was menstruating.⁹² Similarly, Kathleen remembered having terrible cramps before playing basketball, and feeling much better after a game or practice as a result of the

exercise.⁹³ Sue told the following story regarding the monthly inconveniences of her teammates:

At that time your period was a pain in the butt. It was before the use of many of the things (that later became available), and it was quite common for somebody to say, 'I gotta get to the bathroom!' We'd have to get her up there and get her changed ... all we had were pads, and they were not necessarily the greatest things when you were playing sports.⁹⁴

Thus, even menstruation, which for most young woman throughout the twentieth century has been an intensely personal and private bodily function, became part of regular discourse within the basketball team and even a source of humour as teammates helped each other to deal with the by-products of being a female athlete while their coaches (and perhaps spectators) were forced to wait.

For some women, the basketball team's surroundings may have provided one of the few spaces in the mid-twentieth century where they could be open about their sexual orientation. Sue recalled that her teammates were "accepting of all the differences. There was lesbians on the team, and completely acceptable, which was unbelievable in the fifties. They didn't flaunt it or anything else, it was an accepted thing."⁹⁵ While this was one of only a few direct references to lesbianism on a basketball team, several women remember the existence of same-sex relationships on their softball teams. Audrey, for example, remembered the relationship between two women on her softball team with nonchalance: "we knew that they were lezzies, but it didn't bother me."⁹⁶ Kathleen recalled the prevailing attitude about sexual orientation on the softball team as being, "they're girls, they're players. That's all you worried about."⁹⁷ One woman even recalled being "chased down the streets of Nanaimo by a black ball player from Chicago

... she was a lezzie and she wanted me!”⁹⁸ For her, this was un-wanted attention, but in retrospect she thought it was a funny—rather than disturbing—story. For some young women, getting to meet open lesbians from other parts of North America must have been an exciting and perhaps liberating element of team sports.

It is difficult to know the extent to which lesbianism was accepted within basketball teams in general; it probably varied from team to team and from year to year. Ruth recalled that she was “aware of people who were probably lesbians, but nobody in my age group talks about it.”⁹⁹ This fits with historian M. Ann Hall’s account of former female athletes she interviewed who voiced a broad range of opinions about the existence and acceptance of lesbians on sports teams. She writes, “on one point they all agree—no one talked about it.”¹⁰⁰

Certainly, not all women interviewed would have been comfortable talking to an interviewer about lesbianism among their teammates, even if they knew of its existence. Still, it is likely that basketball provided a particularly safe space for some young lesbians who wished to avoid the stigma of playing un-feminine sports. Kathleen remembered that bowling was never considered a feminine thing to do, but that basketball was “absolutely” a normal thing for girls to be doing.¹⁰¹ Audrey recalled that her boyfriend at the time disapproved of her playing softball, but that “Basketball, he used to come and watch. It was okay.”¹⁰² Lois Bryson, author of *Strong Women, Deep Closets*, argues that generally in the 1950s in North America, both basketball and softball games “were relatively safe social gathering places” for homosexual athletes who did not wish the stigma of being labeled a lesbian, in contrast to the danger of attending non-sport related

lesbian gatherings at gay bars or private homes.¹⁰³ Bryson writes, “Sport became a haven where they could meet other lesbians in an atmosphere of relative comfort and safety.”¹⁰⁴

Victoria’s female basketball players in the mid-twentieth century were not usually suspected of being sexual “deviants” in the mid-twentieth century. Basketball, in part because of its development as a sport suitable for women in Victoria, was an accepted arena of female participation, despite the fast and aggressive nature of the game in women’s competitive leagues. Whether or not the spectators, coaches or referees were aware of it, when women played basketball in mid-twentieth century Victoria, it is likely that the court became a female-dominated and positive space for a number of lesbian athletes.

While it is certain that the women who played basketball in mid-twentieth century Victoria played aggressively and competitively, most of these women recall that, because they were women, they displayed particularly good sportsmanship during their games. When remembering their years as basketball players, a number of women pointed out that they were not primarily concerned with winning, but with playing a good game. Whether or not this was always the case, many of the women who played basketball in mid-twentieth century Victoria felt that when they were on the basketball court there was no real hostility towards the opposing team, and that victory was not always as important as playing well. The basketball court became more a friendly and welcoming yet highly competitive place for the women who played on it.

When Doris talked about the trophy-winning game between Victoria and Toronto for the national Senior-A women's title, she recalled that her team won easily because her opponents "didn't have the skills." Realizing the tone of her statement, she quickly corrected herself, saying, "They were great ... you get a lot of friends that way, and a lot of friends that last a long time too."¹⁰⁵

When Sue remembered a particular year of her basketball career, she was clear that she did not (outwardly) associate the bulk of her memories with winning or losing: "I don't know whether we won the BC's or not. It didn't matter. I'm not that kind of person."¹⁰⁶ And Elizabeth, remembering her teammates from the thirties and forties, felt that "they were all nice personalities," but that, unfortunately, "maybe the odd one wanted to score more."¹⁰⁷ These women were clear that scoring and winning were not the most important part of their basketball experiences, nor should they have been. For them, basketball was an activity to be enjoyed regardless of the outcome of the game.

For nearly all the women interviewed, good sportsmanship was an integral part of their basketball experiences. Sue remembered a very friendly rivalry between the teams coached by Bob Whyte and the teams under Walter Yeamans. She said, "We played against each other all our lives, and yet there wasn't any animosity. If one got hurt, the other one picked her up. I mean, it was rough, but it didn't go off the court. It was great."¹⁰⁸ Audrey, a very competitive athlete in her youth, felt that "none of us were (poor sportswomen) ... I thought I was a good sport ... you've gotta learn how to lose before you can ever win and that's it. I can lose and feel good about it, as long as you did the best you can, that's all you can do."¹⁰⁹ Isabel recalled that basketball, especially in

the church league, was almost “too nice” in that everyone was extremely sportsmanlike and friendly. She felt that the athletes she played with “wanted to win, but would never play dirty,” in part because they were representing their church or school at basketball games.¹¹⁰

Even Dave remembered the good conduct of the female basketball players he refereed in the mid-twentieth century. When asked about how the athletes could act both as ladies and as ball players, he recalled that, “I guess they would say to themselves, I’m gonna act as a lady as well as a ball player and not change my attitude.” For Dave, being a lady meant being very sportsmanlike, and he appreciated the words of thanks he often received from female players after their games.¹¹¹

It is extremely difficult to determine exactly what it meant to be a “lady” in mid-twentieth century Victoria; in the context of basketball, ladies came in different shapes and sizes. Just as Dave remembered female athletes being very sportsmanlike, he also recalled that they “played just like a man would. If they got hurt, they’d take their lumps just like the men.”¹¹² Female athletes were able to create a friendly and positive space where they were comfortable playing basketball. At the same time they were, by most accounts, able to play like men: aggressively, physically, and with considerable skill. On the basketball court, young women were allowed to temporarily transcend their gender roles in a space where they felt they belonged. In all of this, they found joy.

Simple enjoyment derived from playing basketball was a major factor in young women’s decisions to play with teams, year after year. Although women’s basketball may have answered a complex of needs and desires, participation in basketball was not

complicated or conflicted for the women who played. Rather, at the time and in hindsight, women played basketball because they had fun on the court and with the team.

Audrey remembered being very young when she and her sisters and friends from the Centennial United Church first put together a basketball team, even though the church league was not very lively at that point. She recalled that, “it was nothing ... you weren’t going to get a cup or anything, it was just a joyful thing.”¹¹³ When Bette thought about her basketball-playing years, she reminisced that she played primarily for “just enjoyment, pleasure ... I just liked doing it. I liked the swish as the ball goes through the net.”¹¹⁴ For Kathleen, the motivation to play basketball continued because “it was fun and we were together and we loved to play.”¹¹⁵ Likewise, Elizabeth said that “I played because I liked it so much. I loved sports.”¹¹⁶

Ruth, who saw basketball as her “all-time favourite sport,” played in the masters’ league well into her forties. She recalled that, “I liked the activity ... just the sheer doing it.”¹¹⁷ Isabel remembered that she loved basketball so much that when her doctor discovered a heart murmur, she said to her mother, “if I couldn’t play sports, I might as well die.”¹¹⁸ And Dave felt that the girls he refereed fifty years ago played “just for the enjoyment of playing the game,” as well as for the thrill of trying to win.¹¹⁹ Indeed, even if, from a historical perspective, basketball for women was layered with meaning and had the potential to subvert gender norms, the women who played basketball were primarily there just to have fun.

Basketball was, for the young women who played it throughout the twentieth century, a highly physical and technical game. There is little about the way basketball is played that can be associated with traditionally feminine behaviour. A respected basketball player is aggressive with her opponents on the court, she is skilled with the ball, and she is physically fit and strong. The excitement of competition must be controlled and channeled into effective play, and the athlete must always be fully aware of her body. Competitive basketball players experienced their bodies differently as a result of their participation in the sport. And part of enjoying the game of basketball was a result of the players having the opportunity to use and experience their bodies in the context of competitive sport. Basketball afforded young women the rare opportunity to be physically active and aggressive in a way that was socially acceptable. The basketball court for these women signified a liminal, in-between space, where maintaining gender-appropriate behaviour was temporarily unimportant, and fans looked on and cheered. That young women found great enjoyment in playing basketball is indicative of the fact that they liked having this opportunity to be physically active in a competitive setting with other young women, to demonstrate their skills against an opponent. Furthermore, their enjoyment of basketball must have been heightened because of the lack of other opportunities for girls and women to act in such a manner. Basketball provided a unique opportunity for young women in Victoria—especially working-class young women—to play a challenging and physical game in the mid-twentieth century.

Women found joy in many aspects of being part of the basketball team. They enjoyed the lasting friendships with each other and bonds with their coaches, they took

pride in the respect and recognition they received for their accomplishments from their community, and they loved the opportunity to travel to different towns and cities and meet a variety of people. When they were off the basketball court, they were attentive to the feminine ideals of their era and acted as most young women of their era did, but when they played basketball, they were temporarily free to take on a different, less inhibited and more competitive personality. And whether they were in practice, in a game, in the locker room or on a trip, the young women on a basketball team had the opportunity to dominate the space they occupied. These basketball players successfully negotiated a place for themselves in their community as competitive athletes *and* young women, and they were applauded for their accomplishments. In this era when young women were supposed to be preparing for their adult lives as wives and mothers, basketball gave some young women the opportunity to exercise a little more freedom than their friends who were not on basketball teams. Their efforts on (and off) the basketball court in turn helped to make the sport acceptable for the next generation of girls who wanted to play.

Notes

¹ Only one of the women interviewed can remember watching women's basketball games as a girl. She recalled, "There was one girl specifically ... Oh, I just thought she was just IT, I really did. She was out of the ordinary." Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.

² Alison Prentice, et. al., "Work: From the Bren Gun Girl to the Electronic Scanner," in Canadian Women: A History 2nd edition (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 341-377.

³ M. Ann Hall, The Girl and the Game (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 111.

⁴ Hall, The Girl and the Game, 109-110.

⁵ All but one of the women interviewed had children. Only one continued to play competitive basketball after her first child was born. Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004. Nearly all worked outside the home throughout their lives.

⁶ Allen Guttman, "The Victorian Age: Debility and Strength," in Women's Sports: A History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 85-105.

⁷ Names have been changed.

⁸ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.

⁹ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.

¹⁰ Interview, Victoria, 3 June 2004.

¹¹ Interview, Victoria, 30 April 2004.

¹² Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.

¹³ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.

¹⁴ Donald J. Mrozek, "The 'Amazon' and the American 'Lady': Sexual Fears of Women as Athletes," in From Fair Sex to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras, eds. J.A. Mangan and Roberta Park (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 282-298, 287.

¹⁵ Mrozek, "The 'Amazon' and the American 'Lady'," 292.

¹⁶ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.

¹⁷ Interview, Victoria, 16 April, 2004.

¹⁸ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.

¹⁹ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.

²⁰ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.

-
- ²¹ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ²² Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ²³ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ²⁴ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ²⁵ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ²⁶ Interviews, Victoria, 4 April 2004; Victoria, 15 April 2004. Also from Victoria Sports Hall of Fame Archives, Iona Worthington File.
- ²⁷ Norma Mickelson, "Message from the University of Victoria," in Vic High 125 Souvenir Program, ed. Cleeve Dheenshaw (4-5 May 2001), 11.
- ²⁸ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ²⁹ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ³⁰ Interview, Victoria, 4 May 2004.
- ³¹ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ³² Interviews, Victoria, 16 April 2004; Victoria, 4 May 2004; Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ³³ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ³⁴ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ³⁵ Interviews, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004; Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ³⁶ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ³⁷ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ³⁸ Interviews, Victoria, 16 April 2004; Victoria, 4 May 2004; Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ³⁹ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁴⁰ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁴¹ Interview, Victoria, 4 May 2004.
- ⁴² Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁴³ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁴⁴ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.

