



VICTORIA HIGH SCHOOL Alumni News

B U L L E T I N

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'Davids' Help 1958-1959 Totems Win Vic High's First BC Hoop Crown by King Lee (VHS '58)

The Vic High Totems' march to their first provincial boys' basketball title – and the first Vancouver Island team to break the mainland stranglehold – could be headlined “Davids play big part in slaying Goliath.”

Or it could simply read: “Have Basketball, Will Travel.”

Legendary coach George “Porky” Andrews had no idea that local basketball stars David Nelson and David Black were plotting to transfer to Vic High for their Grade 12 year, solely to join the Totems and win a championship.

“To play ball, that’s the only reason I went there,” says David Nelson when asked why he left Esquimalt High, where he was a star forward with the Dockers, to attend Victoria High. He credits his lifelong friend David Black with the idea.

Black agrees wholeheartedly. He had been a standout guard for three seasons (grades 9 to 11) with the Hornets at Mount View, the forerunner of Spectrum Community School. The two Davids had been buddies from elementary school days when Nelson went to View Royal, Black attended nearby Craigflower, and they played together in the celebrated First United Church basketball program. It was there that they met future Totem teammates Tom Wyatt, Darrell Lorimer and Barry Sadler.

To apply for transfers out of their own schools' catchment boundaries, Nelson and Black had to show that they wanted to take courses at Vic High that were not available at Esquimalt or Mount View. For Nelson, it was Law 91; for Black, it was German and Law 91. Perhaps it didn't hurt that Black's father – Wesley D. Black – was Provincial Secretary in Premier W.A.C. Bennett's cabinet. In any case, the transfer process was eventually completed.



Happy Totems with their BC championship trophy and all-star trophies: tourney MVP David Black, team captain Tom Wyatt, and coach George “Porky” Andrews.

Both Nelson and Black remember being summoned to principal Harry Dee's office for a chat early in the school year. Nelson recalls Dee saying: “You came here to play basketball – I don't like that.” But the principal added that now they were at Vic High, they had better win. Black recalls the Dee's message as more blunt: “I don't like basketball bums.”

Nelson was a power forward who crashed offensive boards for rebounds and put-back points. He admired Andrews' tough coaching style, even though Nelson had to drop from 235 pounds to 205 in one month.

“I still look back [for a pass] going up the floor,” laughs Nelson, who was the target of more than one basketball fired at the back of his head by Andrews during practice.

Black also has lasting memories of Andrews, such as the time Black was late for gym class because assembly went overtime.

“You're late,” said Andrews, laying down a punishment of 10 push-ups.

“But ...” Black began, before being interrupted by Andrews' upgrade to 25 push-ups.

Nelson says the Totems went through the 1958-1959

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season losing only one game – their season-opener against Esquimalt. “Our [Esquimalt and Mount View] friends were furious with us,” he recalls. But that anger dissipated over the ensuing half-century: in fact, in 2009 Nelson was invited to 50th reunion celebrations at both Esquimalt and Vic High, and attended and enjoyed them both.

After the loss to Esquimalt, the Vic High squad was unbeatable the rest of the season, including a 58-39 win over the older and more experienced reigning Canadian junior

champions from Victoria College. An annual interscholastic tournament pitted the Totems against the (now University of Victoria) Vikings, Oak Bay Bays, and a team from Royal Roads Military College.

In March 1959, after winning the Island high-school championship, the Totems proceeded to Vancouver for the 14th annual provincial tournament as the top seed from Vancouver Island. That year, perennial powerhouse Vancouver College – winner of the inaugural provincial championship in 1946 (and Goliath for the purposes of this story) – was the Lower Mainland’s second seed, so the two met in the second round instead of the anticipated championship game matchup. The Fighting Irish were always strong because Vancouver College was a private school and could draw athletes without regard to catchment area or even Canadian boundaries.

“That [game against Vancouver College] was a war,” says Nelson, who had a cut around his eye to prove it. The Fighting Irish held the halftime lead and Nelson remembers the Totems being surprised when their coach stopped them from going to the dressing room and made them stand near or beneath the bleachers.

Andrews “chewed us out,” says Nelson, and the team responded by clawing back in the second half to win.

In the all-Island final, Vic High defeated the Courtenay Towhees handily, 49-26, to capture the BC



The 1959 provincial tournament’s First All-Star Team featured three Vic High Totems. Pictured are David Black with his MVP trophy, Gordon Betcher (Courtenay), David Nelson, Darrell Lorimer, and Barry Forrest (Abbotsford).

championship. Vic High also dominated the tourney’s all-star selections, with all five starters being honoured. Black was named the tournament’s most valuable player, and was joined on the first all-star team by Nelson and Darrell Lorimer. Totem captain and playmaker Tom Wyatt was named to the second all-star team, while Barry Sadler earned an honourable mention.

Praise flooded in even from rival teams. The coach of pre-tourney favorite Vancouver College called Vic High’s ’59 Totems “one of the best teams ever entered in the tournament.” And a tournament organizer commented, “Porky fielded one of the best teams I have ever seen.”

The Totems went on to win three more BC titles, in 1962, 1966 and 1969. Oak Bay later overtook Vic High in provincial pennants, winning in 1965, 1968, 1973, 1974 and 1977. From 1965 to 1969, only Vancouver College broke the Island domination, taking the 1967 title.

While the two Davids went on to play basketball for the UBC Thunderbirds, they excelled at other sports too. Black (along with Lorimer) was a member of the 1955 BC Babe Ruth championship baseball team. Nelson played a season of senior lacrosse for the Victoria Shamrocks and recalls scraps with the Nanaimo Timbermen’s John Ferguson, who later had a stellar National Hockey League career and won five Stanley Cups with the Montreal Canadiens.

Beyond athletics, the two Davids excelled in business pursuits too. Law 91 must have been a happy choice for Black, as he became a successful corporate lawyer. His name is still featured on the door of Vancouver law firm DuMoulin Black, even though he is officially retired.

Nelson served in the Canadian diplomatic corps from 1964 to 1971 with postings to Glasgow, Belfast, Caracas and Ottawa before taking on the job of assistant to the president of Mohawk Industries, at the time the largest broom-handle manufacturer in the world. He eventually bought the company and became a successful businessman producing doors, sinks and toilets, and establishing a manufacturing plant in China.

Asked about the academic program at Vic High, Nelson says, "I liked it a lot." But still, that wasn't the

reason the two friends conspired to play basketball together at the same high school. "We wanted to be there," he says. "We wanted to play for Porky."

And no one ever spoke to Andrews about the "transfer" athletes nor did he ever raise the subject, says Nelson.

David Nelson recently purchased a seat plaque in the Lawrie Wallace Auditorium. His plaque reads simply: "Otto, Class of 1959, BC basketball champs '59."

He says everyone who went to Vic High that year will know to whom it refers.

Nelson adds that "Otto" was a rather hefty National Football League player. That is all he's willing to say about the subject.

Photos courtesy of David Black



The triumphant Totems disembarking from the "midnight boat" from Vancouver. Back row: Robin Barnes, Dave Nelson, Darrell Lorimer, Tom Collett, Keith Hart, Barry Sadler. Front Row: team manager Norm Isherwood, Bill Hobbis, John Balloch, coach George Andrews, Tom Wyatt, Dave Black.