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THE EDMONTON GRADS: CANADA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL TEAM  
A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THEIR SUCCESS

by

Cathy Macdonald

A Thesis  
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Faculty of  
Human Kinetics in Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Human Kinetics at  
The University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1976

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ABSTRACT

THE EDMONTON GRADS: CANADA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL TEAM  
A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THEIR SUCCESS

by

Cathy Macdonald

The University of Windsor, 1976

The purpose of this study was to write a history and analyze the success of the Edmonton Grads women's basketball team which played from 1915 to 1940. This objective was carried out in two parts. First, a history of the Edmonton Grads was written, in order to illustrate the type and amount of success achieved by the team. Second, three factors which influenced the club's achievements: the organization, coach and players; were examined and delineated, with the ultimate objective of determining the reason or reasons for the Grads' success.

The historical account contained in Chapter II substantiates the fact of the Grads' success and at the same time gives a comprehensive picture of its characteristics and extent. Chapters III to V deal individually with the three variables cited which all influenced the team's achievements. The final section contains conclusions made on the basis of the previous evidence, which indicates that the coach, John Percy Page, was the single most significant factor in the success of the Edmonton Grads.

DEDICATION

For Mom, Marty, Sandy, Bruce,  
Beth and Aunt Gert.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank her advisor, Dr. Alan Metcalfe, for his encouragement and interest in this thesis. Special thanks are also extended to my typist, Angie MacDonald and to those Grads and other individuals who were my interview subjects for their time and insights.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The most successful team in Canadian sport history consisted of forty-nine young women and one man who combined their efforts during the span of a twenty-five year competitive career to bring themselves and their country international recognition in the sport of basketball. The Commercial Graduates Basketball Club was the formal name of the team coached by John Percy Page which reigned supreme in the cage game from 1915 to 1940, winning an amazing ninety-three percent of the games it played. At the time of their retirement, the Edmonton Grads - as they were more familiarly known - were perennial champions at all levels of women's basketball, holding Provincial, National, North American, International and World titles.

This overwhelming competitive success was accompanied by a seemingly unanimous acclaim and support from those who met the team or saw it play. Edmontonians regarded it as the best publicity agent the city could have, while Eastern sportswriters hailed the team as a national institution.<sup>1</sup> The Grads were also highly rated in the United States, Europe, and Australia, but perhaps the finest compliment of all came from the inventor of basketball himself, Dr. James Naismith. After seeing them play, Naismith called the

Edmonton women "the finest basketball team that ever stepped out on a floor."<sup>2</sup>

The accomplishments of this team have been noted, and it seems likely that no other women's basketball team and possibly any team in any sport can match their record.<sup>3</sup> Yet barely thirty-five years later, the Grads and their success are in danger of being forgotten, by all except those who lived through the period during which they reigned as 'Queens of the Court'. The modern written accounts of their career are journalistic and descriptive rather than scholarly in nature and deal primarily with the Grads' statistical record and are based on secondary source evidence.<sup>4</sup> Articles produced during or immediately following the completion of the Grads' competitive endeavours result in the presentation of material which contains errors compounded by the passing of the years.<sup>5</sup> This distortion of fact, in what would otherwise be considered valuable primary source evidence, indicates the need for a complete and accurate compilation of data concerning the Grads' career.

Even the most cursory examination of the team's record prompts an obvious question: why were the Edmonton Grads so successful? This study then is an attempt to determine the reasons for that success and thereby examine and present as accurately as possible for analysis, a segment of Canadian sporting history which, despite its seeming magnitude and importance, has largely been ignored.

The entire period of the Grads career, 1915 to 1940, has been studied, with the focus on the nature of the team's success and subsequently the existing conditions which made those achievements possible. As has already been indicated, there are two distinct aspects of the success enjoyed by the Grads. The first is reflected in the competitive record of the club, while the second, apparently a result of the first, involved the Grad organization's ability to attract and maintain support from a broad variety of sources.