-
- ⁴⁵ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁴⁶ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁴⁷ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ⁴⁸ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁴⁹ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ⁵⁰ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.
- ⁵¹ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁵² Valerie J. Korinek, "'Mrs. Chatelaine' vs. 'Mrs. Slob': Contestants, Correspondents and the *Chatelaine* Community in Action, 1961-1969," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, 7 (1996): 251-275, 253.
- ⁵³ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁵⁴ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁵⁵ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁵⁶ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ⁵⁷ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.
- ⁵⁸ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.
- ⁵⁹ "Vancouver Girls Defeat Victoria in Final Tussle," Daily Colonist, 21 March 1941, 12.
- ⁶⁰ Interview, Colwood, 12 May, 2004.
- ⁶¹ Interview, Victoria, 16 April, 2004.
- ⁶² Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁶³ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁶⁴ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁶⁵ Interview, Victoria, 4 May 2004.
- ⁶⁶ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁶⁷ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁶⁸ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.

-
- ⁶⁹ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ⁷⁰ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁷¹ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁷² Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁷³ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁷⁴ Hall, The Girl and the Game, 111.
- ⁷⁵ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁷⁶ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ⁷⁷ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁷⁸ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁷⁹ Interview, Victoria, 3 June 2004.
- ⁸⁰ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁸¹ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.
- ⁸² Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ⁸³ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁸⁴ Interview, Victoria, 4 May 2004.
- ⁸⁵ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁸⁶ Interview, Victoria, 4 May 2004.
- ⁸⁷ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ⁸⁸ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ⁸⁹ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁹⁰ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁹¹ Joy Parr, Domestic Goods (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 15.
- ⁹² Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁹³ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁹⁴ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.

-
- ⁹⁵ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ⁹⁶ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁹⁷ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁹⁸ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ⁹⁹ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ¹⁰⁰ Hall, The Girl and The Game, 123.
- ¹⁰¹ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ¹⁰² Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ¹⁰³ Kathleen Griffin, Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport (Windsor: Human Kinetics, 1998), 39-40.
- ¹⁰⁴ Griffin, Strong Women, Deep Closets, 40-41.
- ¹⁰⁵ Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ¹⁰⁶ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ¹⁰⁷ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.
- ¹⁰⁸ Interview, Victoria, 5 May 2004.
- ¹⁰⁹ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ¹¹⁰ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ¹¹¹ Interview, Victoria, 2 April 2004.
- ¹¹² Interview, Victoria, 2 April 2004.
- ¹¹³ Interview, Colwood, 12 May 2004.
- ¹¹⁴ Interview, Victoria, 4 May 2004.
- ¹¹⁵ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ¹¹⁶ Interview, Victoria, 4 April 2004.
- ¹¹⁷ Interview, Victoria, 10 June 2004.
- ¹¹⁸ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ¹¹⁹ Interview, Victoria, 2 April 2004.

Chapter 4

Observers and Observed

Sports anthropologist Noel Dyck writes that “[w]hat athletes exhibit in games and other competitive events and what spectators watch and celebrate are embodied sport techniques that unite the private realm of everyday body practices with the public world of shared performances.”¹ When women stepped onto the basketball court for a game in mid-twentieth century Victoria, they entered a unique and liminal space where the personal and private act of physical exertion occurred in a public space in front of spectators. In this space, the athletes were allowed and expected to behave simultaneously as “sportsman-like” ladies and as aggressive, highly-skilled ball players.

While it is clear that the basketball court was a space where acceptable behaviours and appearances for female players were constantly being negotiated and re-defined throughout the twentieth century in Victoria, it is often difficult to determine who was doing the negotiating, and what, exactly, was being re-defined. Noel Dyck points out that “since athletic performances are primarily non-verbal, their description and analysis remain elusive matters for scholars.”² As a historian, even sports performances are inaccessible, and analysis needs to come from other sources.

Basketball has been played by girls and women in Victoria since the turn of the twentieth century, and local newspapers reported on their games fairly consistently. Records have also been left in the form of personal scrapbooks, school yearbooks, and countless team photographs. In photographs, it is possible to see how female basketball players dressed, and how their looks and uniforms changed over the years. In other

records, it is evident that a number of Victoria organizations strongly supported basketball for girls and young women, including schools, churches, and small and large businesses. It is also evident that girls and women were joining basketball teams—and staying on these teams for years—throughout the twentieth century. The continued existence and celebration of women’s basketball throughout the twentieth century indicates the existence of a successful negotiation between the women who played basketball and the members of the community who supported them. For both observers and observed, women’s basketball in Victoria was deemed an acceptable and even beneficial activity, despite the sport’s competitive and physical nature.

“Your body is your autobiography,” wrote Dorothy Nye in her 1936 book entitled, *New Bodies for Old: Why, Where, and How to Exercise for Figure, Beauty and Health*.³ Ms. Nye provided her readers with detailed instructions and numerous exercises to achieve their new and improved bodies—and, ostensibly, their autobiographies. She also offered an extensive “Chart of Correct Proportions,” that included the height and corresponding weight, bust, waist, hips, neck, arm, thigh, and calf measurements of the ideal woman.⁴ The new body, Nye argued, should be strong, “[y]et so perfect are its proportions that it gives no impression of being muscular.”⁵ For her, fitness was not to interfere with the ideals of femininity, but was supposed to support the role of wife and mother. Ms. Nye designed a program that could be practised in the privacy of the home, and was intended to “carry over into everything that we do, from sweeping a room or lifting the baby, into walking, dancing, and all sports.”⁶

New Bodies for Old, it seems, was a widely read book in North America in the

1930s and beyond. Revised and re-printed well into the forties, Dorothy Nye's exercises could even be found in the curriculum library of the Department of Education in Victoria, B.C. Simply, her book made sense to readers who wanted women to be beautiful and healthy in order to perform "traditionally" feminine tasks with grace and ease. Certainly, Nye's vision of a stronger female population did not make her a revolutionary. Rather, she articulated a set of ideals and created a program that women of her era who wanted to be thinner, stronger and more attractive could adhere to. Like the readers of *Chatelaine* magazine in the 1950s who bought into "the fantasy of transformation" based on the advice of beauty experts,⁷ Nye's readers also believed that a regime of physical exercise could improve their lives. As Valerie Korinek asserts with reference to the "makeover mania" of the 1950s and 1960s, "women's 'natural assets' were all visual—skin, face, posture, figure—and the tools of maximizing these assets were makeup, exercises, and beauty regimes (creams, hair colouring, astringents). Intellect and education were not part of the beauty equation."⁸

The notion of the body as autobiography, as reflection—or spectacle—of the internal self, is particularly relevant to the history of women engaged in sport and physical activity. Likewise is the idea of the body as malleable entity, although it is important to note that bodies and autobiographies are always created—and negotiated—in the context of the society in which they exist. Michel Foucault points out that the eighteenth-century witnessed the development of training for soldiers. He postulated that whereas in previous years, men who already had the physical attributes of a soldier would be recruited for service, the conviction arose that any man could be trained and shaped into the ideal soldier. He wrote, "the soldier has become something that can be made; out

of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed.”⁹ It is not difficult to apply Foucault’s analysis to sporting situations, although Foucault’s analysis does not leave very much room for the agency of the individual soldier. Still, just as “one has ‘got rid of the peasant’ and given him ‘the air of a soldier’,”¹⁰ so too might one eliminate the image of an over-weight and unattractive woman, creating in her place a poised, graceful and healthy lady. In a passage that strangely echoes Foucault, Dorothy Nye points out to her female readership that “women actually build their bodies as they live. Habits of diet, work, recreation, exercise, even mental habits, mould the body. They are as all-powerful as the hand of the sculptor on clay. Let’s see how you have fashioned yours.”¹¹

The connection between body and biography are quite clear when considering the transformation of the peasant into the soldier; the new recruit would quickly become defined by his role within an army, and he would begin an entirely new chapter in his life. To onlookers, he would not display the image of a peasant, but that of a well-disciplined soldier and his new career would be inscribed on his body in terms of his carriage, his musculature, and his uniform. But what about the exercising woman in the 1930s? Would her new body bring about a new life?

While Dorothy Nye’s program for physical fitness may not have drastically affected the course of life for very many women, she most certainly contributed to—and was influenced by—an ongoing debate about the appropriateness of sport and physical activity for women. Historian Helen Lenskyj points to an increased focus in women’s magazines in the 1920s on the positive effects of exercise on health and beauty, under titles such as “Your Figure and Your Health”, “Exercising for the New Silhouette” and

Stretch and Stretch Again”.¹² While this promotion of physical activity as a way to improve the female figure continued into the 1960s and beyond, competitive sport often fell outside the range of socially acceptable physical activities available to women. Still, during the period that Dorothy Nye was promoting a program of physical fitness “for Figure, Beauty and Health,” some of her female contemporaries were participating in competitive sport. Many were introduced to sports such as basketball and field hockey in the physical education programs at their schools, and some women continued to be active in recreational and competitive sports leagues long after their school days were over.

It would seem that the products of physical activity might comprise a greater portion of the autobiography of a competitive basketball player, for example, than that of a woman following Nye’s program of figure, beauty and health. For the competitive athlete, a capable body is the means by which games are won and in which teammates place their trust. Ostensibly, the conditioning of a sporting body is also a means by which masculinity is learned and proven, as Canadian sports scholar Lois Bryson argues in her article entitled, “Sport and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity.” If, as Bryson asserts, “men who err are sissies (women),” and “[m]en who perform well are studs,”¹³ one is left to wonder what a successful female athlete might be. Certainly, Foucault’s analysis of the transformed soldier does not explicitly mention the potentials of female physicality nor the possibility of transforming the female peasant into a woman-soldier. In both cases, the female athlete remains unanalysed and unrecognized.

The difference between a competitive female athlete and the practitioner of Dorothy Nye’s exercise regimen is fairly obvious: while the athlete was challenging gender norms about female capacities for physical performance and competition, the

reader of *New Bodies For Old* was hoping to become a better “woman” through physical conditioning and to limit her physical development within the confines of particular feminine ideals. It is precisely the difference between these two women that became the essence of the debate around physical education and female athletes throughout the twentieth century: how could women reap the benefits of physical activity *without* becoming more like men? In other words, how could women be expected to change their bodies *without* affecting their gender autobiographies?

Evidence of this problem can be found in the many photographs of women’s basketball teams in Victoria throughout the twentieth century. The wealth of photographs that cover the entire century are evidence that basketball for girls and women was popular, acceptable, and even celebrated in Victoria. The details that these photographs reveal can give some insight into how young women were able to play basketball in various types of uniforms without calling into question their femininity. Primarily, photographs show the continual evolution of women’s basketball uniforms as the twentieth century progressed. Kathleen E. McCrone, in her book entitled *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914*, has argued:

Fashion is no isolated phenomenon. Rather it is a product and expression of socio-cultural systems and is the operation within them of inertia, continuity and change; it is also an important indicator of class and gender relationships ... The clothes a woman wore reflected aesthetic rules and social constraints, and communicated to the world the functions she was expected to perform ... It is not surprising that the development of special clothing for sport, which allowed women greater physical freedom, was a major area of controversy.¹⁴

Uniforms for women were an important indicator of social values and change as well as technological advances in fabric. For the women who played basketball, they were also

important for comfort and ease of motion. Uniforms demonstrated how comfortable athletes were in wearing non-conventional clothing and in baring their skin to the public eye, just as they demonstrated how comfortable the public was with various incarnations of sports clothing on girls and women. Even if the ever-changing uniforms donned by female basketball players in Victoria were not recognized by the athletes themselves as controversial, the mere act of wearing such clothing in public was indicative of social change and probably subject to some debate, especially as the girls switched from long skirts to bloomers and ultimately to very short shorts.

Several relevant articles have been written pertaining to the evolution of girls' and women's sports uniforms. Janet and Peter Phillips, for example, have written about the development of such things as cotton knickers, bloomers, and very importantly, elastic and bras rather than rigid corsets. Also important to every sportswoman was the development of disposable sanitary napkins, popular after the Second World War, although available in Victoria and throughout North America by the 1920s,¹⁵ which replaced rags that were knotted or safety pinned around the waist. Tampons were also popularised, and gained favour in the 1950s and beyond.¹⁶ Although the photographs of women basketball players in Victoria do not necessarily show the undergarments worn, it can be safely assumed that accessibility of items such as elastic bras and sanitary supplies had an enormous impact on the comfort of the athletes, and on the emergence of uniforms that included shorter shorts and tighter shirts. It is also likely that female athletes would have been some of the first women to regularly use pads and tampons rather than rags, as these women would have been highly motivated to try any products that would make it easier to participate in sports all month long.

