



VIC WEST ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

There have been many outstanding members of the Vic West Athletic Association during its first century. Some have been devoted club members, many first class athletes, others hard workers or good organizers. It takes all kinds to form a solid organization and plenty of them to keep it going for one hundred years. The Wests have been fortunate in having had members willing to step in to carry on the club's enviable tradition.

This chapter is not intended to single out a few, but rather to recognize the contributions of many. Unfortunately, some will be missed or overlooked in this "View From The Sidelines."

Percy Wilson grew up with the club. As a young boy living in Victoria West. He had played on many Vic West lacrosse teams, and, over the years, held every executive position with the club at one time or another. In his later years he was a proud, but reserved, Vic West supporter at their Heywood Park games. On the occasion of the club's 75th Anniversary, in 1971, Percy spent hundreds of hours researching and writing a club history book. A great deal of this chapter's information comes from his efforts.

1896-1906: West's First Decade

In the 1890's, boys living in the Victoria West area would gather and play at the Orchard Field. The field was just off Wilson Street, where Williams Street is now located, and was large enough for a football or lacrosse game.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wilson had built the first house on Springfield Avenue in 1890. Their son, Percy, was four years old at that time and decades later he recalled, "Our back yard gate opened onto the field so I grew up with boys four to six years older than myself." By the time he was ten years old, in 1896, the Vic West boys had arranged a game of football with the James Bay boys. According to **Frank Jenkins**, who was one of the club's first financial secretaries, that was the start of the Victoria West club's 100 years of sporting history.

Some of those first players were; **Tom Crocker, George Okell, Tom Andrews, Will Williscroft, George Andrews, Tom Cessford, Alex and Dick Stevens.** **Tom Crocker** and **George Okell** arranged the games and picked a winning team which made a very good showing.

Soon after, more games were arranged with teams from other districts and were usually played at the Beacon Hill grounds.

Those games continued on in the following year with the Macaulay Point grounds occasionally used for home games. However, that field was often very rough due to the army practicing with their horse-drawn cannons.

Then the boys formed a club and named it the Victoria West Amateur Athletic Association. They obtained the use of the upper part of the Brackman and Ker Feed Building on Mary Street for a clubhouse and the first election of officers was held on Wednesday, February 23, 1898, with the following being elected.

President	F. McDougal
Vice President	J. MacKay
Secretary	W. Allen
Treasurer	H. Jacobson
Guard	T. Crocker

The original club colors were green and black and the various teams of the V.W.A.A.A. began by making a good showing in exhibition games against some of the organized teams. As a result, the parents and citizens of the Victoria West community began holding meetings in one another's home, with the desire to purchase a property and build a gymnasium in their area. Later, the **Rev. Mr. Brown** of Saint Savior's Church, offered the Sunday School hall for the meetings. Before the year's end, canvassing and fund raising had begun. Concerts were held in the Semple Hall along with a number of dances and with the help of stalwart supporters as Beaumont Boggs, P.R. Brown and Sam Matson, the account began to grow.

On Sept. 20, 1899, the Vic West Association held their second election of officers with these results;

Honour	Mr. A.E. McPhillips
President	
President	G.A. Okell
Vice President	Rev. Barber
Secretary	G. Andrews
Treasurer	E.P. Craft

A basketball league had been formed in the city and the Victoria West Athletic Association entered a team that won the Junior Championship of 1898-99. That turned out to be the first of many titles to be won by the Wests.



VICTORIA WEST BASKETBALL TEAM 1898-99 CITY CHAMPIONS

Back Row, L-R: T. Crocker, T. Andrews, G. Andrews.

Centre Row, L-R J. McDonald, F. Waller, A. Patton, H. Jacobson, J. McKay.

Front, L-R: W. Peddle, T. Cessford.

At the time, basketball was played with seven players on a side and featured low scoring games.

