

The Aces of Saskatoon, 1948-1967

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For the better part of twenty years (1948-1967), the Saskatoon Aces (known also as the “Adilman Aces” and the “Saskatoon Directory Club Aces”), dominated senior women’s basketball in Saskatchewan. They were 12-times Provincial Champions, they were perennial finalists on the national scene against their rivals, the Eilers from Vancouver, they were Canadian Champions twice—in 1959 and 1963, they formed the nucleus of the Canadian team at the 1959 Pan-American Games in Chicago and they managed to keep alive elite-level basketball for senior women in Saskatoon and in the province. The Aces were a success and endured because of the dedication of key sets of very skilled players and the patience and persistence of the only two coaches the team had. Jack Adilman, a local businessman responded to the appeal by three young players to coach their team. He translated his considerable basketball background and his access to sponsorship dollars into the cause of senior women’s sport. Ten years of struggle were rewarded with a thrilling, come-from-behind victory over the Eilers in Calgary to become Canadian Champions in 1959. Bob Stayner projected himself onto the coaching scene. This little big man soon earned a significant reputation for himself, for the Aces and for senior women’s basketball in Canada. Stayner was short, stocky, in-those-days demanding, often loud, boisterous, the bane of game officials and even obnoxious, but always a colourful character who has been duly recognized for his never-wavering support of senior women’s elite amateur sport. More than 150 different women played for the Aces, yet several of them played for more than ten years and were truly the heart and soul of the team. Among them were Judy Jenkin, Lee Fior, Pat Lawson, Audrey Campbell, Marlene Ackerman and Diane Hanysh. The Aces were as much a reflection of the times and of the small, prairie city of Saskatoon. Post-secondary schools elitist basketball for women was generally accepted in the west—the Eilers of Vancouver, the Maxwells in Calgary, the RCAF in Winnipeg, the Deuces in Moose Jaw, the Jaspers in Edmonton—all had picked up from where the world renounced Edmonton Grads left off. The women who played for the Aces were supported by family and friends and were respected in the community for their achievements. Saskatoon was truly an ethnic melting pot with little or no concern over the mix of a Jewish coach and players from Polish, Ukrainian, German, Scandinavian, French, Finnish, Greek as well as British backgrounds. The women who played for the Aces were true amateurs who played for the fun and excitement in the game. Friendships formed were deep and long-lasting. The fame the Aces enjoyed was the greatest ever enjoyed by any Saskatchewan basketball team.