

Control of Sports Facilities in Early Vancouver: The Brockton Point Athletic Association, 1888 to 1913

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Brockton point is located at the eastern tip of Vancouver's renowned Stanley Park, and has been the site of a major athletic facility since the late 1800s. In 1888, the Brockton Point Athletic Association (BPAA) was granted a 40-year lease for 10 acres of partially-cleared land, and over the next 25 years, developed a major sports grounds for cricket, rugby, lacrosse, track and field, cycling, field hockey, and lawn tennis. For many years, Brockton Point was the most important sports facility in Vancouver.

The BPAA was a private organization, and its volunteer officers were usually influential members of the new city's social and business elite. Also, the leasing of this prime location reflected the early tendency of the Vancouver City Council to delegate responsibility for specialized park services to private groups. Therefore, the Association was able to withstand many years of criticisms from important groups such as the Vancouver Board of park Commissioners and the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council.

The BPAA was charged with developing and maintaining an amateur sports facility for the people of Vancouver, and was very successful in achieving this objective. However, the structure of the Association was conducive to social elitism. Only those largely middle-class sports clubs admitted to the Association as associate members could use the facilities on a regular basis for practices and games. Therefore, as Vancouver's athletic population and diversity grew, other clubs were deprived of the opportunity to use the city's most prized athletic facility.

Finances were always a problem for the BPAA. Initial efforts to raise funds to build the facilities were unsuccessful and the BPAA petitioned the City Council for financial aid. This was provided in the form of a \$10,000 bond, repayable over 20 years. The BPAA charged admission for all scheduled events, and retained a percentage of the receipts. This was usually a satisfactory arrangement, and the BPAA added several structures at the Grounds from time to time, including: more fields, a better cycle track, pavilions and a caretaker's house, a new grandstand, and tennis courts.

In 1901, the BPAA was granted a 5-year moratorium on its bond payments, to facilitate a major construction project. However, at the end of that period, the BPAA found itself unable to pay the increased annual bond payments. Lacrosse, the biggest spectator sport at Brockton Point (producing as much as 40 percent of the BPAA's annual income), had moved to another facility, and the BPAA had entered into a period of decline, both in membership and financial worth. In 1912, to solve its financial problems, the Association proposed to lease the major portion of the Grounds to a professional lacrosse promoter. The resulting public outcry against bringing professional sport into Brockton Point forced the City Council to veto the proposal. By 1913, the BPAA had become the private preserve of a few amateur, middle-class sports clubs, with virtually no revenue. Unable to meet its financial commitments, the BPAA voluntarily disbanded, and its assets reverted to the City.

Over the years, the BPAA had many detractors, who objected to the notion of public parkland being controlled by private clubs. However, the Association did provide the City of Vancouver with

a world-class sports facility at a time when the City itself, having only been incorporated in 1886, lacked the financial resources to build modern sports fields and tracks. Because of the facilities at Brockton Point, Vancouver athletes were able to participate in organized sports on an equal footing with athletes in other North American cities.