Preliminary research indicated several factors which seemed to have had a significant effect on the attainment of the team's success and these form the basis of the analysis. Included among these are separate considerations of the contributions of the following: the club organization, players and coach.

The objectives of this study therefore may be listed as follows:

1. To write a history of the Edmonton Grads, in order to illustrate the type and amount of success achieved by the team
2. To examine and delineate those three factors which have been indicated as influencing the club's achievements: the organization, players and coach; with the ultimate objective of determining the reason or reasons for the Grads' success

It was initially proposed therefore that the Edmonton Commercial Graduates Club did in fact achieve the two types of success attributed to it. The historical account of their activities was undertaken to substantiate that fact and at the same time give a comprehensive picture

of the characteristics and extent of this success. The premise underlying the second section of this study is that the three variables cited all influenced the team's achievements and the coaching factor, personified by John Percy Page, was the single most significant contributing factor in the Grad's success.

Newspaper reports and personal interviews provided the bulk of information available on the Grads, which was collected and classified according to the criteria outlined above. The Edmonton Journal became the major source of raw data, due to the sheer mass of information it contained, although dailies from other Canadian cities as well as American and European publications were also employed to a lesser degree. Time limitations imposed by the period being studied resulted in interview subjects being drawn from the pool of players active after 1920.

The material obtained from these sources was employed in the writing of the history of the Grads and in the subsequent analysis of the factors which contributed to their success. Chapter II chronicles the exploits of the Edmonton Commercial Graduates and evaluates the nature of the success they attained. The club organization is described in Chapter III. A similar format is involved in the two succeeding chapters which deal with the players and coach respectively. A final section follows, in which conclusions are made on the basis of the forgoing evidence, as to the reasons for the Grad's success.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Edmonton Journal, 29 September 1938; Ibid., 27 September 1938.

<sup>2</sup>The Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940 (Royal Bank of Canada, 1975), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>for example: Robert Collins, "The Ferocious Young Ladies from Edmonton," Maclean's Magazine (December 10 1955), p. 36; T. Frayne and P. Gzowski, "The Edmonton Grads," Great Canadian Sports Stories (McClelland & Steward Ltd., 1965 Toronto), pp. 53-56; Tricia Sirrs, "the Grads," Amateur Sport (Canadian Olympic Association, Spring 1974), pp. 10-12; Scott Taylor, "Canada's Greatest Team," The Starting Line-up (January 1975), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>for example: Harold A. Cruickshank, "These Girls Fight to Win," Liberty (December 29 1934), pp. 15-17; Henry H. Roxborough, "The Illusion of Masculine Supremacy," Canadian Magazine (May 1935), p. 15; Frederick B. Watt, "The Winners," Collier's (March 12 1940), p. 18.



## CHAPTER II

### A HISTORY OF THE GRADS 1915-1940

#### Introduction

This chapter will attempt to illustrate both the existence and the nature of the success achieved by the Edmonton Grads as well as any changes that occur in either. Any historical account of its success drawn exclusively from record books and score sheets reveals only part of the phenomenon which was the Edmonton Commercial Graduate Club. Such a situation also illustrates the essential problem encountered when dealing with the concept of success. The difficulty of course lies in determining a satisfactory definition for the term.

In the study of an athletic unit such as the Grads, the win/loss record is probably the obvious and easiest variable to measure. Yet as mentioned earlier, there was another aspect of success evidently enjoyed by the Commercial team. This involved the ability of the club to attract and retain widespread support and admiration. Since the team was eventually dependent on gate receipts for its survival, the attainment of this type of success was a necessity. Since this success could be measured by attendance figures, we have two relatively subjective measures available to determine the degree of success achieved by the Grads.

It is proposed however that each of these types of success may be broken down into two distinct levels: actual and perceived (see Figure I). Therefore competitive success can be measured in terms of wins and losses, in relation to the perceptions of those who watch or know of the contest's outcome. Positive or negative reactions to a winning team then act as another gauge of competitive success. Public support indicated by means other than attendance at games would be the criterion evaluated in determining the amount of the second type of success enjoyed by the Grads. This would include letters expressing an interest in the team; invitations to play for special events and welcoming committees present at the end of road trips. These categories then provide the basic framework for an examination of the Grads' success.

