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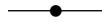
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## INTRODUCTION

# Fair Manipulators of the Twisted Hickory

**I**t is now more than half a century since Clarence Campbell, then president of the National Hockey League, remarked that hockey was “too rough for gals.” He was responding to a question about the possible formation of a women’s hockey league in the mid 1950s. Since then, of course, women’s leagues have been formed across Canada, the United States and Europe. In North America particularly, female players have proven just how mistaken Mr. Campbell was. The International Olympic Committee awarded women’s ice hockey full medal status at the Nagano Winter Games in 1998, and no NHL official today would even contemplate an observation as dismissive as that made by Mr. Campbell.

It is much less well known that women were playing competitive ice hockey fully half a century before Campbell’s assessment, and it is hardly recognized at all that their game was particularly strong in western Canada. In a sense, history can exist only if it is remembered, and the history of women’s ice hockey in western Canada has not been remembered. (It might be mentioned that Clarence Campbell apparently chose not to remember that he was a referee in the early 1930s in Edmonton when

that city was accustomed to producing champion women's hockey teams annually.) Occasional references to the women's game in the west have found their way into the better documented history of women's ice hockey in central Canada, but these references are primarily found at the few points of intersection of what were essentially two separate hockey worlds. As is the case with so much in Canadian history, the western story differs from the experience of Ontario and Quebec — sometimes radically so.

Because the history of women's hockey in central Canada is better recorded, it is easy to assume that the central Canadian narrative reflects the history of Canadian women's hockey in general, despite including so little western detail. That is certainly not the case. Like their eastern counterparts, women's teams in western Canada played their first reported games before the beginning of the twentieth century, but the game in the west experienced an explosion of popularity during the years of the First World War — not afterwards, as was the case in Ontario. Collegiate teams were central to women's hockey in central Canada, but most teams in the west were community based, with colleges making only a secondary contribution to the hockey story. While women's hockey reached new heights in Ontario in the 1930s, the game in the west by that time was already descending from the peaks it had reached during the preceding decade.

A major contribution to the women's game in the west in the 1920s was made by the squad known as the Vancouver Amazons. It is primarily their story that is told here. The Amazons were one of several teams that met at Banff each winter to contest for what was regarded (sometimes officially and sometimes unofficially) as the women's ice hockey championship of western Canada. Each of the teams they faced as opponents deserves to be remembered in the annals of hockey history, especially those from Calgary and Edmonton that managed to claim the Banff championship so frequently. In British Columbia, the geographic centre of early women's hockey history was located in West Kootenay — from Rossland to Nelson to Grand Forks — and although the Amazons had peripheral connections to those teams, the Interior story is a separate chapter in British Columbia's hockey history. That story is touched upon here, but a more detailed examination of women's hockey in West Kootenay is long overdue.

The Vancouver Amazons, in many ways, were not typical of women's teams. Their associations with hockey's famous Patrick brothers and some well connected Vancouver families certainly distinguish them from other women's hockey teams of their era. They alone had the advantage of having artificial ice available locally for practice, but they also had to contend with the distinct disadvantage in most years of having no serious opponent against whom to test their abilities — that is, until they travelled to Banff. On the other hand, few women's teams can lay claim to once having

been the champions of western Canada. The Amazons enjoy that and other distinctions.

For fans of the highly regulated and well publicized sport of modern professional hockey in North America, a genuine effort is required to imagine what the game was like a century ago. There are many aspects of ice hockey that seem so natural and obvious today that people often assume they have been present always. They have not. Before turning directly to the story of the Vancouver Amazons, it will be helpful to examine the broad outline of the game in the days before the Second World War and, at the same time, to comment upon the circumstances of women's teams.

