



The 1930 University of British Columbia Women's Basketball Team:
Those Other World Champions
By Louisa Zerbe



In the spring of 1930, a strong and confident University of British Columbia Senior "A" Women's Basketball Team played a two-game total point series for the Western Canadian title against the already famous Edmonton Grads. Although UBC lost both games to the Grads, on April 3rd and 5th, Percy Page, the coach of the Grads, claimed that it was the best display of women's basketball he had ever seen.

It was during the Grad's visit to the west coast that the UBC team was first introduced to the idea of attending the Women's World Games that were to be held in Prague at the end of the summer. Percy Page declared that his Grads were unable to attend the games. Why, is not known; | depression years and financial difficulties may have been the reasons.

By the summer of 1930, the idea of UBC competing in Prague had become reality. Permission had been secured from the Canadian Basketball Association and despite the attempt of a Seattle team to enter the World Games, it was to be the UBC squad that would represent North America. Paris officials had refused the Seattle bid, stating that Canada has applied first. It was also at this time that the United States women physical educators objected to the Women's Games.

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When permission was granted by the Canadian Basketball Association, the UBC girls began practicing twice a week at the old Vancouver Athletic Club gymnasium, a fundraising campaign was launched and an office in the Province Newspaper building was used as campaign headquarters. Mr. M.W. Morton, the Vancouver manager of the Bank of Commerce, handled the money and attended to the financing of the project. When the team set off for Prague the campaign has raised close to \$5,500, \$1000 of which had been donated by the UBC students' Council.

On Friday, August 15, 1930, at 9:00pm, the Canadian Pacific Railway station was crowded with friends and fans to see the UBC squad off to the "old country" The team traveled by rail from Vancouver to Montreal, where on August 21, they boarded the SS Montclair and sailed to Hamburg, Germany. Travel arrangements for the nine team members, their coach and their chaperone, Mrs. Whyte, were arranged by Mr. Brud Blaney of the Canadian Pacific Railway, who accompanied the team to Montreal.

Aboard the SS Montclair, the team trained twice a day. In the morning and late afternoon they could be seen running their mile of laps around the ship and exercising; this was followed by practice of dribbling and passing skills on the deck tennis courts. The practices always ended with a sea bath in deep tubs filled with pure sea water. Weather and sea sickness permitting, the girls were required to participate in the strenuous workouts.

Montreal to Hamburg took ten days, as the SS Montclair was a small ship. When the ship docked in Hamburg on the morning of Sunday, August 31, the team immediately set off by rail for Berlin, where they remained overnight; they then continued on to Prague, by train, the next day.

When the team arrived in Prague, a week before the start of the Games, they were greeted by a crowd of people with speeches, cheers, and a bouquet of flowers presented to the team chaperone. The UBC team was billeted, along with all the other teams, in a new hotel – "The Central". Most of the others teams were there for the track and field event, and some were involved in the swimming.

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Officially, the games were called the "Women's Olympic Games" and then later the "Women's World Games". Founded by the French woman, Mme. Millait, the Games marked the midpoint of each Olympiad, from 1922, when they were first held in Paris, to the last games held in London in 1934.

Because the officials of the Games wanted the Canadians to be featured in final of the games, the Basketball match would be one game only, with the UBC team playing the winner of a preliminary match. While the UBC team awaited their game, they toured the city of Prague, attended garden parties and became friendly with other teams, especially the Japanese.

On September 8th, approximately one week after the team had arrived in Prague, the contest for the World Basketball Championship between France and Canada was played. At 6:00 in the evening, close to 10,000 spectators filled the stadium where most of the events of the games had been held, to witness a basketball game which could only be described as more like rugby football. Played on a cinder court, 92x48 feet, instead of the regular court, 80x40 feet, the game produced an event which discouraged skillful ball handling, and in which rough body contact was featured. Not only were the UBC girls handicapped by having to play on a cinder court, but the game was played under international rules according to French interpretation.

To add to the Canadians' frustration, the referee was an Italian who spoke only his native tongue and French, making communication with the UBC team almost impossible. The French interpretation of the rules allowed for a great deal of body contact, no substitutions except for injuries, and no rests between quarters. The size of the ball used by the French was smaller than the size normally used by the UBC team. This caused a disagreement at the start of the game over which ball was to be used first. It was decided that the French ball was to be used in the first half and the Canadian ball in the second half. At the end of the first half the Canadian Team had gone ahead by a score of 14 to 8. Despite the fact that in the second half the French team resorted to rough tactics to out-score the Canadians 6 to 4, the UBC girls hung on to win 18 to 14.

The game had been more a test of perseverance than of basketball skill. However, the team, and particularly the coach, were proud of their accomplishments. A beautiful crystal trophy was presented to the team, and each member received a small medal. After the presentation they returned to their hotel to celebrate their victory.



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Their return trip (home) was by rail from Prague to Paris, where they spent two days touring the city before heading to London and boarding the "Duchess of Atholl". After a long sea voyage, the World Champions finally arrived on familiar soil. On September 20, in Montreal, the New World Champions, tired, broke, but happy, were greeted by a crowd of supporters, among them members of the 1928 Olympic Team, and the Mayor of Montreal who presented each team member with a bouquet of beautiful roses.

In Montreal, because the team had depleted their funds, the players wired home for money before boarding a train for Vancouver where they arrived on September 26 at 10:00pm. Their welcome at the Canadian Pacific Railway station was one of the largest to greet returning athletes. A public reception was staged at the Hotel Vancouver after the preliminary greetings at the station, and further honors fell to the champions when they were entertained at several luncheons and presented with silver bracelets from the local Kiwanias Club.

There never was a re-match, as thought there might be, between the Edmonton Grads and the New World Champions, the UBC Varsity. In wake of World War II, the accomplishments of this young, successful and well liked university team were quickly forgotten. For nearly fifty years their story remained untold. Today, however, UBC Women's Athletics proudly displays the 1930 World Championship trophy in their trophy case.

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