

# Early Professional Baseball in Vancouver: Northwestern League, Vancouver Beavers, and R. P. Brown

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The recent success of the Vancouver Canadians AAA professional baseball team has generated little local interest in the history of the sport in the area despite some evidence of previous strong on-field performances. This essay provides a pioneering account of the Vancouver's first professional team, the Vancouver Beavers (1905-22) and an historical sketch of the minor league environment in which it played.

An examination of archival, historical, and contemporary literature—despite their uncertain authenticity—suggests that the first years of professional baseball in Vancouver were shaped by three events: the formation of the Northwestern League in 1905, the offer of a franchise to Vancouver and the subsequent formation of the Vancouver Beavers that same year, and the team's sale to R. P. Brown in 1909.

Originally constituted as the Pacific North-West League in 1901 and renamed in 1905, the Class B Northwestern League included, at various times, teams from large and small centres scattered over Washington, Oregon, Montana, and British Columbia. For a brief period, the league was very successful as measured by the standards of the time. Future Hall of Fame players who developed their skills in it included Stan Coveleskie and Harry Heilmann. Unfortunately, internal problems, rival leagues, and World War I eventually forced the league to cease operations midway through 1917, and efforts to establish a viable alternative proved futile. In 1918 the league was reconstituted as the Pacific Coast International League (not to be confused with the Pacific Coast League). In 1919, it became the International North Western League, in 1920-21, again the Pacific Coast International League and in 1922, the last attempt, the Western International League.

The Vancouver Beavers were a significant part of Northwestern League success. Although the team had early off-field problems (missing the 1906 season for financial reasons), its on-field success was remarkable its first decade, winning league championships in 1908, 1911, 1913, and 1914. The decade also saw strong fan support, a new stadium, and substantial revenue from the sale of players to the major leagues. Although much less successful after 1917, the Beavers would remain the one common denominator in the various leagues after this date. In 1919, the team won its last pennant. In 1922, it was forced to disband when the Western International League failed.

The Beavers' success was due in large part to the efforts of an American and Notre Dame graduate, R. P. Brown. Brown, father of professional baseball in Vancouver with his five decades guiding the sport (1910-1954), bought the team at the end of the 1909 season, settled in Vancouver, and remained Beavers owner until its disbandment in 1922. His dynamic leadership as player, manager, and owner, was the major reason for the team's success, 1911-1914.

In conclusion, the Northwestern League, Vancouver Beavers, and R. P. Brown combined to give baseball in Vancouver an auspicious beginning.