## FORMING A TEAM AND FINDING AN OPPONENT

Women who played ice hockey a century ago — especially those who ventured beyond a casual Sunday afternoon lark to form community teams — were courageous. Society expected many things of women in Edwardian times, but a serious inclination to play a man's game was certainly not one of them. To play ice hockey, women had either to dismiss or ignore society's discouragements, roadblocks and restrictions. Those independent-minded women who challenged these restrictions in order to play hockey emerged from all social classes: from a Governor General's daughter to a married teacher, from an unmarried bank clerk to a coal-miner's daughter. Such individuals came together to form teams throughout western Canada, particularly during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Of course, establishing a team was the easy part. For most women's teams, the greatest challenge of all was finding a worthy opponent. Having managed to establish a roster from the limited number of women within their community who were interested in participating in such a physical game, the new team would naturally look to nearby towns and cities for competition. Very often the closest communities were either too small to form a team or were home to women who had no interest in trying to do so. The size of the community appears not to have been the primary factor determining where teams existed. In British Columbia, small communities such as Waldo and Coal Creek established teams, while much larger centres such as Kamloops and Kelowna apparently did not. Even a town successful in forming a team one year could find that, because of changed circumstances for even one or two players, it was unable to do so the next.

The most fortunate teams were those in communities with sufficient populations to generate more than one squad and those that were able to establish an ongoing rivalry with a competitor. In both respects, the women's teams from Calgary enjoyed particular advantages. For much of the first three decades of the twentieth century, there were two or more teams active within Calgary, and rivalries emerged that were

the keenest in the land. Within a hundred-mile radius, several communities at one time or another provided opposition for the Calgary squads, and further afield — in Edmonton — Calgary’s women’s ice hockey teams soon found (as any team from Calgary does) their most serious and long-lasting rivalries.

It is an irony that probably the most unfortunate in this respect was the team that is the chief focus of this book: the Vancouver Amazons. Seemingly with the advantage of the greatest concentration of population west of Winnipeg, able to practise and play on an artificial ice surface and assured of active support from the owners of the professional Vancouver Millionaires, the Amazons should have been the envy of any women’s team in Canada. Their predecessors, the Vancouver Ladies’ Hockey Team, had come together in 1913 in response to teams already formed in Victoria and New Westminster. As interest in Victoria collapsed in 1914, and as ice was no longer available in New Westminster after 1915, the Vancouver women turned to varsity opposition until the upstart Amazons challenged them in 1918. The players of the Vancouver Ladies’ Hockey Team soon hung up their skates, and the Amazons subsequently were hard pressed to find opponents locally. Each year in the 1920s, they would travel to Alberta to seek the western Canadian championship with only split-squad scrimmages at practice sessions as preparation.

## NAMING THE TEAM

In any sport, teams formed to play only a single game have little need of official names. Reds can play Blues, a team composed of employees from one commercial company can challenge a team from another, and a side captained by Smith can take on a team put together by Jones. Whenever a group of women came together, however informally, to form an ice hockey team with more than just a single game in mind, they would typically be called simply the Ladies’ Ice Hockey Team. Teams with that name appeared in most sizeable cities in western Canada before the First World War and in many smaller communities as well. Games were essentially split-squad scrimmages with half the team playing against the other half.

Only when an opportunity arose to play another team was it necessary to acquire a more specific name. When the women from Vancouver travelled to play the women from New Westminster, the contest was between the Vancouver Ladies’ Ice Hockey Team and the New Westminster Ladies’ Ice Hockey Team. With the exceptions of Edmonton and especially Calgary where, by the time of the First World War the existence of more than one team made it necessary to distinguish one local squad from another, the name of the community attached to “the ladies’ hockey team” was typically all that was needed to identify the group of local women playing the sport until the early 1920s.

When the time arrived to move beyond a generic name, most women's organizations turned first to familiar themes. If a team was associated with a particular athletics society or sports club, taking the name of that organization was the most logical thing to do. The Edmonton Victorias, for example, played under the auspices of the local Victoria Athletics Club. Identifying the team by the name of the athletics society sponsoring it is what men's amateur teams traditionally did, the Calgary Columbus Club being a case in point. If not connected to a local athletics association, women's teams followed the general preferences of their male counterparts in adopting popular names like the Monarchs and the Regents. If such a choice of name resulted in a degree of confusion in a particular community, the women's team was referred to as the Lady Monarchs or Lady Regents. Only occasionally would a team turn to its locale for inspiration in naming itself, as did the Canmore Minnewankas in the early 1920s.

