

# Sport and Boosterism: Seattle's Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, 1909

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The nature of Western urban growth has frequently been that of speculation, rivalry and urban promotion. Frontier cities were often founded on little more than the enthusiasm and hopes of the settlers and many never grew to fulfill those dreams. Early settlers had to actively promote their towns in order to attract the settlers, investments and transportation connections which were required for their survival and growth in the West. The literature, tactics and attitudes of these early promoters has become known as "boosterism." These booster campaigns became the focus for community identity and welded together public and private interests in their common pursuit, the promotion of their city. Athletic competitions were particularly well suited as a focus of these urban rivalries and as an instrument of boosterism. Communities identified with the local teams and a track and field meet or a baseball game came to portray, in microcosm, the economic rivalries of the cities themselves. A winning athletic team was indicative of the superiority of the city at large.

The growth of Seattle typified these patterns of urban rivalry. In 1909, the year of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, Seattle had just emerged from two decades of explosive growth which had clearly established it as the dominant city on Puget Sound. Having vanquished its local rivals, Seattle's self-image had rapidly expanded to that of a major international port and it began looking to Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles as its chief rival for Pacific Coast trade. The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, one of a series of fairs being hosted by cities across the country, was designed as an advertisement for the resources and economic potential of Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. A series of sporting competitions were sponsored as part of the Exposition and received extensive publicity in the local press. This paper investigated the role of the sporting events as a symbol of the local rivalries and as a method of boosting Seattle and the Pacific Northwest to national prominence.