Patricia Campbell Warner explores the development of rowing uniforms at Wellesley College, a school for young women, from 1876 to 1900. She argues that they are the earliest example of female collegiate sports uniforms in the United States. Warner demonstrates through primarily photographic evidence that early rowing events at Wellesley, called “Float Days,” were primarily pageants, where the students designed their own uniforms to be judged on the basis of style rather than function. By the turn of the century, however, the uniforms had gradually become looser and more practical “gym suits,” especially as new, sleeker and faster boats were bought for the school that required more physical movement and expertise.¹⁷

Sarah A. Gordon also looks at the evolution of sports uniforms for women between 1870 and 1925, arguing that sports provided women with the impetus to think about the nature of their clothing and the need for a change in style to accommodate different activities. Gordon argues that the process of creating and popularizing new clothes was instrumental in the reconsideration of femininity at this time when female athleticism and the idea of the stronger, fitter “New Woman” was emerging out of older Victorian notions of female debility.¹⁸

Pamela Grundy, writing about North Carolina women’s basketball uniforms, traces a pattern of dress reforms for female basketball players over the twentieth century that mirrored the situation in much of North America, including Victoria. Grundy provides a number of photographs, including that of a 1901 team sporting outfit that “differed little from every day garb,” a 1916 team wearing combined skirts and bloomers, and a team from 1923 that bared scandalous knees as well as elbows.¹⁹ By the 1930s, women in North Carolina were wearing shorts while playing basketball, and in the 1950s,

synthetic satin came into vogue, only to be replaced by pinnies as competitive women's sports lost favour in the United States and non-competitive "play days" became the norm. Grundy argues that the larger story behind the photographs is one of a "century of determined effort by women for whom disapproving rumors, financial difficulties, unwieldy materials, social restrictions, and all the other complications faced by female athletes in the twentieth century were simply obstacles to overcome in pursuit of their own ideals."²⁰ The existence of a similar underlying story can also be assumed when examining the many photographs of women's basketball teams in Victoria.

The earliest photograph of a women's basketball team available in any Victoria archival holdings is dated 1903 and can be seen in Figure 4.1. This photograph, like most taken in the early twentieth century, features a basketball inscribed with the team initials and date. In this case, the letters "W.E.Y.L.C." are written on the ball, indicating that the team is comprised of young women belonging to the Work Estate Young Ladies Club of Victoria. The women are featured in front of a nature scene backdrop of several trees, and are lined up, facing the camera, in three rows: sitting, kneeling and standing rigidly. The players appear to be teenaged, and their dress is typical of the day: they wear dark, large-collared, long-sleeved blouses with dark, long, full skirts. Nearly all wear their hair back in some sort of bun with volume created over the forehead and at the sides. Their faces are un-smiling, but not stern, and all look towards the camera. The coach is female and pictured in the centre of the group, with the basketball at her feet. There are twelve members of the team present, likely indicating two strings of a six-player team, or two teams that played against each other. Not surprisingly, it appears that there was little or no difference between these uniforms and women's clothing worn for everyday use at

this time. At the beginning of the century, social notions of women as either modest, moral guardians or dangerous temptresses meant that “there were serious implications for the girls and women who wished to adopt less restrictive dress in order to participate more fully in physical activities.”²¹ It is likely that the style of basketball played by these girls was not particularly physical or aggressive, as their clothing would have inhibited large movements in the upper body, and their skirts were surely capable of tripping any athlete who ran or changed direction quickly.²²

Two photographs remain from the 1911-12 girls’ team from Victoria College, perhaps the first college basketball team for young women in Victoria. One of these photographs is pictured in Figure 4.2. These photographs feature the same six athletes, three sitting and three standing in one shot, and all six standing side by side in the other picture. In both photographs, the team is flanked by what appears to be a female teacher on one side, and a male coach or assistant on the other. As in 1903, the photographs are professionally done, with a nature-scene backdrop. The hairstyles, not surprisingly, have changed since 1903 and include a variety of lengths and dos, mostly with a middle part, and with several of the girls wearing head bands that would keep the hair out of their eyes if they were playing basketball. In general, the hairstyles look more conducive to physical activity without coming un-done, and the clothing appears to be a little more relaxed, although all the girls are wearing blouses with long sleeves, collars and decorative ties. They do not appear to be wearing corsets. The skirts are pinned or sewn up above the ankles, not into a full “bloomer” style, but in a way that would allow quick movements without tripping. It is difficult to tell if the bloomer-skirts were created solely for sports use, or if they were temporarily modified. The girls are not smiling, but

their faces appear cheerful, and their bodies seem relaxed. In both photographs, the middle girl is holding a basketball that reads, “V.C. 1911-1912.”²³

Certainly, it is difficult to know whether the style of play in women’s basketball changed over the first decade of the twentieth century in Victoria, but it is arguable that, based on the uniforms worn, a little more freedom of movement was granted to the female athletes by 1911, and basketball was becoming popular enough that it warranted some small modifications in clothing to suit the style of play. Such small changes cannot be underestimated. As Kathleen McCrone argues, “[m]ore than anything else sport encouraged a utilitarian attitude towards female dress and the actual development of more functional costumes. Under sport’s influence, women began to shed restrictive clothing and to adopt styles permitting freer movement; and in the course of doing so some experienced for the first time a liberating sense of their own bodies.”²⁴

Amelia Bloomer invented the billowy “Turkish-style trousers” in the 1850s for women who wanted more freedom of movement,²⁵ but it was not until the early 1920s that photographs show “bloomers” on Victoria’s basketball courts. Sarah Gordon notes that there was a significant shift in the boundaries of female modesty following World War I that stemmed from women’s active roles in the war as well as the success of the suffrage movement.²⁶ This shift can be seen in female basketball uniforms in Victoria, as there are a number of examples from the early twenties of more revealing, bloomer-style basketball uniforms.

The 1923-24 Provincial Normal School (P.N.S.) girls’ basketball team wore bloomers to just below the knee, with lace-up boots or shoes and opaque tights, along with long-sleeved, V-neck, loosely fitting shirts as can be seen in Figure 4.3.²⁷ The

Victoria College team of the same year, shown in Figure 4.4, sported similar uniforms, but with short-sleeved, collared T-shirts.²⁸ Both team photographs feature relaxed, smiling or nearly-smiling athletes, with each team comprised of the six players needed to play girls' rules basketball. All hair styles are similar, usually a bob with short bangs and a middle or side part, which would have been comfortable on the basketball court.

In 1924-25, the uniforms changed slightly, with the Provincial Normal School girls wearing short-sleeved shirts, and the Victoria College team wearing V-necked shirts without collars. Significantly, the P.N.S. girls rolled down their stockings to just below the knee.²⁹ This is similar to the photograph taken of the B.C. Telephone Company women's basketball team in the same year (Figure 4.5) which shows women wearing striped V-neck shirts with bloomers, and at least two of the women are wearing what appear to be socks that end a few inches below the knee. These women, who played in the commercially-sponsored city league, are probably in their early twenties, and sit and stand behind two trophies and a large championship plaque, as well as a basketball stating their team sponsor and year. They are accompanied by coach Bob Whyte, and most likely played boys' rules basketball, as there are only five team members. Like the Normal School and College girls, these women wear their hair in short bobs, and they are smiling slightly.³⁰

This photograph of the B.C. Telephone Co. Ladies team is significant in that it was clearly intended to celebrate a successful season for a team comprised of women who chose to play basketball outside of school. Also, women's basketball was considered important enough by someone to commission a professional photograph of the year's achievements. Although still wearing bloomers rather than shorts, these

women have bare knees and arms, and it does not look like the uniforms would have inhibited the movements of the athletes in any way, or caused them to over-heat on the court. Indeed, these uniforms appear to have been entirely functional, and would certainly not have been worn in any other context than the basketball court.

The Provincial Normal School girls' basketball team switched to sleeveless tops and either shorts or short bloomers with a stripe down the side in 1926-27, but it appears that they returned to more traditional, dark bloomers the following year, and in fact wore short skirts as part of their uniform—perhaps their regular physical education uniform—from the early thirties until well into the 1940s. An example from the early 1930s is shown in Figure 4.6.³¹ The Victoria College team, on the other hand, began wearing shorts in 1927-28, which they wore with sleeveless shirts and knee socks. The 1927-28 team is pictured with two male coaches, and includes seven members. Remarkably, their uniforms are nearly exactly the same as the boy's Victoria College team uniforms of the same year, the only difference being that the boy's sleeveless shirts are slightly more revealing, as can be seen in Figures 4.7 and 4.8.³² In 1928-29, the girls wore short, calf-bearing socks instead of long ones, and these uniforms stayed more or less the same until the 1936-37 season. Also notable is the presence of a female coach in the photographs, from 1935-36 onwards.³³

The changes in uniforms over these years, and the differences between the uniforms of the Provincial Normal School team and those of Victoria College may be explained by a number of factors. Clearly, the Victoria College uniforms for women's basketball became more functional as the twenties progressed, indicating that basketball's popularity continued to grow in these years, and young women and/or their coaches were

looking for ways to play basketball more easily. Bloomers, while much more functional than long skirts, were surely warmer and more cumbersome than shorts, and new uniforms that included shorts were probably embraced by players who appreciated their increased freedom of movement. That these young women actually wore such revealing clothes for games, a very public display of female bodies and athleticism, would indicate that the spectators at the games were not particularly offended by the uniforms. This public acceptance of new and very revealing basketball uniforms for women is indicative of the decade in which they were introduced; the 1920s saw significant loosening of norms for women in terms of appearance and fashion as well as behaviour compared to the 1910s, and this was reflected in female sportswear that accentuated the newly-fashionable boyish and athletic form. Sarah Gordon writes, “Clothing provides a place to negotiate, both verbally and through images, different ideas of womanliness. The novelty of women’s sports opened up a space in the discussion of women’s clothing, and in that space women and the fashion industry negotiated different representations of femininity.”³⁴ Clothes designed for functionality on the basketball court that were deemed acceptable by athletes and spectators may have helped to normalize clothes that allowed freedom of movement for women in other contexts.

The modification of basketball uniforms for women was not always uncontested, as can be seen in a couple of examples. In a nostalgic article about basketball published in the *Daily Colonist*, it was reported that when a Victoria First United team of girls stepped onto a basketball court in Duncan wearing shorts in the early 1920s, “half the crowd walked out.”³⁵ It may be that spectators were not ready to see young women wearing shorts at this time, or that the crowd in Duncan was not as accustomed to women

in shorts as basketball fans in Victoria. In either case, it is clear that many spectators would not hesitate to let female basketball players know that their clothing was inappropriate. News reports across Canada in the early twentieth century also expressed concern about sporting women's clothing, as historian Helen Lenskyj points out: "journalists seldom reported women's sporting activities without including details of the participant's clothing and personal appearance, apparently for the purpose of reassuring readers that these women were feminine, that is, charming and attractive, as well as athletic."³⁶

Even as late as the 1940s, not all female athletes were wearing shorts and T-shirts, as can be seen in the P.N.S photographs of girls wearing skirts to play basketball in the 1940s. This is indicative that uniforms for women did not evolve at an even pace in Victoria, and that not all spectators, physical educators and/or athletes were comfortable with such daring garb. As well, not all schools in Victoria embraced the ideals of inter-scholastic or city-league competition, as can be seen in the 1928-29 issues of the *Anecho*, the P.N.S. yearbook.

In the *Anecho*, it was noted that, "Games for all, and games for the fun of playing them,' was the motto of the Athletic Committee."³⁷ Under the heading "Girls' Basketball", it was recorded that "Every girl played basketball. Each of the three classes mustered six teams, and each team provided itself with a very distinctive and high sounding name The games were played under girls' rules, and were first between the class teams and then between classes ... Games with outside teams were few."³⁸ Under "boys' Basketball," it is written that "A stiff schedule faced this year's aspirants at the start," including many inter-collegiate and city league games.³⁹



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4



Figure 4.5



Figure 4.6



Figure 4.7



Figure 4.8



Figure 4.9



Figure 4.10



Figure 4.11



Figure 4.12



Figure 4.13



Figure 4.14



Figure 4.15

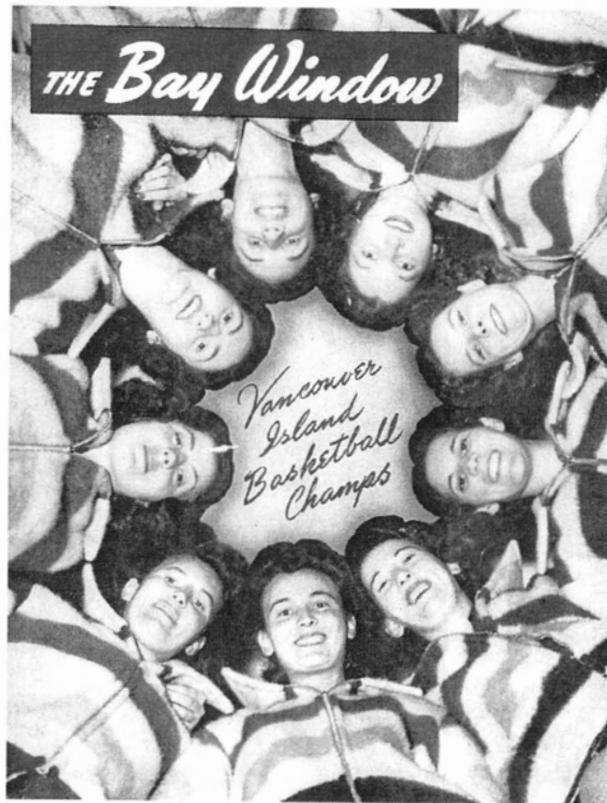


Figure 4.16

Despite announcing the goal of athletics for everyone, the Provincial Normal School adopted a fairly clear policy of participation for female students, and competition for males, as can be gleaned from the following quote: “the teams which upheld the name of the school in outside competition, performed manfully and with a will. To them is due much credit, because they put forth a special effort and did it well.”⁴⁰ External competition in sport at the P.N.S., it seems, was something meant to be done “manfully and with a will.” Female athletes would be well served by intra-mural sport, and changing their uniforms to include more comfortable, but less feminine, shorts would have been unnecessary. The photographs from the Provincial Normal School demonstrate that some thought was put into basketball uniforms for girls at this school, and that care was taken that these athletes appear on the court as feminine and modest girls as well as basketball players.