On the playing field, a series of junior lacrosse games was arranged with JBAA and the Vic West boys being the only teams entered. The Bays won the final game 4-2 and gained possession of the McPhillips Cup on September 20, 1899.

In 1900, the Wests entered the senior basketball ranks and playing against the JBAA team, lost their first game 6-2, a vast difference from today's scores. The following year, the basketball league moved to a different format with JBAA fielding a representative team that hosted clubs from Vancouver, Seattle, Tacoma and Portland. Games were played at the Drill Hall, the red brick building on Menzies Street that later housed the Government Motor Vehicle offices. Those Saturday night band concerts and basketball games, for a 10 cent admission, were a must for the young crowd.

Vic West, Nanaimo, and Fernwood Young Men's Club formed a 2nd Division Basketball League and the Wests were declared the Intermediate City and BC Champions in their second season.

Victoria West School opened in the fall of 1900 and adopted the green and black colours of the community club. On entering the school football league, under 14 years of age, Vic West School fielded a strong line-up and downed Central School 2-0 in their first game.

Other school teams of that time were North Ward, South Park, and the Boys Brigade. The competition finished in March 1901, with South Park in first place and Vic West School second.

At about the same time, the V.W.A.A.A. had formed a junior football team composed of some of the school team players and a number of boys up to 16 years of age. They played matches with other clubs such as Corrig College. That private school, with 100 to 125 boys, many of them boarders, was considered Victoria's Eton, and sports were an important part of its curriculum.

The Wests basketball team traveled to Nanaimo in March 1901, for the clubs first ever road-game, later, Nanaimo played a return game in Victoria with Vic West winning both closely contested matches.

By the summer of 1901, the Wests junior lacrosse team had beaten their JBAA rivals 7-0. Team members were; **G. Kirk, E. Stevens, S. Okell, W. Duncan, G. Brown, J. McBeath, A. Crocker, G. Bahlmen, J. McKenzie, T. Cessford, J. Anderson** and **A. Stevens**. However, the Wests intermediate team lost their final to JBAA 6-2 in a game played at the Caledonia Grounds on Saturday, September 7, 1901. V.W.A.A.A. team members being; **T. Crocker, G. Andrews, C. Fairall, A. Patton, H. Erskine**, and **G. Caldwell** as captain, along with junior's **A. Stevens, T. Cessford** and **G. Brown**.

In November, the club, now known as Victoria West Athletic Association, was incorporated under the Benevolent Societies Act. Another big event for the association occurred when the contract for their new gymnasium, to be built at the corner of Edwards and Catherine Streets, was let to Laurie & Colby Co. for \$1000. The gym was to be 35 ft. x 70 ft. with a spectator balcony, two dressing rooms and a large upstairs clubroom. Work started on January 18th. and the first meeting in the new hall was called April 18, 1902, with President **Colby** in the chair, **G.A. Okell** as the secretary, and a paid up membership of seventy-five.

The following year saw some basketball games being played in the new Victoria West Hall. Fernwood and JBAA had top-notch senior teams while the Wests were again successful in the intermediate age group.

Three teams had formed an Intermediate Football League in 1901-02. All the games between the Columbia's, Boys Brigade and Vic West were keenly contested with the Wests winning six, losing one and tying one to gain the championship. That was their first of many football titles and it was won by; **T. Crocker**-captain, **A. Stevens, F. Baker, A. Davidson, T. Neill, H. Stewart, W. Okell, C. Wiggins, G. Roller, G. Andrews, P. Wilson, R. Dodds, H. Monteith** and **D. Stevens**.

At an April 1902 meeting, a motion was made to change the Vic West club colours from green and black to green and white. After a hot debate, the motion was defeated, but later in November of that same year, **A. Stevens** moved and **W. Fairall** seconded another motion to change the colours. This time the motion carried and the club colours of VWAA have remained green and white to this day.

