

Britannia - The Story of a Mine

by Bruce Ramsay

Extract from book about sports and leisure activities

Sports activities of all kinds were sponsored by the community clubs and leagues were formed between the Beach and the Townsite, and often with Woodfibre and Squamish. In this field in particular, the rivalry between the Beach and the Townsite was intense because it provided a visible outlet to the age old rivalry between the mill and the mine. Put simply this rivalry can best be expressed this way. Because of its location the mine always looked down on the mill, while the mill, in one sense and one sense only, had to look up to the mine, a patently unreasonable fact of life which the mine never let the mill forget, but which the mill folk had to endure. This inter-camp rivalry showed itself regularly, but once during the 1920s it reached the comic opera stage. The Beach baseball team was being clobbered left, right and centre field by the Townsite team and the losers began to despair of ever winning as much as a single game. Then the mill superintendent, had a brain wave. He slipped down to Seattle and hired a bunch of ball players from the University of Washington and put them to work in the mill. The results of the next game were magnificent, at least as far as the Beach was concerned.

The Townsite really couldn't call "foul," for after all, the new players *did* work at the mill and it was just the good fortune of the Beach that they happened to be ball players.

After their second straight defeat the Townsite came to the realization that the tide had turned and the people from the lower region might just take the season. Taking a page from the Beach book, the mine superintendent went down to Vancouver and hired a new crew of miners, who just happened to be ball players, and to the horror of the Beach fans, their newly found idols struck out. There was no joy that night at the Beach, and like the Townsite, they too had to snuff out any desire to shout "foul." It is unimportant to chronicle which team came out on top as such things are better left unsaid.

Sometimes baseball could be expensive for the Townsite club. Perhaps this is attributable to the brawn of the miners, but fly balls used to sail over the fence and into the creek, and one year the annual tab for baseballs came to \$1000.

Basketball, too, was popular and each shift would have its own team. During the winter months boxing matches were held in the gym with

some of the best pugilistic talent in Vancouver coming up either to put on exhibition matches or work in the mine.

With justifiable pride the twin communities could point to another contribution the community clubs made to the recreational facilities of Britannia. And they could also point out, with glee, to the people of Squamish, that though they might have the Pacific Great Eastern Railway, stores and two pubs, there were two swimming pools down at Britannia. The first of these, at the Beach, was put in in 1927 and the one up at the Townsite in 1930.

For their dollar a month dues the members also had full use of the library which was stocked with the latest and best books on the market, as well as a vast variety of newspapers, many in foreign languages, which kept the miners from abroad in contact with the news from back home.

Under the direction of the community clubs, the two camps had their own mimeographed newspapers, which, among other things, listed the latest books in the library, a column or two of comment, a social and personal column, weddings, as well as notices of upcoming events. These papers had a forerunner, a handsome little monthly magazine published "with the co-operation and assistance of the employees of the Britannia Mining and Smelting Company Ltd." Which, with P.A. Langerquist as editor, made its debut in February 1930. It lasted only six months.

A contest had been held earlier to name the paper. Some suggestions were Broanniaks and Copperation, but the winning name, suggested by Alan MacDonnell, of the Beach was "Britco News." The columns of this monthly contained a lot of whimsy, like the Sports Note from the Victoria Camp:

Victoria is feeling pretty low after the exhibition they made against the Copper Plant. We had an idea that we had a fair team and would stand a good change against anything the Townsite might produce. However, we aren't so sure now. From start to finish, Victoria made bonehead plays, the climax being reached when we allowed the Copper Plant to make a triple play on a series of asinine errors. Frank Hay claims it was the most pitiful game of ball he has ever umpired. But, Victoria can and will play good ball. Even the Yankees hit a slump sometimes."