By the late 1930s, the girls’ team at Victoria College began wearing plain white short-sleeved blouses instead of sleeveless tops, along with short shorts. Photographs show that the effect was a team that reflected the ideals of femininity of the era, as can be seen in Figure 4.9.⁴¹ The young men’s teams in this era were still wearing sleeveless tops, with numbers on the chests, and this uniform remained more or less the same until at least the 1960s.⁴²

The young women at Victoria College and the Provincial Normal School experienced a change of style in their uniforms in the 1950s, as both teams began wearing shorts with short-sleeved blouses in a satiny, shiny material, an example of which can be seen in Figure 4.10.⁴³ Again, these uniforms gave the team a distinctly feminine look; these uniforms would not have been worn by any boys’ teams, as the blouses especially

appear to be designed to reveal the female form. The feminine look in all of the photographs of young women's teams is enhanced by an obvious attention to hair styles throughout the decades. Although hair cuts and styles obviously changed over the years, the young women featured have clearly taken care to brush, curl, style and set their hair according to the fashion of the day, as can be seen in every photograph of young women's basketball teams from both Victoria College and the Provincial Normal School.

Nowhere is hairstyle more evident than in the 1935-36 photograph of the "Unitys," a city league team coached by Walter Yeamans, seen in Figure 4.11.⁴⁴ The young women in this photograph are wearing very striking warm-up suits with the team name written on the long-sleeved tops, and they are sitting and standing behind a championship trophy. They all wear their hair in curled bobs with a side part, and some of them also appear to be wearing lipstick and possibly eye make-up. The overall effect is that the team looks rather glamorous. Interestingly, one of the women interviewed had an aunt who played on this team. The aunt would tell her niece stories about her basketball days in the 1930s, recalling that she was personally sponsored by a hair dresser who would style her hair before each game!⁴⁵ This situation demonstrates the extent to which an attractive, feminine appearance was totally normalized for the athletes who played basketball in Victoria in this era, and that at least one hairdresser thought it was worth her time to style one of the athletes' hair for games that would be attended by a significant number of spectators who would see and appreciate the hair style.

This care taken to maintain feminine appearances is also apparent in city-league photographs from the late 1940s which show the young women in uniform with hair and nails neatly done (Figures 4.12 and 4.13).⁴⁶ Figure 4.14 features another rather

glamorous shot, this time in a showy formation with each woman holding the hips of the teammate in front.⁴⁷ Even in the 1960s, photographs show that athletic young women were careful to maintain feminine hairstyles on the basketball court, as can be seen in the attached photograph that appeared in the local paper (Figure 4.15).⁴⁸

That all of the athletes on this team, and on virtually every team of women's basketball players before 1965, clearly took care to style their hair for team photographs, as well as for games, is indicative that these young women were conscious of maintaining a feminine appearance while playing basketball. Although the athletes were playing a sport that demonstrated to spectators that women could excel in physical competitions not unlike those played by men, it appears that the female athletes did not wish to challenge gender norms about looks and hair styles, even if they were wearing shorts and T-shirts rather than skirts and sweaters. In addition, when the basketball game was over, these young women went to great lengths to look like attractive young ladies, and many former athletes recall spending the time necessary in the locker rooms to emerge after games looking their best for an evening on the town.⁴⁹

Basketball uniforms were very different from everyday clothing worn by women in the 1920s and later. The shorts and T-shirts that were created to be functional on the basketball court fell outside the dominant ideology about what respectable young women should be wearing. Indeed, even as late as the 1960s, one woman interviewed recalls that she and her teammates would never wear anything but a skirt or dress in public, except on the basketball court.⁵⁰

The young women who played basketball in Victoria were able to keep playing for the entirety of the twentieth century, even though their clothing was out of the

ordinary, and their game could be seen as overly competitive, strenuous and unladylike. The female basketball players helped to keep women's basketball acceptable to parents, spectators and the community at large by being careful to maintain very feminine appearances with regard to their hair and make-up, as can be seen in team photographs. In doing so, the girls and women were able to successfully negotiate a place for themselves on the basketball court throughout the twentieth century, and their successes were celebrated and recorded with team photographs as well as in newspaper articles and in other forms of community support.

As mentioned above, several of the city-league teams are pictured with the trophies they won that season, as has been fairly normal for basketball teams throughout the twentieth century. Sometimes these team photographs were featured in Victoria newspapers as recognition of provincial and national achievements. Nowhere was this recognition more apparent than in 1949, when a team from Victoria sponsored by Cec's U-Drive won the Canadian Senior A women's basketball championship, at home on the Victoria High basketball court.⁵¹ On 27 April 1949, the *Daily Colonist* featured several photographs of the team on the first page of the sports section, with an article entitled, "Cec's Capture Canadian Cage Championship." The article included a description of the presentation of the trophy, supplied by the company, Underwood Limited, which also underwrote the cost of the tournament. When the trophy changed hands from the former champions from Toronto to the Victoria team, it was reported that, "Captain Muriel Mitchell of the Maids walked up to the big silver cup and kissed it good-bye. She quickly corrected herself and said 'Au Revoir.' The cup was used as a punch-bowl at Muriel's wedding during the last year." As well, there was a "surprise presentation to

[Victoria team member] Mary Casillio. The veteran of 15 years of basketball in Victoria received a set of silver flatware from the Victoria and District Basketball Association and appreciative fans.”⁵²

In the *Victoria Daily Times* on the same day, the feature sports articles were entitled “Cec’s New Holders of Dominion Cage Title,” and “Bring Underwood Trophy to City For First Time.” One of the photographs featured in this article was of the team crowding around and hugging coach Hank Rowe, the caption reading, “Oh for the life of a coach!” The article describing the game listed the high number of fouls of each team, and noted that, “If you think girls’ basketball isn’t rough, especially when the Canadian title is at stake, just take a look at what happened to Flo Kennedy of Cec’s U-Drive last night when she attempted to cut in for a basket. Flo hit the floor hard and landed with a thud right under the nose of Times cameraman Irving Strickland.”⁵³

These articles and photographs were intended as a celebration of the team’s achievements, and a similar amount of coverage would probably have been given to a men’s championship team. Still, it is clear that the athletes were seen by the community as both women and basketball players; the gender of the players was an important component of the reporting, just as it was important in the minds of the spectators. The women who played basketball in this era were not consciously trying to subvert stereotypes about what women could or could not do in general. Rather, they successfully incorporated basketball into what it meant for them to be normal women. Flatware, a gift suited to a young woman building a home for her new family, was a generous and flattering present for retiring athlete Mary Casillio. The Toronto player who used a basketball trophy as a punch bowl at her wedding even found a way to bring

basketball into her traditional marriage celebrations. If women in Victoria were challenging gender norms about female appearance and physicality, competitiveness and aggression, they were doing it only within the limits of the basketball court, as was the case when spectators saw Flo Kennedy hit the floor when attempting a basket. When the athletes got off the court, they automatically re-did their hair, graciously accepted gifts, and publicly embraced their coach. In doing so, they made basketball acceptable to those watching who were reassured that it would not affect the femininity of female players, at least not in the long run.

It is apparent from a number of sources that basketball in Victoria was a socially accepted and even status-elevating sport for young women to participate in—especially working-class young women. Certainly, the fact that local businesses and organizations were sponsoring girls' and women's basketball teams from the 1920s onward indicates that there was perceived merit and even positive business opportunity and advertising to be gained from associating with the sport. The Hudson's Bay Company, for example, a long-time sponsor of basketball teams, put together a team of young women comprised of Victoria employees in the mid-1940s, and used the team's successes as advertising and publicity in the local newspapers. One such advertisement featured several photographs of the team, and included the following text:

It's Not All Work and No Play at 'The Bay'

Because we know proper relaxation amidst congenial surroundings goes a long way towards healthier, happier people, we have provided the proper facilities solely for the staff to fully enjoy rest periods and lunch hours. Hot, nourishing meals in our Cafeteria, sports, a pleasant, restful lounge, all play their part towards making ours one big, happy store-family that gives you ... our customers ... friendly, courteous, efficient service.

Competitive Sports Are Encouraged

A glimpse of our Girls' Basketball Team in action during the first game of the season. Wholehearted competitive sports—basketball, bowling and others—encouraged, for they create a spirit of cooperation and friendliness. Lower picture shows our healthy, happy team lined up to start the new season in good spirits.⁵⁴

Similarly, a 1946 issue of *The Bay* newsletter featured a photograph of the women's basketball team on the cover wearing special Hudson's Bay team jackets, under the headline "Vancouver Island Basketball Champs" (Figure 4.16).⁵⁵ A newspaper article about the championship celebrations stated the following:

Hudson's Bay Cage Club Ends Season as Hosts at Banquet. An air of optimism pervaded the Prince Albert room of the Empress Hotel last night when the Hudson's Bay Basketball club entertained league officials, representatives for the J.B.C. and members of the press at a wind-up banquet ... C.W. Page, advertising manager ... promised that the Hudson's Bay Company would not only continue but augment their support of the sport in the next season. He then created a mild furor by presenting team members with a pair of nylons on behalf of the sponsor.⁵⁶

In the eyes of those responsible for publicity at *The Bay*, a women's basketball team was a worthwhile investment that promoted positive community relations and a good image of the company as a paternalistic benefactor of its female employees. The members of the basketball team benefited from the sponsorship of their employer, and they furthered the positive image of *The Bay* by enthusiastically accepting gifts such as nylons, graciously hosting banquets, and always looking their feminine best, especially for the many photo opportunities they encountered as successful athletes.

In terms of company paternalism, *The Bay* was not creating a unique situation in Canada with its sponsorship of women's basketball, as can be seen in Joan Sangster's article entitled "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-1960."⁵⁷ Likewise, Susan L. Forbes has

described a similar sponsorship of sports and recreation in her article entitled, “Gendering Corporate Welfare Practices: Female Sports and Recreation at Eaton’s during the Depression.”⁵⁸ Both of these articles show that some Canadian corporations in Ontario were eager to promote women’s sports and recreation in order to foster employee well-being and job satisfaction, as well as good customer relations, and that competitive sports proved very popular amongst female workers before, during, and after the depression. In Victoria, the sponsored sport of choice for women was basketball, as there was a popular basketball league in place for women, and spectators and reporters showed that the community supported the activity. The Bay was also promoting a positive work environment with its sports teams, as well as with activities such as company picnics and excursions.⁵⁹ The Bay, and other companies and organizations in Victoria that acted as external sponsors saw women’s basketball as a good opportunity to advertise positive community relations. It is clear from a number of sources that the community saw women’s basketball as worthwhile in the mid-twentieth century.

When the Victoria women’s team sponsored by Cec’s U-Drive won the national championship in 1949, they were celebrated in the press, as discussed above. In addition, the athletes were presented with miniature gold basketball necklace pendants as a token of local support at a banquet and dance celebrating the champions.⁶⁰ As well, medallions kept by the city that had been meant for returning war heroes were inscribed and given to each team member by Mayor Percy E. George at a reception held at a city council meeting.⁶¹ Along with these medallions, the team members were given a glowing letter of appreciation from the Mayor, which read as follows:

I have the pleasure of advising you that at its regular meeting held on the 10th of May the Victoria City Council by unanimous vote passed the following resolution, namely:

‘THAT this Council place on record its appreciation, delight, and pride in the outstanding achievements of Cec’s U-Drive Women’s Basketball Team during the 1948-49 season in winning successively in the Women’s Senior A Basketball Division the City of Victoria championship, the Province of British Columbia championship, the Western Canada championship, and the Canadian and World’s championships ...

THAT the hearty congratulations and high praise of the Council on their splendid record both of accomplishment and of personal conduct be extended to all of the members of the Team ...

THAT the Council express to Sponsors Cec Rawlings and Cec Rhodes, Manager Cec Walton, and Coach Hank Rowe its admiration and appreciation of their worthy contributions to the success of the players in bringing such credit and honour in the world of sport to themselves, the City, the Province, and Western Canada.’⁶²

In addition to the above letter and other accolades, a song was written celebrating the team’s good sportsmanship, perhaps to be chanted by spectators at the championship games:

Cec’s U Drive on the floor
 Out to get a mighty score
 Play the game so nice and clean
 Cec’s girls are never mean.