Another source of nomenclature is always contemporary culture. In the early 1920s, there was much talk of the "new woman" and her insistence on independence and equality. One popular characterization of the new woman — a conception that combined overtones of both power and danger — was the vamp. And so the Seattle Vamps appeared in 1921. Their trendy counterparts emerged in Victoria the same year. Popular with young women at the time was the kewpie doll, awarded at fun fairs as prizes and available in all shapes and sizes in the shops. The new women's team from British Columbia's provincial capital found the doll and its name "too cute for words" and declared they would be known as the Victoria Kewpies. In Calgary, patriotism played a role when a new women's team named itself in honour of Canada's newly appointed Governor General Lord Byng in 1922. Interestingly, the Byngs, the Vamps and the Kewpies were all teams that played for no more than a single season.

One very distinctive name, the Amazons, drawn from ancient history rather than from modern times, seems to have bestowed much greater longevity upon teams which chose it. Moreover, as it is sex-specific, it was a name for which there was no competition from the men. Selected first by a group of young players in Vancouver in 1918 to distinguish themselves from a more established women's team in that city, the name Amazons was also chosen several years later by the team from Red Deer. With its suggestion of power and prowess, the name had no peer when it came to identifying a team as being unequivocally female. Both the Vancouver and the Red Deer teams would win championships under the name Amazons.

Another name largely avoided by men's teams, but favoured by women's teams — "Swastikas" — requires particular explanation. The appeal of the "Swastikas" as a team name is found in its origins. The swastika is recognized as an ancient symbol associated with good fortune. Indeed, some argue it is the most ancient of such symbols. Before the 1920s, it popularly carried with it the same positive connotations associated with the shamrock. Rudyard Kipling made it his personal talisman; a community in

Alberta was named Swastika as was one in Ontario; the Filberg Lodge in Comox embossed the symbol on its gates; the Boy Scouts presented swastika badges to thank individuals for services to their organization. In all these circumstances, its selection had nothing to do with the abhorrent political associations the symbol has conveyed to the world since it was appropriated and modified by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party. Nevertheless, when viewing photographs taken in the early twentieth century portraying women with swastikas on their hockey jerseys, it does require a genuine mental effort to remember that the symbol was selected by these teams before it became so thoroughly contaminated by more recent history.

Popular in Atlantic Canada and in the west, “Swastika” skating clubs were formed in several communities. During the middle years of the First World War, the Edmonton Swastikas played ice hockey and the Vancouver Ladies’ Hockey Team was commonly referred to as “the Swastika women.” Even without the formation of a local swastika skating club, the name appealed to women most likely because it had not been appropriated by men’s teams. The Fernie Ladies’ Hockey Team, for example, formed at the end of the First World War, had become the Fernie Swastikas by 1921. As late as 1934, a team from Canmore adopted the name.

It is worth noting that very few of the team names chosen by men and women a century ago would be favoured by either men or women today. No modern team would consider taking to the ice with a name that could be abbreviated to the CeeCee’s, as the Calgary squad representing the Columbus Club did. Names of professional men’s teams in western Canada less than a century ago included the Bluebirds and the Canaries. Today, ice hockey teams of either gender with names like the Calgary Canaries or the Vancouver Bluebirds would meet with derision from opponents, reporters and fans at every turn. Millionaires, Aristocrats and Metropolitans today are all names with distinctly old-fashioned tones, but all had the desired connotations of superiority and sophistication sought by Pacific Coast Hockey Association team owners of the 1910s and 1920s. Similarly, no modern women’s team would today consider calling itself the Beavers, as teams in Vancouver once did. The modern imagination simply does not turn naturally to the notions of a steady work ethic that the name was then intended to convey.

## ORIGINS OF THE GAME AND PLAYING THE GAME

The origins of the game of ice hockey have received a great deal of attention from hockey historians, and the controversies rage on still. Most Canadians are aware of the claims staked by rival communities to have been the location of the first hockey game, and many people become animated in debates over conflicting versions of the evolution of the hockey stick or the introduction of a particular style of play. The recent four-part CBC television series *Hockey: A People’s History* and its massive companion