

A Time For T

A couple of months ago, Mr. John Cole, the current athletic director at Victoria High, visited our Archives and asked a simple question: “When did Vic High begin using team nicknames starting with the letter T, and loosely based on a First Nations theme?”

Yikes, I thought. How come I get all the hard questions? “I’ll see what I can find out” is all I could say.

I sat down with archival records and yearbooks and, as usual, was immediately sidetracked.

I went through hundreds of pages covering the years between 1914 and 1949, and not one mention of a Tomahawk, a Titan, a Tiger, or a Totem leapt off a page. What I did find were iconic names scattered through the old annuals like blossoms in a neglected garden.

These names represented some of the superstars of their time. Not just locally but nationally and internationally. Hall-of-fame names like Lynn and Muzz Patrick, Torchy and Doug Peden and Art and Chuck Chapman. However, I was looking for team nicknames, and there wasn’t anything to be found until the 1930s.

When the school was founded in 1876, most team games associated with school athletics were still in a process of growth. Rules were dynamic and sometimes local, and any international agreement on the rules we know today were years away. Tennis, badminton, calisthenics, marching drills, running, archery, shooting, gymnastics and rowing would have been popular kinds of exercise. Some form of cricket, baseball, rugby and association football were played, but team sports for schools would have been still quite novel. To put things in perspective, in 1876, the year Vic High was founded, General George Custer’s troops were defeated at the battle of the Little Big Horn. That same year the National Baseball League was formed. Basketball was still 15 years away from its invention. The Stanley Cup was still 16 years away from its creation.

By the start of the 20th century the popularity of team sports grew exponentially and Vic High joined in the craze. By the early 1900s Vic High had drafted teams in baseball, cricket, basketball, soccer/football, field hockey and rugby.

This passage from *Come Give a Cheer: One Hundred Years of Victoria High School* sums up the atmosphere and success the school encountered in those early years: “In 1905 there was inaugurated a series of annual competitions for BC High School supremacy in three sports – boys’ rugby and basketball, and girls’ grass hockey. At first, for all practical purposes, these contests were between Victoria High School and Vancouver (King Edward) High; but other schools were represented as the province’s population grew. The Thomson Stationery Company of Vancouver put up handsome silver trophies, and the ‘Thomson Cups’ became the most coveted awards in high school sport.”

Vic High’s success varied. The rugby team failed to win a provincial championship until after World War I. The boys’ basketball teams, however, were victorious in 1907, 1908 and 1911.

Playing for Vic High at that time was future BC premier Boss Johnson. However, the most dominant Vic High team of that era was the girls' grass hockey team. They won the Thomson Cup seven times between 1906 and 1914. Records indicate that the girls obtained permanent possession of the Thomson Cup and that it is somewhere in the Archives. We were unaware of that and we've begun a search.

As the 1920s progressed, Vic High found all kinds of high schools to knock around with on the Island and over on the Lower Mainland. The basketball girls won the McDonald Cup, emblematic of the provincial girl's championship, in 1914, 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1926. The boys' basketball team won the Thomson Cup in 1917, 1921, 1923 and 1927. The boy's rugby team won the Thomson Cup in 1925.

One of Vic High's amazing BC champions following the Great War was the 1922 girls' basketball team. Led by Muriel Daniels, Isabel Crawford, Doris "Pinky" Grubb and Elizabeth McLennan, the girls swept city honours, beat New Westminster 12-10 for the provincial high school championship, and then topped that by winning the BC Open championship. They played a two-game aggregate series against St. Mark's of Vancouver, winning by scores of 13-12 and 6-4. Don't laugh: basketball was a very different game then. The girls speed would have been hampered by their full-suit ensembles, complete with accessory ribbons and bows.



GIRLS' BASKETBALL TEAM
 Worthington Melville
 McQueen Daniels (Capt.) Gates
 Grubb Crawford

1922 BC Open Champs



During the early days of basketball, the school janitor was kept busy retrieving the ball from the mounted peach basket every time a goal was scored.