When the game is finally over
 Even if we have no score
 We are proud to really say
 Cec’s played the sporting way.⁶³

Regardless of whether or not the women who played basketball in Victoria in this era really did “play the game so nice and clean” (and most evidence points toward fairly rough games with many fouls), the athletes’ image in the community was such that their successes were celebrated, their teams were sponsored, and they were seen as good,

sportsmanlike and ladylike players who were a credit to the city. The players themselves felt pride in their achievements, and compiled scrapbooks and framed photographs of their basketball successes that would remain in their homes for the rest of their lives.

This situation suggests that there was little concern that the female basketball players on the court were challenging gender norms in Victoria, nor were the athletes themselves worried about subverting ideals about femininity and masculinity. Rather, the basketball players were successful in incorporating and projecting a positive and feminine image of themselves to their communities, despite the seemingly un-feminine nature of the game they played.

Nearly fifteen years after the women of Cec's U-Drive were celebrated by their community, basketball for girls and women was still seen as a positive and beneficial activity, as can be seen in the letters, articles and awards received by this later generation of Victoria athletes. Prominent members of the churches, the media, and the schools of Victoria were eager to extend their praise to the young women's basketball teams that represented the city so well.

On 11 April, 1962, the Reverend A.I. Higgins wrote the following letter to one of his young parishioners:

It was with great pleasure that I learned that your team had been successful in winning the British Columbia Championship. This has meant a very great deal to me and to our church, and I want to extend to you my congratulations. In every way you are fine girls and I am very proud to have you in our church and to be your minister.⁶⁴

The reverend of a church with a decades-long tradition of supporting both girls' and boys' basketball teams in the Sunday School leagues was clear that, in his mind, there

was no contradiction between being “fine girls” and successful athletes.

One year later, in August 1963, CKDA Radio Victoria chose to feature a female basketball player as “personality of the day.” An excerpt of the letter written to her from the radio station read as follows: “It was our pleasure tonight to pay the following tribute to you on our 6:10 sportscast. Congratulations go out this evening to the CKDA Sports Personality of the day ... Last winter Lee played basketball in the Peninsula League and had many outstanding games. Lee likes summer sports as well.”⁶⁵ Interestingly, the letter was addressed to a “Mr.” by the radio station, which was later crossed out and replaced by “Miss” in blue ink, probably by the recipient. Thus, an employee at the radio station thought it appropriate to honour a local female basketball star in this segment of the programming, but it was later assumed that the athlete was male by a typist or sports-caster who read a given name that could be either male or female. It seems that in the early 1960s, it was normal for a young woman to enjoy success in basketball, but honoured “sports personalities” were assumed to be male unless specifically stated otherwise. In this case, the mistaken gender pronoun was simply corrected, and the letter was proudly pasted into a scrapbook that details the basketball career of a successful female athlete. For her, being mistaken for a boy because of her athletic skill was not particularly insulting, in part because she knew that no one would take her for a boy off the basketball court.⁶⁶

Young female basketball players in the early 1960s in Victoria loved to play competitive basketball, but they knew that their athletic skill was not always taken as seriously as that of their male contemporaries. They could see this in the amount and nature of the sports coverage they received in the local papers. For example, in a short

1965 article in the University of Victoria's *The Martlet*, entitled "B.B's Unbeatable," it was written that "the most beautiful legs on campus prove also to be the most agile as the University Women's Basketball team strides far beyond all competition." Short write-ups about individual athletes in the article include such sexualised descriptions as, "This blonde beauty shows much potential. But her statistics are confidential."⁶⁷

In another article a few weeks later, it was reported that "Basketball Vikettes Win Swim Trophy" at a University of British Columbia invitational tournament in Vancouver. It was jokingly related that,

Shortly after their performance, the tournament co-ordinator asked for the trophy. 'But our captain just left with it.' was the reply. 'She can't! We have to present it at the swim gala next week.' The Vikettes ... returned their mouldy old trophy, being promised a shiny new one 'soon.'⁶⁸

Being taken seriously as athletes who deserved appropriate recognition for their accomplishments may or may not have been a concern for female basketball players in the 1960s. Despite sexualised reports and inappropriate trophies, not to mention a diminutive team name such as the "Vikettes," these young women had the opportunity to play as much basketball as they wanted against a variety of highly skilled teams in far-away cities. In fact, the Vikettes travelled to Montreal to win the national championship in the spring of 1965. Being taken seriously off the basketball court was perhaps not as important to these female athletes as having the opportunity to play serious basketball on the court.

By the early 1960s in Victoria, basketball for girls and women was fairly mainstream. Even if people still associated athletic successes with male athletes, no one would be surprised at this point if a young woman was honoured as a basketball star, or if

her team were particularly skilled or aggressive. This acceptance of women's basketball spanned decades through the twentieth century, and was a result of a successful negotiation between the athletes who enthusiastically enjoyed basketball while being careful to maintain their femininity off the court, and the spectators who accepted skilled and aggressive play on the court, so long as the athletes did not challenge gender norms after the game.

This successful balance took some time to develop, however, as can be seen in a newspaper article reporting on a game in the early twentieth century, and the resulting letters to the editor. In November 1919, a series of articles appeared in the *Daily Colonist* that indicate that women's basketball was at this point not yet established as a game in which it was acceptable for women to play aggressively. On 27 November 1919, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported on two basketball games in Ladysmith. The report stated:

The first event was the ladies' game and ended in a win for Chemainus by a score of 5 to 4, all of the Chemainus score being penalty shots. The game all the way through was characterized by close checking and at times distinct roughness, the main offenders being one or two of the visiting team, who played the lady rather than the ball. It should be remarked in this respect that they were helped by the referee, who apparently let the game slip out of his hands entirely... The second half was mainly a tussle ...The game was handled by R. McBride, of Chemainus, to the noticeable dissatisfaction of the players and spectators, who voiced their feelings in no uncertain terms.

The second game, between Harry's team, of Nanaimo, and a local men's team, was of an entirely different nature ... The game was very open, fast and clean, some very good basketball being played by both teams.⁶⁹

Two days later, Mrs. C. R. Jarrett, one of the female athletes from Chemainus, wrote to the *Daily Colonist* to assert her point of view about the supposedly rough game. She argued that the refereeing was not unfair and that the members of her team were not

uncharacteristically rough:

I can say that in my five years basketball experience with the Chemainus team I have never received a more unsportsmanlike 'beating up' than I did on Tuesday evening. In this connection, however, I wish to state in all fairness to everyone, that the treacherous nature of the Ladysmith athletic arena is more to blame for any bumps and bruises than the players themselves ... Now, Sir, I wish it to be clearly understood that this letter is not directed in any way at the players on the Ladysmith ladies' team. On the contrary, we all credit them with being a nice bunch of girls and good sports, but they have a few fans, one of whom is your reporter who could do the cause of sport on Vancouver Island a genuine favor of [sic] they would retire from that field entirely. To them, I would say, 'Learn to take an honest beating gracefully or else stay at home.'⁷⁰

Below the athlete's statement is another letter from the referee at that game, giving an "Emphatic Denial" of the *Daily Colonist's* report on his poor refereeing and loss of control over the game, stating that "no one but a poor sport, and one with very little knowledge of the game would have submitted such a report for publication."⁷¹

Several days later, another letter was published about the ladies' game in Ladysmith, this time written by a spectator named Frank Wargo, a member of the Ladysmith Athletic Association. Mr. Wargo wrote to "state emphatically that the game was exceedingly rough, which roughness, in my opinion, should have been promptly checked by Referee McBride, and which could easily have been done if so desired." Mr. Wargo also asserted that the Ladysmith arena was perfectly suitable for basketball, and pointedly refuted Mrs. Jarett's allegations of un-sportsmanlike behaviour among the fans, arguing that "those who live in glass houses should not throw stones."⁷²

In this instance, the idea of women playing basketball with unnecessary roughness and unsportsmanlike behaviour was clearly a troubling issue for spectators and players alike, and important enough to incite debate in the pages of the Victoria newspaper. Although the game in question was not in Victoria, the article and letters were published

in a Victoria paper, and teams from the city would routinely travel north on Vancouver Island for tournaments. Because “roughness” is not clearly defined, it is difficult to determine what the women were doing on the basketball court to merit such a response in the *Daily Colonist*. Whatever the case, some members of the teams were not acting in a way that befitted young ladies on the basketball court in 1919 in the eyes of at least one reporter and one spectator. It is likely that aggressive, physical and competitive play between girls’ and women’s basketball teams was not yet accepted at this time, and it was still felt that un-ladylike behaviour on the court should not be tolerated. A referee was expected to maintain a reasonable level of decorum throughout a women’s basketball game.

Interestingly, the athlete who wrote to defend her style of play did not feel that the game had been exceedingly rough, but that the facilities were inadequate for basketball. She cited an overly small and slippery floor, as well as “projections to be collided with” as reasons for increased contact between players, rather than an aggressive type of play.⁷³ She also made a point of commending her opponents in a manner befitting a good sportswoman. Mrs. C. R. Jarrett, an experienced basketball player of five years, and an adult, married, and literate woman, was clearly indignant at the suggestion that members of her team were playing too roughly, having felt that instead the spectators were acting inappropriately when their town’s team lost. Ostensibly because basketball for women was not entirely accepted in 1919, Mrs Jarrett felt the need to publicly defend herself and her sport from outside criticism. Ultimately, female basketball players in Victoria would no longer need to defend their actions on the court from on-lookers who found their manner aggressive and rough, as can be seen in later descriptions of women’s games. In

part, the acceptance of women's basketball was surely due to outspoken early athletes like Mrs. Jarrett, who asserted their right to play basketball to the best of their abilities and before a respectful crowd.

Victoria before the mid-1960s was a society in which the two distinct genders of masculine and feminine were seldom openly or consciously subverted, and few people were protesting in favour of women's liberation or sexual freedom. If it was considered true in this era that "your body is your autobiography", as author Dorothy Nye suggested, then the young women who put on their uniforms and played basketball in front of cheering crowds in Victoria were showing that they were capable of doing what young men did, and in doing so they challenged views about female limitations. The continued existence and evolution of basketball for women into a highly competitive sport is evidence that its challenge to dominant discourses around gender was either not recognized or not considered a serious subversion by those watching. This was largely because the women who played basketball pushed the boundaries of acceptable female dress and behaviour on the court, but they were quick to conform to more familiar gender roles when they left the gym.

Over the years, women's uniforms in Victoria changed to suit the expectations of the era, starting as full skirts, moving to bloomers, then boyish suits, and finally to feminine shorts and tops. The relationship between the female players of basketball and their spectators and communities also changed over the years, evolving to an outright—though somewhat marginalized—acceptance of aggressive and competitive women's basketball in Victoria with the condition that the athletes act as proper ladies off the court, and with a degree of sportsmanship on the court. In reaching this acceptance,

female basketball players throughout the twentieth century were engaging in a negotiation that they probably never recognized. Most of these women did not want to challenge their gender roles in society, or to challenge gender norms in general; they simply wanted the opportunity to play basketball. In playing basketball, however, they entered a public space and became a rare spectacle of female physicality and athleticism and showed that their bodies—and their autobiographies—were capable of achieving a high level of performance, even if it was only on the basketball court. For both observers and observed, women's basketball in Victoria gently pushed the boundaries of what it meant to be a proper young woman. The continued acceptance and celebration of the game for the entire twentieth century is evidence of a particularly successful, if mostly silent, negotiation between women who wanted to play basketball like men, and a community that expected these women to maintain their femininity off the court.

Notes

- ¹ Noel Dyck, "Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport," in Games, Sports and Cultures, ed. Noel Dyck (New York: Berg, 2000), 13-42, 24.
- ² Dyck, "Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries," 24.
- ³ Dorothy Nye, New Bodies for Old (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1946), 16.
- ⁴ Nye, New Bodies for Old, 17.
- ⁵ Nye, New Bodies for Old, 11.
- ⁶ Nye, New Bodies for Old, 11.
- ⁷ Valerie J. Korinek, Roughing it in the Suburbs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 202.
- ⁸ Korinek, Roughing it in the Suburbs, 202.
- ⁹ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Vintage, 1995), 135.
- ¹⁰ Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 135.
- ¹¹ Nye, New Bodies for Old, 17.
- ¹² Helen Lenskyj, "Physical Activity for Canadian Women, 1890-1930: Media Views," in From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras, eds., J.A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 208-231, 219.
- ¹³ Lois Bryson, "Sport and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity," Women's Studies International Forum 10(4) (1987): 369-379, 378.
- ¹⁴ Kathleen E. McCrone, "Women's Sport and Dress Reform," in Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914 (London: Routledge, 1988), 216-246, 216.
- ¹⁵ I have found advertisements as early as 1926 for disposable napkins in Victoria newspapers, although it is impossible to determine the extent of their popularity. See "Kotex No laundry—discard like tissue," Daily Colonist, 23 Jan 1926, 13.
- ¹⁶ Janet and Peter Phillips, "History From Below: Women's Underwear and the Rise of Women's Sport," Journal of Popular Culture 27 (2) (1993): 129-148, 139-141.
- ¹⁷ Patricia Campbell Warner, "The Comely Rowers: The Beginnings of Collegiate Sports Uniforms for Women Crews at Wellesley, 1876-1900," Clothing and Textiles Research Journal 10(3) (1992): 64-75.
- ¹⁸ Sarah A. Gordon, "'Any Desired Length': Negotiating Gender through Sports Clothing, 1870-1925," in Beauty and Business, ed. Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 24-51.
- ¹⁹ Pamela Grundy, "Bloomers and Beyond," Southern Cultures 3(3) (1997): 52-67, 54-58.