A summer intermediate field lacrosse schedule was drawn up between the rivals from JBAA and Vic West. After six evenly matched games, a final championship fixture was played on September 20th with the Bays proving to be the best and winning the 1902 title. A junior league had also formed with Centrals, South Park, Vic West and North Wards however, there were no records of the results or standings.

In 1902, basketball was the first winter sport to call for entries. The new Capitols, Fernwood, JBAA and Vic West answered with teams in the senior and intermediate leagues. At the seasons end, Fernwood were declared the Senior Champions and JBAA the Intermediate winners.

By that time, with the Victoria West Association growing rapidly and many new faces appearing, it was soon given out.

*We do not care what your politics are!
We do not care what your religion is!
We do not care what the colour of your skin is!
Can you play football?*

There never was a colour bar in the club or on any lacrosse, basketball or football team of the VWAA and this stand has been carried out to the present day.

Many activities took place at the clubhouse such as the social and athletic night that was held on November 18, 1902, with over two hundred in attendance. That evening's program included an intermediate basketball game between JBAA and VWAA that ended 14-13 in the Wests favour. The **Bayley** brothers gave a demonstration of brotherly love in the boxing ring, then **H. Dodds** and **F. Baker** went at it for three rounds. **Frank Jenkins** sang some favorites and **W. Peddle**, a well-known comedian, entertained the crowd before **Jack Winters** and **Art Gray** boxed four very evenly matched rounds to finish off the festivities.

Women appeared on the Victoria West sports menu when they formed a basketball team to play against the ladies from James Bay. It was reported that they raised team funds by charging a fee to watch them practice!

Two teams formed an Intermediate Football League between the Capitals, from the James Bay neighborhood, and Victoria West. Six games were played with Capitals winning the series.

About the same time, January 1903, a five teams Junior Football League began play between the Capitals, Centrals, North Wards, South Park and VWAA. By March 28, 1903, the Capitals had also won that championship.

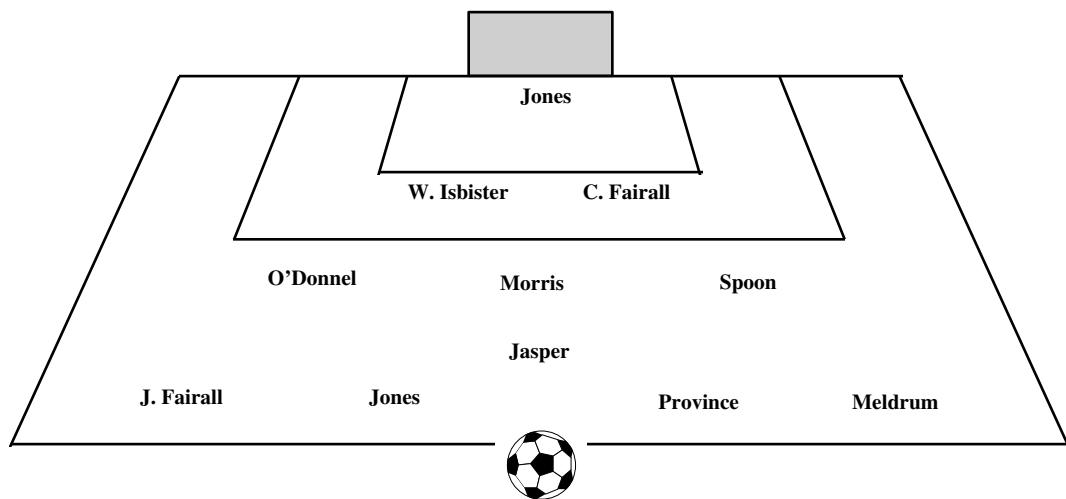
Before the 1903 fall sports season began, the annual election of VWAA officers was held at the club. **Mr. W. Dickson** was re-elected president, **C. Fairall** vice-president, **H. Jacobson** secretary, **T. Hutchison** financial secretary, and **G.A. Okell** treasurer.