Reading the *Camosuns* from those years is a like deciphering some secret code; however, the excitement surrounding some of the events is quite obvious.

The boys' basketball teams of 1929 and 1930 were led by Vic High's first legendary coach, Claude Campbell, and featured players like Art and Chuck Chapman (both future Olympians), Alex McKeachie, Muzz and Lynn Patrick and Doug Peden, runner-up for Canada's male athlete of the first half of the 20th century.



In 1929, they started off by beating both the Normal School and Victoria College, which was housed on the fourth floor of Vic High. Then T.J. Trapp Technical School of New Westminster was “invited to try conclusions” with the Vic High Reps for some kind of bragging rights. What those conclusions were exactly is not quite clear.

In front of a packed Vic High gymnasium, “the boys did not disappoint their followers, but rather gave them a great shock by taking a 35-20 victory.” It’s not evident who was shocked: their New Westminster rivals or the Vic High followers. Back the teams went to New Westminster to play, and Vic High won again.

Apparently “conclusions” were not completely tried because an official championship game was yet to come. Nanaimo challenged Vic High to a single-game final, and our boys won 27-10, locking up the provincial championship and the Thomson Cup. After 1929, any mention of the Thomson Cup seems to vanish.

In 1930, it appears having Art Chapman in the lineup wasn’t enough for the Vic High boys, so they added Lynn Patrick. When Lynn wasn’t scoring tries in rugby or winning boxing titles, he was preparing to be an all-star and Stanley Cup champion in the NHL, where he played for the New York Rangers. For good measure, future Canadian champion Alex McKeachie was added to fill out the Vic High roster.

The Reps let Vic High’s house teams take care of business with the local high schools and instead joined an Intermediate “A” league. They took a quick break from that action to beat Alberni and claim the Island Intermediate B championship. Remember now, these were under-21 men’s teams they were playing.

Vic High won the city Intermediate A championship, and with that victory gained the right to challenge the Durkins from Chalmers United Church in Vancouver for the unofficial Provincial Intermediate “A” championship. They won a single-game playoff to claim the BC Open championship.

It all gets a little confusing now. The boys had won the provincial championship, but now they had to play the First United Doodads (you read that right: the Doodads) for the Island Intermediate “A” championship. The boys won that in a screamer 20-11. It doesn’t say where the game took place, but if it was at the church, it would have been in the coffin-sized gym in the

basement of what is now called First Metropolitan United Church. I played there when I was 11 years old, and I still get nightmares about it.

Coach Campbell wasn't finished. He wanted more. He entered the Vic High Reps in the City Knockout league. Remember, this is the Depression era, and this is a men's league. The referees were all "homers" and turned a blind eye to a lot of the body crunching that took place.

The term "knockout" was as much literal as it was figurative; what a show it must have been. Vic High made their way to the final to play against a powerful Keating team, and we'll pause here and begin a side journey into the past.

Stay with us, we'll be right back after this commercial.

<p>Two games, a dance, coffee And refreshments: 25 cents</p>
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Brian "Arch" Sluggett is now 86 years old and still looks like he could go 10 rounds in a super middleweight boxing match. He has the square build of a boxer and moves with a boxer's grace. Arch, as is family calls him, was inaugurated into the Victoria Sports Hall of Fame with the famous Gorge Hotel fastball team from the 1950s. He also won the 6th World Seniors Left-handers golf championship in Galway, Ireland in 1990.

He won't thank you for making any fuss about those events, but he will buy you a pint and discuss his memories of the old Brentwood area. He has Hemingway-like stories of shooting grouse and pheasants and waiting in a blind, enjoying the morning mist, holding his dog Mike, while waiting for geese to fly in to feed on the flat wet areas abundant on the Sluggett farmland. He accepts the changes he's seen but, as he points out, that doesn't mean he doesn't miss the freedom of those days.