-
- ²⁰ Grundy, "Bloomers and Beyond," 64-65.
- ²¹ Lenskyj, "Physical Activity for Canadian Women, 1890-1930: Media Views," 217.
- ²² B.C. Archives, "Work Estate Young Ladies Basketball Club," Victoria B.C. 3/7/1903, #44463.
- ²³ British Columbia Archives, "Victoria College Girls' Basketball Team," 1911-1912, #81015 and #81016. Also at University of Victoria Archives, "Miscellaneous," 139-008-00.
- ²⁴ McCrone, "Women's Sport and Dress Reform," 242.
- ²⁵ McCrone, "Women's Sport and Dress Reform," 219-220.
- ²⁶ Gordon, "Any Desired Length," 45.
- ²⁷ University of Victoria Archives, 139-009-00 (9), 1923-24.
- ²⁸ University of Victoria Archives, 139-001-00 (1), 1923-24.
- ²⁹ University of Victoria Archives, 139-009-00 (12) P.N.S. and 139-001-00 (5) Victoria College, 1924-25.
- ³⁰ Photograph, "B.C. Telephone Co. 1924-25" from Victoria Hall of Fame Archives held by Dave Unwin.
- ³¹ University of Victoria Archives, 139-009-00 series, 1923-1946. Team photographs.
- ³² University of Victoria Archives, "Victoria College 1927-28," 139-001-00.
- ³³ University of Victoria Archives, 139-001-11 and 139-002-00.
- ³⁴ Gordon, "Any Desired Length," 47.
- ³⁵ "How Basketball Memories Began," Daily Colonist, 24 February 1962, 8.
- ³⁶ Lenskyj, "Physical Activity for Canadian Women, 1890-1930: Media Views," 217.
- ³⁷ Camosun College Archives, "Athletic Society," Anecho, Provincial Normal School, Victoria, 1928-29.
- ³⁸ Camosun College Archives, "Girls' Basketball," Anecho, 1928-29.
- ³⁹ Camosun College Archives, "Boys' Basketball," Anecho, 1928-29.
- ⁴⁰ Camosun College Archives, "Athletic Society," Anecho, 1928-29.
- ⁴¹ University of Victoria Archives, Victoria College Basketball Team, 139-003-00.
- ⁴² University of Victoria Archives, Victoria College Basketball Team, 139-003-00.
- ⁴³ University of Victoria Archives, Provincial Normal School, 1955-56, 139-011-00. Victoria College, 139-0400 and 139-007-00.
- ⁴⁴ Courtesy of Pat Metcalfe.

-
- ⁴⁵ Interview, Victoria, 16 April 2004.
- ⁴⁶ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews.
- ⁴⁷ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, photo circa 1951.
- ⁴⁸ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Lee Drummond, taken from Victoria Daily Times, 12 February 1965. Oak Bay athlete and Vikette athlete pictured.
- ⁴⁹ Interviews, Victoria, 16 April 2004; Colwood, 12 May 2004; Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ⁵⁰ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004.
- ⁵¹ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews.
- ⁵² "Cec's Capture Canadian Cage Championship," Daily Colonist, 27 April 1949, 11.
- ⁵³ "Cec's New Holders of Dominion Cage Title," Daily Times, 27 April 1949, 15.
- ⁵⁴ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, newspaper clipping from her Fall 1945 basketball season, n.t., n.d.
- ⁵⁵ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, 1946 season.
- ⁵⁶ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, Victoria article clipped some time after game on 30 March 1946.
- ⁵⁷ Joan Sangster, "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-1960," Labour/Le travail 31/32 (Fall 1993): 167-199.
- ⁵⁸ Susan L. Forbes. "Gendering Corporate Welfare Practices: Female Sports and Recreation at Eaton's During the Depression," Rethinking History 5(1) (2001): 59-74.
- ⁵⁹ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, "Six hundred Bay employees and their families enjoyed the first picnic since 1939 on July 16th at Shawnigan Lake," The Bay Window Newsletter, 1946, 6-7.
- ⁶⁰ "Dominion Cage Titlists Honoured," Daily Times, 14 May 1949, 13.
- ⁶¹ "Team Members Honoured by City," Daily Colonist, 21 May 1949, 11. Also from Interview, Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004.
- ⁶² Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, Letter to Miss Marion Kennedy from Office of the Mayor, 11 May 1949.
- ⁶³ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Marion Andrews, from 1949 season.
- ⁶⁴ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Lee Drummond, Letter to Miss Lee Hagglund from Rev. A.I. Higgins, First United Church, Victoria, 11 April 1962.
- ⁶⁵ Courtesy of Scrapbook from Lee Drummond, Letter to Mr Lee Hagglund from Bob Gillingham, Sports Director, CKDA Radio Victoria, 17 August 1963.

⁶⁶ Interview, Victoria, 9 July 2004. She recalls that in the 1950s and 60s she would absolutely always wear a skirt or dress in public unless she were playing sports, and she always wore make-up and styled her hair.

⁶⁷ "B.B.'s Unbeatable," The Martlet, 7 January 1965, 7.

⁶⁸ "Basketball Vikettes Win Swim Trophy," The Martlet, 28 January 1965, 7.

⁶⁹ "Chemainus Ladies Win At Basketball," Daily Colonist, 27 November 1919, 10.

⁷⁰ Mrs. C.R. Jarrett, "Upholds the Referee," Daily Colonist, 29 November 1919, 10.

⁷¹ Bob McBride, "Emphatic Denial," Daily Colonist, 29 November 1919, 10.

⁷² Frank Wargo, "Spectator Endorses Reporter's Account," Daily Colonist, 2 December 1919, 10.

⁷³ Jarrett, "Upholds the Referee," 10.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The basketball court, for thousands of athletes in Victoria over the twentieth century, was a special, magical place. For female basketball players, the court represented a particularly rewarding and unique experience that contrasted significantly with the rest of their lives. Like elsewhere in North America, female basketballers in Victoria found particular freedoms and opportunities through their sport, including the chance to demonstrate and cultivate physical abilities in a competitive setting, to obtain community recognition, to travel and have adventures, and to create lasting friendships among teammates. Many of the young women who played basketball found these opportunities and freedoms to be unparalleled. There were few sports available to participate in, public honours and spectator support came only from basketball achievements, modest family incomes made travel a very rare and special occurrence, and the friendships found in teammates were the closest and most important in their lives.

Certainly, the female basketball players in Victoria were not unique in their love of their game. Every historical article and book about basketball for women at least alludes to an on-going passion for the sport on the part of the participants. Young women were not generally forced to play basketball except perhaps in physical education classes. The girls and women who played basketball for their school, Sunday school, or city league teams definitely chose to do so, and many of them continued to choose to play the sport they loved for many seasons.

The tension, or focus, in much of the historiography has nothing to do with the

enthusiasm and accomplishments of the athletes themselves, but with the debate over the appropriateness of women's basketball among physical educators and members of the communities in which women's basketball was played. Girls' rules were adopted to suit the assumed physical inadequacies of young women and, in much of the United States, competitive play was suspended altogether in order to promote more feminine, cooperative participation, and "the qualities of beauty of movement, poise, femininity by affording each individual who participates an opportunity to play in an atmosphere of dignity, courtesy, and refinement."¹

Women's basketball in Victoria, rather than undergoing a debate about appropriateness and a resulting suspension or modification of play, was a popular sport from its introduction at the turn of the century until 1965 and beyond. Indeed, the sport's acceptability for and accessibility to young women seems to have been largely uncontested during the twentieth century, although most elementary and high schools used girls' rules for a number of decades, and there were definitely some concerns about roughness in city league basketball games during the early part of the century. Still, the uninterrupted existence of several basketball leagues for girls and women in Victoria is evidence that the sport was never seen as a threat to the health of the participants or as having the potential to turn female athletes into tomboys, feminists, or lesbians.

Thus, the history of basketball in Victoria may be characterized, not by a tension about the game's suitability for young women, but by a general lack of concern about the perils of working-class young women's enthusiastic participation in the sport. Certainly, this lack of concern was not universal, as can be seen in newspaper reports about overly rough and inappropriate play, in the policy of participation and feminine uniforms for

girls at the Provincial Normal School, and may be inferred from the women interviewed who do not recall playing basketball before 1965 with any athletes from wealthy or upper- class families. Competitive, city league basketball was not usually a sport chosen by or for the young ladies of high social class in the early and mid-twentieth century, for a number of reasons. Also, the game probably engendered some debate during the early years of the twentieth century when it was quickly gaining popularity among young women who were showing spectators that female athletes could fight for a ball as aggressively and with as much determination as their male counterparts.

By the time women were wearing shorts and T-shirts on the court in the mid-1920s, basketball for women was firmly entrenched in the sporting establishment in Victoria, and working-class young women were proving that they could play with skill and assertiveness. Their games were attended by spectators, their teams were sponsored by upstanding businesses and organizations, their uniforms were functional, their photographs were taken with the medals and trophies they won, and their winning tournaments were celebrated in the newspapers. Basketball, perhaps more than any other activity, allowed young women to be taken seriously and celebrated for their accomplishments, just like young men.

Arguably, basketball for women constituted a serious challenge to the established and hegemonic gender roles of the early and mid-twentieth century. The basketball court is a very public space, and may even be considered a stage on which players act out physical abilities and tactical competitiveness in front of spectators. The skills cultivated and displayed on the basketball court are not particularly compatible with the skills required to be a proper young lady before 1965. Rather, sports such as basketball have

long been considered good training for men and war.

In an article entitled “Athlete Specially Fit for Soldiering” in a 1915 issue of the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, the headings included “Athlete Understands Training,” “Has Learnt Self-Reliance,” and “Knows Importance of Details.”² In the article, it was argued that the athlete “has led a life which has pre-eminently fitted him for war conditions, and if he is but given the chance he will be found among those who have materially helped to keep the honor of England high, unsullied, free from taint.”³ Canadian sports historian Bruce Kidd has written a chapter entitled “The Making of Men” in his book, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*. He points out that following the end of World War One in 1919, a delegate at the conference for the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada argued that, “The value of athletics to the Army has been recognized more than at any time in the world’s history.”⁴

Still, women were playing basketball in Victoria in increasing numbers after the First World War, even though no one was arguing that women should fight in war, nor would most people have argued that women should undergo military training. Even after the “golden age” for women’s sport in Canada passed after the 1920s,⁵ women continued to play basketball in Victoria. Historian Colin Howell argues that the post-1945 period saw an increased rigidity of gender stereotypes in Canada, and this was reflected in the sports world. He notes that “a gendered representation of sports suggested that diving, synchronized swimming, golf, tennis, gymnastics, and figure skating were appropriately feminine,” while competitive team sports tended to be seen as masculine.⁶

Basketball, a team sport that promotes aggressive and competitive behaviour and requires speed, strength and stamina was clearly not a sport that would cultivate feminine

behaviour amongst female players. The ideals of womanly conduct including the grace and poise required for synchronized swimming and gymnastics, for example, were not needed in a game of basketball. Conversely, basketball players demonstrated that their bodies were capable of discipline and skill, regardless of their gender. Because basketball is a public demonstration of physical prowess, it is not surprising that physical educators and communities debated the appropriateness of basketball for girls and women in much of North America. Spectators could plainly see that women were challenging gender norms on the basketball court as they ran, jumped, and fought for the ball. Not only could this spectacle be seen as totally inappropriate for young women, but it was probably feared that this sort of behaviour might carry over into the everyday lives of the female athletes. This sentiment was articulated by a faculty member at Bennett College in the United States, who stated in 1937 that, “The presidents of women’s colleges are not endeavouring to turn out an army of masculine counterparts. Neither in the light of rapid historical progress and a sense of humor is there any longer a need to turn out an army of feminists.”⁷ Basketball, it was feared, had the potential to create “masculine counterparts” and “feminists.” In this context, many prudent physical educators in North America put an end to inter-collegiate competitive play for women and to the unsightly spectacle of public games.