The Wests senior, intermediate and junior basketball teams were all to have great seasons that year. The seniors won their league title with a 5 wins, 1 loss record. They challenged Nanaimo Mosquitoes, winners of the BC League, for the provincial title and defeated them to claim that championship. Intermediates swept their division and then issued a challenge to any other intermediate club for the BC title. Ladysmith jumped at the offer but lost both ends of the home and away series and the Wests had their second BC Basketball trophy in one year. Cloverdale took ownership of the City Junior title.

That same year, Wests regained the intermediate soccer title in a five games series against the defending champions. Those close game results, against the Capitals, finished 2-1, 0-0, 2-1 and 3-1 in the Wests favour. Capitals junior unit claimed that league's title.

During the summer of 1904, the Wests Intermediate Lacrosse team had once again entered into a competition with the JBAA club. Each team won two of the first four games before the fifth and deciding match was taken by the Wests. That Vic West team had included; **R. Stevens, C. Fairall, D. Sinclair, W. Battersby, T. Crocker, P. Wilson, H. Jacobson, F. Baker, A. Stevens, W. Fairall, J. Hancock, J. Anderson, C. White, H. Ogden, H. Monteith and J. Fairall**. Another championship to wrap-up Vic West's best year to date after winning honours in senior basketball as well as intermediate football, basketball and lacrosse.

In 1904-05, a City Senior Football League was formed with teams from the Navy, Garrison, the Victoria Association Football Club and Vic West who used this line-up.



That being the first entry of the Wests into the senior football competition, and while they didn't win many games, they gave a good account of themselves.

Once again, the Wests Intermediate Football team won the City Championship McPhillips Cup and medals in 1904-05.

Basketball started the 1905 season with a big step but stumbled to end the season. Under the direction of a new Victoria Basketball Association the leagues ran from January until March with games played at the Annex on Broad Street. The divisions grew to six junior and intermediate teams and four senior clubs, all with keen competition. Near the end of the season, a dispute involving JBAA and an executive ruling, resulted in the Bays withdrawing their teams from all three divisions. Wests were declared Senior Division champs while Cloverdale won the Intermediate title and Vic West took the Junior Division crown.



Clockwise From Bottom Left:

J. Bayley, F. Nason, E. Harris, A. Campbell, R McInnes, H. Campbell,
A. Stevens, W. Crocker, P. Wilson, F. Jenkins, E. Tait, S. Okell, B.Graham.

In 1905, the City Lacrosse League received intermediate entries from VWAA, the Stars (JBAA), and Centrals who ended up claiming the title. A junior division also had three clubs; JBAA, Collegiate and VWAA competing with the Wests finishing on top to win the Spencer Cup and individual medals going to each team member. By winning that cup three times in-a-row it became the property of the VWAA.

Vic West took on another sport, at that time, when **Mr. W. Bolton** turned over the charter of the Victoria Amateur Boxing Club to the VWAA. A good many amateur and professional fighters began working out at the clubhouse with boxing tournaments often staged in the gym.

In their first ten years, the Vic West Athletic Association teams had won;

- ☒ City Intermediate Basketball 1900
- ☒ City Intermediate Football 1902
- ☒ City Intermediate Football 1904
- ☒ City Intermediate Lacrosse 1904
- ☒ City Senior Basketball 1905
- ☒ Provincial Senior Basketball 1905
- ☒ City Intermediate Basketball 1905
- ☒ Provincial Intermediate Basketball 1905
- ☒ City Intermediate Football 1905
- ☒ City Junior Lacrosse 1905
- ☒ City Intermediate Lacrosse 1905

Not bad for a new club. And with all the gymnasium activities, there was something for everyone in the community.

Two foremost original Victoria West members had been **Tom Crocker** and **George Okell** who are credited with organizing the club's first teams. Tom being most prominent, organizing the club in its original stage and captained the football and lacrosse teams during their first decade. This responsibility likely led to his declining health and early death at the age of twenty-six. After a hotly contested lacrosse game he had stayed on the field, disputing a bad call, long after the game had ended. A cold wind came up and he got a chill from which

he never recovered. One of the club's most enthusiastic members had died fighting for his club!