Arch showed me where the old West Road Hall used to stand. This was the scene of some pretty unusual basketball games, and Arch remembers them well. The hall stood right where a Butchart Gardens sign stands now at the corner of West Saanich Road and Benvenuto. In 1910 Jack Sluggett, Arch's uncle, donated the land for the hall, and a committee of locals raised the funds for the mortgage, booked activities and maintained the hall. It was the centre for all community social activities before the Brentwood Community Hall was built.

Dave Clark, an old cricket associate and former Canadian national rugby player, is the current archivist at Butchart Gardens. I asked him if Butchart's had a photo of the old hall. He couldn't locate one; however, he did come up with an amusing snapshot of the restaurant and service station that was located kitty-corner from the hall, with a sign that read: **Eat Here and Get Gas.**

Basketball and dancing were two natural fundraisers for the community hall; however, they did make for some safety concerns. That was especially true when both events occurred on the same evening.

March 1930: Vic High meets Keating in the City Knockout final. It's hard to imagine a group of high school kids tackling these full-grown muscular farmers from the Peninsula. However, this wasn't just any high school team, as it featured some icons of Canadian basketball from the first half of the 20th century.



Keating Basketball Team

“Adverse conditions” was how the *Camosun* described that championship game. Adverse? Let's take a look at what that might mean.

On a dark March evening, the Vic High boys are loaded into Model A's. They wind out of Victoria along West Saanich Road and, with a bit of luck, find the hall just south of Brentwood Village. This area is extremely rural, with very few street lights. People are jammed into the hall, and the boys probably have to push their way through the entrance. A sheet draped across one end marks the confines of a changing area.

More wood is piled into a potbellied stove to warm up a hall that is already panting hot from the bodies crammed inside. The hall is very small. There are lines painted on the walls three feet above the floor surface: this allows the players to run up the walls a little before being called out of bounds. The spectators are expected to move out of the way. Their cooperation would probably depend on the score.

There is a dance following the game so the floor has been freshly waxed. Wahoo! Players are sliding all over the place. What about travelling calls? Are they enforced depending on which direction the referee is sliding at that same moment?

Arch says: “The whole place would rattle when a car drove by. Mind you, we might get one a night back then. The hall was located right on the corner, and you could hear a vehicle coming from miles away, and it always sounded like it was coming right into the hall as it veered past.”

There are a few other tricky obstacles besides the potbellied stove and unpredictable spectators. Iron bars are strung across the hall from wall to wall to stabilize the building. The bars are 8 feet off the floor and, with the basket being 10 feet high, the players had a unique problem. As Arch says, “the players shot underhand and would loft shots between the bars and drop them into the goal”. However, some of the best moments occurred when players slid across the waxed floor and laid the ball into the basket before crashing into the end wall.

Vic High put up a game effort that night in 1930, but the Keating men prevailed by just two points. I like to imagine one of those muscle-bound Keating players sliding along the waxed floor like a curling rock, the befuddled Vic High boys staring on, as the agile man lays up the winning shot and a shotgun blast signals the end of the game. The toe-tapping spectators, realizing the game has ended, come charging and cheering onto the floor just as the gramophone, wound up and ready to go, begins grinding out a swing tune, and this unstoppable onset of the evening's dance puts a definitive end to the game. And, just maybe, the Vic High boys get a cup of coffee and a piece of cake for their troubles. Go ahead: try and prove me wrong.

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Let's get back to the pub with Brian "Arch" Sluggett. "I imagine attending games at the original Vic High gym must have been like going to Madison Square Garden," I say to Arch as I sip my beer.

"It was," he said, "My cousin Claude Sluggett, all five foot two inches of him, played for the famous Victoria Blue Ribbons, and they played their home games at the Vic High gym. It was the only real facility in town except for the Willows Exhibition Hall. As a kid, if I was lucky, the family would drive into town on game nights, and I'd get to dangle my feet over the side of the terraced running track and scream like crazy during the games: Unless there were girls watching me, of course."