But what did competitive basketball for women mean to those involved with the sport? Was the game simply a fun diversion for participants and spectators alike, or did it have the potential to challenge gender norms? Arguably, Dorothy Nye’s argument that “your body is your autobiography” may have had some relevance to the young women who played basketball in twentieth-century North America. As Judith Butler argues, “the

body *is* a historical situation ... and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation.”⁸ She writes, “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.”⁹

If a continual and repeated performance of acts constitute the gender of the actor, then a significant change in the nature of these acts would arguably constitute a subversion of gender. Female basketball players in North America really did have the potential to change the way they behaved as women; as they became accustomed to acting aggressively and physically on the basketball court, they were not reproducing feminine behaviour, but challenging it. Even if only temporarily, female basketball players were incorporating non-feminine actions into their routines, and these actions were watched and cheered by spectators.

The question, then, is why was there so little opposition in Victoria to young women’s participation in competitive basketball during the twentieth century? If, as many former players attest, young women stepped onto the basketball court and took on a different, more aggressive and physical personality, then why were spectators, physical educators and parents not concerned that this personality would manifest itself when they were not playing basketball? The answer lies, at least in part, in the way the young women conducted themselves when they were off the basketball court.

Nearly all of the women interviewed, who played basketball in Victoria between the late 1930s and the mid 1960s, recall that they and their teammates took great care to appear as attractive and presentable ladies when the games were over. In the locker room, they changed into dresses and skirts, put on makeup and did their hair before they went out with friends or boyfriends for the evening. Countless photographs show that

considerable attention was given to hair, nails and make-up in preparation for team pictures, and even for games. These young women knew that they were being watched when they stepped onto the basketball court, and many of them wanted to look their best, even as they sweated and fought for the ball. When banquets were held in honour of their basketball successes, the athletes always showed up looking their finest. Accepting awards, they remained as humble and gracious as they were expected to be as young ladies and as ambassadors of their sport. Happily, they accepted prizes of stockings, cutlery, necklace pendants and swimming trophies. Jubilantly, they hugged each other and their coaches and smiled for the cameras when they won championship tournaments.

It was obvious to the players themselves and to anyone watching that they were attractive and feminine young women. When they were not on the basketball court, female basketball players in Victoria proved again and again that they were not losing their feminine charms, nor were they becoming overt feminists. Theorists of identity would argue that participation in basketball in fact made these young women even more conscious of their appearances and actions as they made sure to maintain a positive relationship with their supporters despite their temporarily un-feminine behaviour. These young women were not purposely trying to push the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour; they just loved to play basketball, and they loved all of the freedoms and opportunities that went along with the game. Consciously or unconsciously, they realized that acting as ladies off the court helped them to maintain a positive reputation in their community, for themselves and for their sport.

The women who played basketball in Victoria were not alone in this attempt to maintain their feminine image despite—or because of—their involvement in sport.

M. Ann Hall points to the example of Jackie MacDonald, the tall, glamorous, bleach-blond shot put and discus thrower of the 1950s. Hall cites a passage from a 1955 article about MacDonald in *Maclean's* magazine: "As her muscles grow stronger, she fights back with an angora beret, sewn with sequins. Though she is tall—five feet ten and weighing a hundred and sixty pounds—Jackie is determined never to be picked out of a crowd as the girl most likely to move a piano."¹⁰

In return for the basketball players' careful attention to the maintenance of feminine appearance and behaviour, the physical educators, spectators, and community of Victoria never really questioned the appropriateness of the game for girls and women. Basketball for women may have been marginalised somewhat by silly team names like the "Kandy Kids," or "Vikettes." The players of the game were also sexualized when news reports that made offhand comments about the attractiveness of players, among other things, even in the 1960s. However, this was another factor in the continuation of women's basketball in Victoria; because many people in the community did not take women's basketball very seriously, no one was concerned that the game was challenging or changing the boundaries of behaviour for young women. Attractive girls having fun with their basketball team was nothing to be concerned about.

As the years went by and basketball for women had been played in the city for decades, there were probably fewer and fewer concerns that the feminine sensibilities of basketball players would be harmed. Many former athletes went on to coach or assist with women's teams, especially as their own daughters became old enough to play basketball. And as women who played basketball went became physical educators and coaches in Victoria, they were sure to teach boys' rules basketball to their female

students and athletes, year after year.¹¹ Basketball in Victoria was, by the middle of the twentieth century, firmly established as a sport played competitively by girls and women in a number of leagues. It would have taken a great deal of effort at this point to put an end to female competitive play, and clearly no one was particularly against it.

Thus, the athletes themselves had a primary role in maintaining the popularity and acceptance of women's basketball in Victoria before 1965. By choosing to play the game and joining a variety of leagues and teams, and by clearly maintaining their femininity off the court, young women in Victoria did their best to ensure that basketball would be available to themselves and their daughters.

While this thesis was not meant to be an exhaustive or a comparative study of women's basketball, it is important to note several other factors that may have also contributed to the long-standing tradition of women's basketball in Victoria, and on the west coast of Canada. The support of Protestant churches was briefly touched upon a number of times, but more research may lead to an increased emphasis on the churches' influences on the rise and popularity of women's basketball in western Canada. Certainly, the churches in Victoria were the site of many young girls' first experiences with competitive basketball. As well, businesses and organizations acted as sponsors for women's basketball teams and it is possible that a tradition was established where proportionately more sponsorship went into women's teams in the west than elsewhere in Canada and the United States.

Athletics and physical fitness for girls may have been accepted more widely and earlier in British Columbia than elsewhere in North America, perhaps because teachers in the province were following an English schooling tradition which encouraged "a sound

mind in a sound body.” The strong tradition of physical recreation activities in British Columbia is also evident in the “Pro-Rec” program that existed between 1934 and 1953, created by the provincial government to raise the health and morale of citizens through sport and fitness and preceded the community centre recreation programs that would later become popular across Canada. Pro-Rec enjoyed great popularity, especially among women who enjoyed both the physical and social aspects of the program in the 1930s and 1940s.¹² It is possible that the existence of Pro-Rec helped to normalize the idea of physical activity for women, making basketball just another option for young women who wanted to keep fit and have fun.

The scarcity of female physical education teachers in British Columbia in the early twentieth century—and the scarcity of women in general—may also have contributed to the acceptance of sports for girls and women. In the United States and in Ontario, it is well documented that female physical education teachers played a pivotal role in down-playing competitive sport in favour of non-competitive games and activities for girls. Without a strongly organized contingent of female physical education teachers, a similar movement may have never been possible in British Columbia.

Though the above factors may have contributed to the history of women’s basketball in Victoria and British Columbia, the athletes themselves were the principal actors in the creation of an acceptable space for women to play basketball. These girls and women negotiated their way between acting aggressively and physically in a public space, and the normative behaviour of a conventional femininity off the court. Because they were able to demonstrate that they remained attractive and feminine young women

despite their involvement in basketball, they maintained acceptance and support within their community.

Notes

¹ Rita Liberti, "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942," Journal of Sport History, 26 (3) (Fall 1999): 567-584, 578.

² "Athlete Specially Fit For Soldiering," Daily Colonist, 5 January 1915, 13.

³ "Athlete Specially Fit For Soldiering," 13.

⁴ Bruce Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996), 45.

⁵ See David McDonald, "The Golden Age of Women and Sport in Canada," Canadian Woman Studies 15(4) (Fall 1995): 12-15. See also Ron Hotchkiss, "The Matchless Six: Canadian Women at the Olympics, 1928," The Beaver 73(5) (1993): 23-42.

⁶ Colin Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2001), 120-121. See also M. Ann Hall, "Sweetheart Heroines: Athletic and Lovely," in The Girl and the Game (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 104-134.

⁷ Liberti, "'We were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys'," 581.

⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," in Writing on the Body, eds. Katie Conboy, et. al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 401-417, 404.

⁹ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 406.

¹⁰ Hall, "Sweetheart Heroines: Athletic and Lovely," 129-130.

¹¹ Several of the women interviewed went on to teach physical education and coach girls' basketball teams. Interviews, Victoria, 5 May 2004; Victoria, 3 June 2004; Victoria, 10 June 2004.

¹² Barbara Schrodt, "History of Pro-Rec: The British Columbia Provincial Recreation Program, 1934 – 1953," (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1979), British Columbia Archives, Microfiche, Add. MSS. 1941.

Bibliography

Interviews

All interviews conducted and transcribed by Emily Boyle in British Columbia, Canada.
All names have been changed.

Doris. Brentwood Bay, 26 February 2004. Age: 79.

Dave. Victoria, 2 April 2004. Age: 84.

Elizabeth. Victoria, 4 April 2004. Age: 84.

Kathleen. Victoria, 16 April 2004. Age: 74.

Diane. Victoria, 30 April 2004. Age: 76.

Bette. Victoria, 4 May 2004. Age: 61.

Sue. Victoria, 5 May 2004. Age: 72.

Audrey. Colwood, 12 May 2004. Age: 73.

Muriel. Victoria, 3 June 2004. Age: 77.

Mabel. Victoria, 10 June 2004. Age: 79.

Ruth. Victoria, 10 June 2004. Age: 68.

Isabel. Victoria, 9 July 2004. Age: 57

Primary Sources

“Athletic Society.” Anecho of the Provincial Normal School, Victoria. 1928-29.
Courtesy of the Camosun College Archives.

“Basketball.” Physical Health and Education 1961. Victoria: Department of
Education, Division of Curriculum.

“Boys’ Basketball.” Anecho of the Provincial Normal School, Victoria. 1928-29.
Courtesy of the Camosun College Archives.

British Columbia (B.C.) Archives.
Photographs, male and female basketball teams.

“Cec’s New Holders of Dominion Cage Title.” Daily Times. 27 April 1949, 15.

Craigdarroch Castle Archival room.
Photographs, male and female basketball teams, wall display.

“Dominion Cage Titlists Honoured.” Daily Times. 14 May 1949, 13.

“Girls’ Basketball.” Anecho of the Provincial Normal School, Victoria. 1928-29.
Courtesy of the Camosun College Archives.

“Girls’ Basketball,” (Usually includes photo and short write-up) The Camosun
(yearbook of Victoria High School) 1921- 1965. Courtesy of Victoria High
School Archives.

The Martlet, University of Victoria News. Articles sorted by date:

“B.B’s Unbeatable.” The Martlet. 7 January 1965. 7.

“Vikettes Nipped.” The Martlet. 14 January 1965. 7.

“Basketball Vikettes Win Swim Trophy.” The Martlet. 28 January 1965, 7.

“Vikettes Montreal Bound.” The Martlet. 1 April 1965, 7.

“Moral Issues,” Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of
Canada, Vol. 19, 1944, 39.

Nye, Dorothy. New Bodies For Old. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1946.

Scrapbook courtesy of Marion Andrews, including:
Bay Window. The Bay publication, 1946. “Vancouver Island Basketball

Champs.”

Bay Window 1947.

Numerous newspaper articles from Victoria, Vancouver, Nanaimo, Seattle, Port Angeles. 1939-1950.

Original photographs, 1939-1950.

Personal letters and invitations.

School Letters.

Song Lyrics.

Scrapbook courtesy of Lee Drummond, including:

Banquet and awards programs.

Basketball association membership cards.

Basketball tournament programs.

Game score sheets.

Numerous newspaper articles from Victoria, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Regina 1961-1967.

Original photographs, 1961-1967.

Personal letters.

School letters, patches, ribbons and buttons.

Scrapbook courtesy of Pat Metcalfe, including:

Complete listing of women's teams coached by Walter Yeamans.

Photographs.

Whitehead, Eric. "Only 13 Years Ago." (Story of the Edmonton Grads) Vancouver Sun. Magazine Section. 27 June 1953. 16-17.

"Women's Basketball." The Tower. Victoria College Yearbook. Photographs and write-ups, 1951-52 through 1958-59. University of Victoria Archives.

Victoria Daily Colonist. Articles, sorted by date:

"School League Sports." (Girls' basketball, Oaklands vs South Park). 15 November 1914, 9.

"Basketball Leaguers plan three divisions." 27 November 1914, 11.

"Names Teams for Inter-Scholastic Sports." 4 December 1919, 9.

"Victoria Scores in Thompson Cup Sport." 5 December 1914. 9.

"Prowess of Girls Wins for Victoria." 6 December 1914. 9.

"Athlete Specially Fit For Soldering." 5 January 1915, 13.

- “Chemainus Ladies Win At Basketball.” 27 November 1919, 10.
- “Upholds the Referee.” 29 November 1919, 10.
- “Emphatic Denial.” 29 November 1919, 10.
- “Nearly Every Girl Can Make Herself Pretty and Attractive.” Advertisement.
29 November 1919, 18.
- “Spectator Endorses Reporter’s Account.” 2 December 1919, 10.
- “Basketball League Will Start Play Early in New Year—Number of Sunday School
Teams to Enter—Senior, Intermediate and Ladies’ Leagues.” 2 December
1919, 10.
- “Basketball Entries Close Next Monday.” 19 December 1919, 10.
- “Basketball Games to Start Tonight.” 9 January 1924, 10.
- “Ladies’ Basketball.” 13 January 1924, 10.
- “How to Play Basketball.” Series, 22-29 January 1925. Sports section.
- “Canadian Girls are Becoming Lovlier Every Day, Say Men Who Ought to Know.”
25 January 1925, 12.
- “City Basketball At Willows Tonight.” 16 January 1925, 10.
- “City Basketball League Schedule.” 30 January 1925, 11.
- “City League Basketball.” 21 January 1926, 10.
- “Kotex No laundry—discard like tissue.” Advertisement, 23 January 1926, 13.
- “Alberta Girls Play Falcons.” 18 February 1926, 10.
- “Women Athletes Are Arranging For Separate Athletic Federation.” 21 February 1926.
10.
- “Varsconas Win Basketball From Fidelis by Five Only.” (“Splendid Exhibition
Delights Large Crowd of Fans”) 24 February 1926, 10.
- “Our Basketball History.” 11 March 1934. Third Section, 1.
- “Banquet For BC Athletes.” 1 June 1939, 6.