There have been many West's families with fathers, sons and brothers involved, but none as eminent as the **Okell's**. Their family arrived in Victoria and settled on the west side of town in 1889. Four sons, **George**, **Harold**, **Bill** and **Stan**, were all club originals. **George**, who had helped to organize the club, played on their football and basketball teams. He was a carpenter and worked on the building of the club hall in 1901. He was also the organization's first secretary, later vice president and then president. Always having a keen interest in Vic West, he became a city alderman around 1912. **Harold** played football with plenty of enthusiasm and ability in his younger years, until a serious leg injury and work commitments ended his playing days. Later, he was well-known as the Trial Island lighthouse keeper for many years. **Bill** was a great player and a good club worker, serving on many committees with thoroughness and efficiency. In later years becoming manager of the West's second and junior teams. He took on many tasks and involved his spouse and sons, **Jack** and **Roy**, in the club. Their family looked after the thankless jobs like laundering uniforms. Bill would re-cleat the players' boots while the boys would clean and grease the leather to make it supple again. **Stan** was a well-known athlete and captain of the West's award-winning Intermediate and Senior Football teams of 1907 to 1910. A good club-man who later became manager, then secretary in 1914 and finally president. When the First World War broke out, he left to take a commission with the 57th Regiment Gordon Highlanders. He played and managed the soldier's team before going overseas where he served with distinction. Rewarded with the Military Cross, he returned with the rank of Major. Between the wars, Stan operated the Red Cross Workshop, a rehabilitation unit for returning members of the service and also served as a city council member for seven years. At the start of WW II, he took on the post of BC Recruiting Officer and later became head of the Vancouver Island Office of Veteran Affairs.

Other prominent first decade Vic West names included **George Andrews** who played on the West's first Championship Basketball team, as well as their football and lacrosse squads. A native son, he grew up in Esquimalt and worked as a stevedore on the S.S.Maquinna. He was the father of **Jenny**, **Joe** and **George "Porky" Andrews**, the latter also being an outstanding athlete and a well-known basketball player and coach.

There were also the **Steven's** brothers, **Dick**, **Alex**, **Ernie** and younger, half-brother, **Henry "Toots" Plump**. **Dick** and **Alex** were on the West's first lacrosse squad, Dick in goal and Alex on defence. Both were fine basketball guards and football full-backs. **Ernie**, a lacrosse player with one of the most accurate shots in the game, passed away too early as a victim of the 1918 flu epidemic. "**Toots**," later an outstanding player in all sports, was well-known for his play-making and pin-point passing. He joined the Western Scots, went overseas and rejoined the Wests on his return. During the 20s he moved up-island where he saw action with some great mining town football teams in Nanaimo and Cumberland.

Three **Fairall** boys, **Jim**, **William** and **Charlie** all played parts in the club's early history. **Jim** helped to organize the West's first senior football team and was one of their top goal-getters. He also played field lacrosse before going to the Old Country in order to complete his education. **Will** and **Charlie** excelled in basketball and were the forwards when Vic West won the City, Island and British Columbia titles in 1904.

There were others, the likes of **Tom Cessford, Will Williscroft, Tom Andrews,** and **George Caldwell** involved in that first decade. Along with names like **Patton, Willard, Erskine, Henry Cowper, Chuck Kinlock, Dodds, Frank Baker, Monteith, Fred Buxton Battersby, Hancock, the Campbells and Frank Jenkins** who appeared regularly on the various Vic West team line-ups. Many took positions on the executive along with **F. McDougal, J. McKay, H. Jacobson, E.P. Craft, Wm. Dickson and T. Hutchison.** Then there was the Reverends **Barber, Roberts** and **Cooper** who made certain that the club was always in “good hands”.