**Blue Ribbons National Champions in the 1930s
Claude Sluggett is on the far left**

In the early 1930s, the Peden family donated a trophy to be presented to the winner of the local high school basketball championship. There were still not enough high schools to make a decent league. Oak Bay was making a few waves in rugby and soccer, but they were a long way from creating their eventual basketball dynasty.

To make things interesting, Vic High entered four or five teams to compete for the Peden Cup. Teams with names like the Shamrocks, the Blacks, the Golds, the Nuggetts and the Cardinals. (The Cardinals? My guess is this name was chosen because of the antics of the Gashouse Gang - the St. Louis Cardinals in Major League baseball. The antics of guys like Dizzy and Daffy Dean were all the rage, and I am sure the high school boys loved emulating them.)

Yes, in 1938, the Vic High Shamrocks won the Peden Cup. They beat Mt. View.

In 1937, the Vic High rep team beat Magee High School to win what the *Camosun* calls "the Mythical BC championship." They did it again in 1938 when they beat Vancouver College in a best-of-three challenge playoff. As an aside, we begin seeing names of future pros like George Andrews and Hank Rowe.

Then something called World War II came along, and the interest of the student body shifted abruptly from sports teams to military training. It's not that there wasn't any sport happening at Vic High: it was simply a matter of priority. The boys and girls house leagues continued, and the school rep teams kept finding matches, but there are few references to provincial tournaments until 1946.

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In 1945, the first BC Boys basketball tournament took place at the New Westminster YMCA. There were only four teams, none from Vancouver Island. The following year it grew to eight teams, and Vic High entered and finished fourth. It expanded to sixteen teams in 1948.

Back at Vic High, we still had rep teams. Nobody was called the Totems, the Tigers or the Tikis.

In 1950, finally, and for no discernible reason, the boys' basketball team is referred to as this year's Totems. Interesting, because nowhere in the 1949 annual is the name Totem mentioned.



The first Vic High Rep team to be definitively nicknamed with a "T" word was the 1950 Totems

What has happened is George "Porky" Andrews has finished his playing career at the University of Oregon, ended his service with the RCAF, won a national title with the Air Force team, coached and played professionally with the Vancouver Hornets, led Alberni to a national championship, and finished his teacher training.

After considering a career in physiotherapy, he signed on to teach and coach at Victoria High School. Starting in 1949, the Totems begin an annual pilgrimage to the 4,500-seat UBC Memorial Gym where the BC High School championships were staged. The boys are a force, but the school goes without a championship until 1959.

During the 1950s, the T names begin to trickle into vogue. Whether or not the staff was so forward-thinking that they were purposely trying to avoid a hint of sexism, or just not noticing how strange it was having a bevy of different names at one school, there were no Totemettes at Vic High, and each sport purposely had its own nickname. This nomenclature is rather unusual; however, it does avoid confusion. If you are a Tiger at Vic High, you play girls' basketball. If you are a Tsasquatch, you play boys' volleyball. I would imagine George Andrews had something to do with all this; heaven help you if you didn't know who the Totems were. A member of the 1949-1950 Totems was Bill Garner, a future coach, school principal and district administrator; he was a prominent student and he did like to organize school activities. He became a lifelong friend of George Andrews, so my money says that they cooked up the idea together.

Every team at Vic High had a unique name, starting with the letter T. What's interesting is that it worked. Every team had its own identity, and most students at Vic High and other schools seemed to be aware of the difference.

The Search for the Thomson Cup

It's solid silver and it is still missing. We can only hope that if it's not found somewhere in the school building, then the answer to our quest will be revealed in the exciting upcoming sequel of *Indiana Moen and the Holy Thomson Cup*.



The 1907-1908 VHS BC Champions featuring the Thomson Cup