“Playing in Coast Final.” 15 March 1941, 13.

“Local Girls Win Titles.” 16 March 1941, 13.

“After British Columbia Honors Tonight.” “Victoria Cards in 37-37 Deadlock in First of Play-Off.” 20 March 1941, 12.

“Vancouver Girls Defeat Victoria In Final Tussle.” 21 March 1941, 12.

“Cec’s Capture Canadian Cage Championship.” 27 April 1949, 11.

“Team Members Honoured by City.” 21 May 1949, 11.

“How Basketball Memories Began,” 24 February 1962, 8.

University of Victoria Archives.

Photographs, male and female basketball teams from Victoria College, Provincial Normal School. 139-001-00 through 139-011-00.

Victoria High School Archives. “Girls’ Basketball.” (Usually includes photo and short write-up.) The Camosun. (yearbook of Victoria High School) 1921- 1965.

Victoria Sports Hall of Fame Archives.

Iona Worthington File.

“Mary Pearson Coutts, Basketball, 1960’s-1970’s.”

Photographs, male and female basketball teams, including “B.C. Telephone Co. 1924-25.”

“Mary Pearson Coutts, Basketball, 1960’s-1970’s.”

Women's Basketball History

- Beran, Janice. "From Six-on-Six to Full Court Press: A Century of Iowa Girls' Basketball." Ph.D. diss., Ames: Iowa State University, 1993.
- Beran, Janice. "The Story: Six-Player Girls' Basketball in Iowa." In Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthropology of Women in Sports. Reet Howell, ed. West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1980. 552-563.
- Byrne, Julie Elizabeth. "'O God of Players': Immaculata College Basketball and American Catholic Women's Pleasure, 1939-1975." Ph.D.diss., Duke University, 2001.
- Chalus, Elaine. "The Edmonton Commercial Graduates: Women's History: An Integrationist Approach." In Winter Sports in Canada. Elise A Corbet and Anthony Rasperich, eds. Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1990. 69-86.
- Chepko, Steveda. "The Domestication of Basketball." In A Century of Women's Basketball. Joan Hult and Marianna Trekell, eds. Reston, Va: NAGWS, 1991. 109-124.
- Davenport, Joanna. "The Tides of Change in Women's Basketball Rules." In A Century of Women's Basketball. Joan Hult and Marianna Trekell, eds. Reston, Va: NAGWS, 1991. 83-108.
- Dewar, John. "The Edmonton Grads: The Team and its Social Significance From 1915-1940." In Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthropology of Women in Sports. Reet Howell, ed. West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1980. 541-547.
- Dosch, Nancy Cole. "The Sacrifice of Maidens or Healthy Sportswomen?" In A Century of Women's Basketball. Joan Hult and Marianna Trekell, eds. Reston, Va: NAGWS, 1991. 125-136.
- Emery, Lynne Fauley and Margaret Toohey-Costa. "Hoops and Skirts: Women's Basketball on the West Coast, 1892-1930s." In A Century of Women's Basketball. Joan Hult and Marianna Trekell, eds. Reston, Va: NAGWS, 1991. 137-155.
- Grundy, Pamela. "Bloomers And Beyond: North Carolina Women's Basketball Uniforms, 1901-1997." Southern Cultures 3(3) (1997): 52-67.
- Grundy, Pamela. "From Amazons to Glamazons: The Rise and Fall of North Carolina Women's Basketball, 1920-1960." Journal of American History 83 (June 2000): 112-146.

- Horger, Marc Thomas. "Play By the Rules: The Creation of Basketball and the Progressive Era, 1891-1917 ." Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2001.
- Howell, Reet, ed. Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthropology of Women in Sports. West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1980.
- Hult, Joan and Marianna Trekell, eds. A Century of Women's Basketball. Reston, Va.: NAGWS, 1991.
- Liberti, Rita. "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942." Journal of Sport History. 26(3) (Fall 1999): 567-584.
- Lucas, Shelley Marie. "Courting Controversy: Gender and Power in Iowa Girls' Basketball." Ph.D.diss., University of Iowa, 2001.
- Markels, Robin Bell. "Bloomer Basketball and Its Suspender Suppression: Women's Intercollegiate Competition at Ohio State, 1904-1907." Journal of Sport History. 27(1)(Spring 2000): 31-49.
- McElwain, David. "The Only Dance in Iowa: A Cultural History of Iowa Six-Player Girls' Basketball." Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2001.
- Peavy, Linda and Ursula Smith. "World Champions: The 1904 Girls' Basketball Team Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School." Montana. 51(4) (Winter 2001): 2-25.
- Schrodt, Barbara. "Vancouver's Dynastic Domination of Canadian Senior Women's Basketball, 1942-1967." Canadian Journal of the History of Sport. 26(2) (1995): 19-32.
- Teague, Bertha Frank. Basketball for Girls. New York: Ronald Press Company, 1962.
- Wamsley, Kevin B. "Power and Privilege in Historiography: Constructing Percy Page." Sport History Review 28 (1997): 146-155.
- Welch, Paula. "Interscholastic Basketball: Bane of Physical Educators." In Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthropology of Women in Sports. Reet Howell, ed. West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1980. 424-431.
- Zerbe, Louisa. "The 1930 University of British Columbia Women's Basketball Team: Those Other World Champions." In Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthropology of Women in Sports. Reet Howell, ed. West Point, N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1980. 548-551.

Secondary Sources

- Bryson, Lois. "Sport and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity." Women's Studies International Forum. 10(4) (1987): 369-379.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." In Writing on the Body. Katie Conboy, et. Al, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 401-417.
- Conboy, Katie, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury, eds. Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Dyck, Noel. "Games, Bodies, Celebrations and Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Sport." In Games, Sports and Cultures. Noel Dyck, ed. New York: Berg, 2000. 13-42.
- Dyck, Noel, ed. Games, Sports and Cultures. New York: Berg, 2000.
- Forbes, Susan L. "Gendering Corporate Welfare Practices: Female Sports and Recreation at Eaton's During the Depression." Rethinking History 5(1) (2001): 59-74.
- Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- Frisch, Michael. A Shared Authority. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Gordon, Sarah. "'Any Desired Length': Negotiating Gender through Sports Clothing, 1870-1925." In Beauty and Business. Philip Scranton, ed. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Griffin, Pat. Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport. Windsor: Human Kinetics, 1998.
- Guttmann, Allen. Women's Sports: A History. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Hall, M. Ann. Feminism and Sporting Bodies. Windsor: Human Kinetics, 1996.
- Hall, M. Ann. The Girl and the Game: A History of Women's Sport in Canada. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002.
- Hoffman, Abby. "1923-1935: The Golden Age of Women's Sport." Branching Out 7. (1) (1980): 23-25.

- Hotchkiss, Ron. "The Matchless 6: Canadian Women at the Olympics, 1928." Beaver. 73(5) (1993): 23-42.
- Howell, Colin D. Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Howell, Colin D. Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1995.
- Kidd, Bruce. The Struggle For Canadian Sport. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Korinek, Valerie J. "'Don't Let Your Girlfriends Ruin Your Marriage': Lesbian Imagery in *Chatelaine* Magazine, 1950-1969." Journal of Canadian Studies. 33(3) (Fall 1998): 83-109.
- Korinek, Valerie J. "'Mrs. Chatelaine' vs. 'Mrs. Slob': Contestants, Correspondents and the *Chatelaine* Community in Action, 1961-1969." Journal of the Canadian Historical Association. 7 (1996): 251-275.
- Korinek, Valerie J. Roughing It in the Suburbs. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Lenskyj, Helen. "Common Sense and Physiology: North American Medical Views on Women in Sport, 1890-1930." Canadian Journal of the History of Sport. 21(1) (1990): 49-64.
- Lenskyj, Helen. Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality. Toronto: Women's Press, 1986.
- Lenskyj, Helen. "Physical Activity for Canadian Women, 1890-1931: Media Views." In From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras. London: Frank Cass, 1987. 208-231.
- Lenskyj, Helen. "Training for 'True Womanhood': Physical Education for Girls in Ontario Schools, 1890-1920." Historical Studies in Education 2(2) (1990): 205-223.
- Lenskyj, Helen. "We Want to Play...We'll Play: Women and Sport in the Twenties and Thirties." Canadian Woman Studies 4(3) (Spring 1983): 15-18.
- Mangan, J.A. and Roberta J. Park, eds. From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras. London: Frank Cass, 1987.

- Martens, Fred L. A History of Physical Education in the University of Victoria. Victoria: Morriss Printing, 1984.
- McCrone, Kathleen E. "Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public Schools." In From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras. J.A. Mangan and Roberta Park, eds. London: Frank Cass, 1987. 97-129
- McCrone, Kathleen E. Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914. London: Routledge, 1988.
- McDonald, David. "The Golden Age of Women and Sport in Canada." Canadian Woman Studies. 15(4) (Fall 1995): 12-15.
- Mickelson, Norma. "Message from the University of Victoria." Cleeve Dheenshaw, ed., Vic High 125. Souvenir Program, May 4-5, 2001, 11.
- Mrozek, Donald J. "The 'Amazon' and the American 'Lady': Sexual Fears of Women as Athletes." In From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras. J.A. Mangan and Roberta Park, eds. London: Frank Cass, 1987. 282-298.
- Parr, Joy. Domestic Goods. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- Phillips, Janet and Peter. "History from Below: Women's Underwear and the Rise of Women's Sports." Journal of Popular Culture. 27(2) (1993): 129-148.
- Prebish, Charles S. Religion and Sport. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Prentice, Alison, et. al. Canadian Women, A History, 2nd Edition. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996.
- Sangster, Joan. "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-1960." Labour/Le travail. 31/32 (Fall 1993): 167-199.
- Schrodt, Barbara. "History of Pro-Rec: The British Columbia Provincial Recreation Program, 1934 – 1953." Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1979. British Columbia Archives, Microfiche Add. MSS. 1941.
- Scranton, Philip, ed. Beauty and Business. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Smith, Michael. "Graceful Athleticism or Robust Womanhood." Journal of Canadian Studies 23(1&2) (Spring/Summer 1988): 120-137.

Smith, Peter. Come Give a Cheer! One Hundred Years of Victoria High School 1876-1976. Victoria: Victoria High School Centennial Celebrations Committee, 1976.

Smith, Peter. "How are we doing now, Vic High?" In Vic High 125. Cleeve Dheenshaw, ed. Souvenir Program, May 4-5, 2001.

Strong-Boag, Veronica. The New Day Recalled. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988.

Warner, Patricia Campbell. "The Comely Rowers: The Beginnings of Collegiate Sports Uniforms for Women Crews at Wellesley, 1876-1900." Clothing and Textiles Research Journal. 10(3) (1992): 64-75.

Whyte, Philip and Kevin Young, eds. Sport and Gender in Canada. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford, 1999.

Appendix

Interview Questions:

What is your age?

What is your graduation year and highest level of education?

At the time you played basketball, how would you describe your family's social class?

Where and when did you first play basketball? (age and school year)

Did you participate in other sports?

When (and where) did you start to play competitive basketball? Why did you join a team?

How many years did you play with a team? What position did you play?

Did you play "girls' rules"?

Were there tryouts?

Did you have any female role models who played basketball?

Did you also like to watch basketball games? (or did you just like to play)

Did your family/community support your participation?

Were there spectators at your games? Did news reporters come to or report on your games?

Did you think that people in the crowd expected you to look or behave a certain way as women?

How would you describe the girls you played basketball with?

At the time, were there concerns about preserving your modesty or femininity as basketball players? Were you concerned about being seen as tomboyish?

Did you feel that you could be a lady as well as a basketball player?

Were there concerns about overexerting or damaging your bodies on the basketball court?

Were you yourself concerned that the sport might affect your body? Were you hopeful that it would make your body more attractive or that you would lose weight, etc.?

Did you see basketball as good for your health?

Would you say that you had a different personality on and off the basketball court?

Did you get adequate time to practice and play in a gym?

At the time, did you find that boys' teams were treated differently than your team?

Why did you stop playing basketball?

Did you remain friends with your teammates after you stopped?

Did you remain physically active later in life?

Are there any other memories or funny stories you would like to share?