In the course of this study, it was discovered that there were distinct differences between certain periods of the Grads' career (see Figure II). The predominant type of competition serves as one illustration of the difference while resultant variations in the type and scope of success enjoyed by the team provided another. The Initial Years are so named because they herald the formation of the Grads and the original competitive endeavours, concentrated primarily in the city of Edmonton and the Province of Alberta. At this point, support was at first determined by the institutional loyalties of fellow students and then by the civic pride of Edmontonians when competition was

Fig. I. MODEL USED TO EXAMINE AND DELINEATE SUCCESS

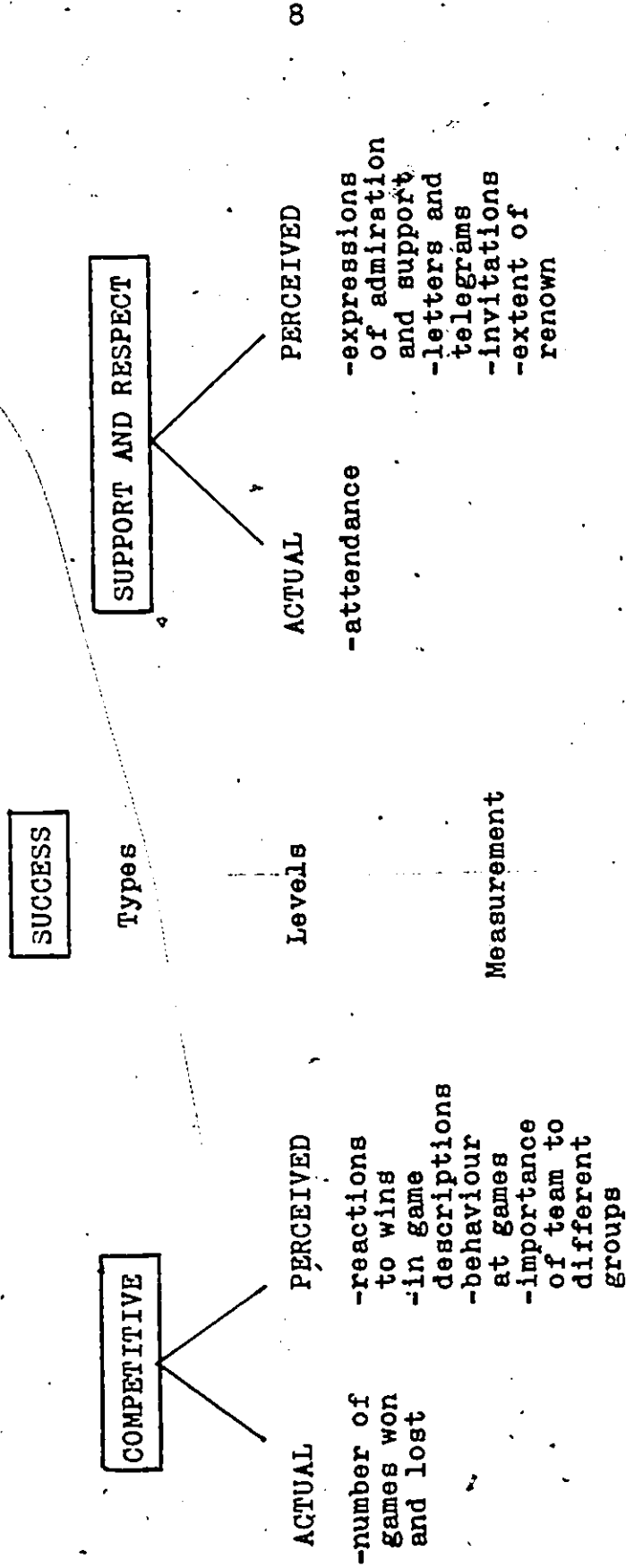
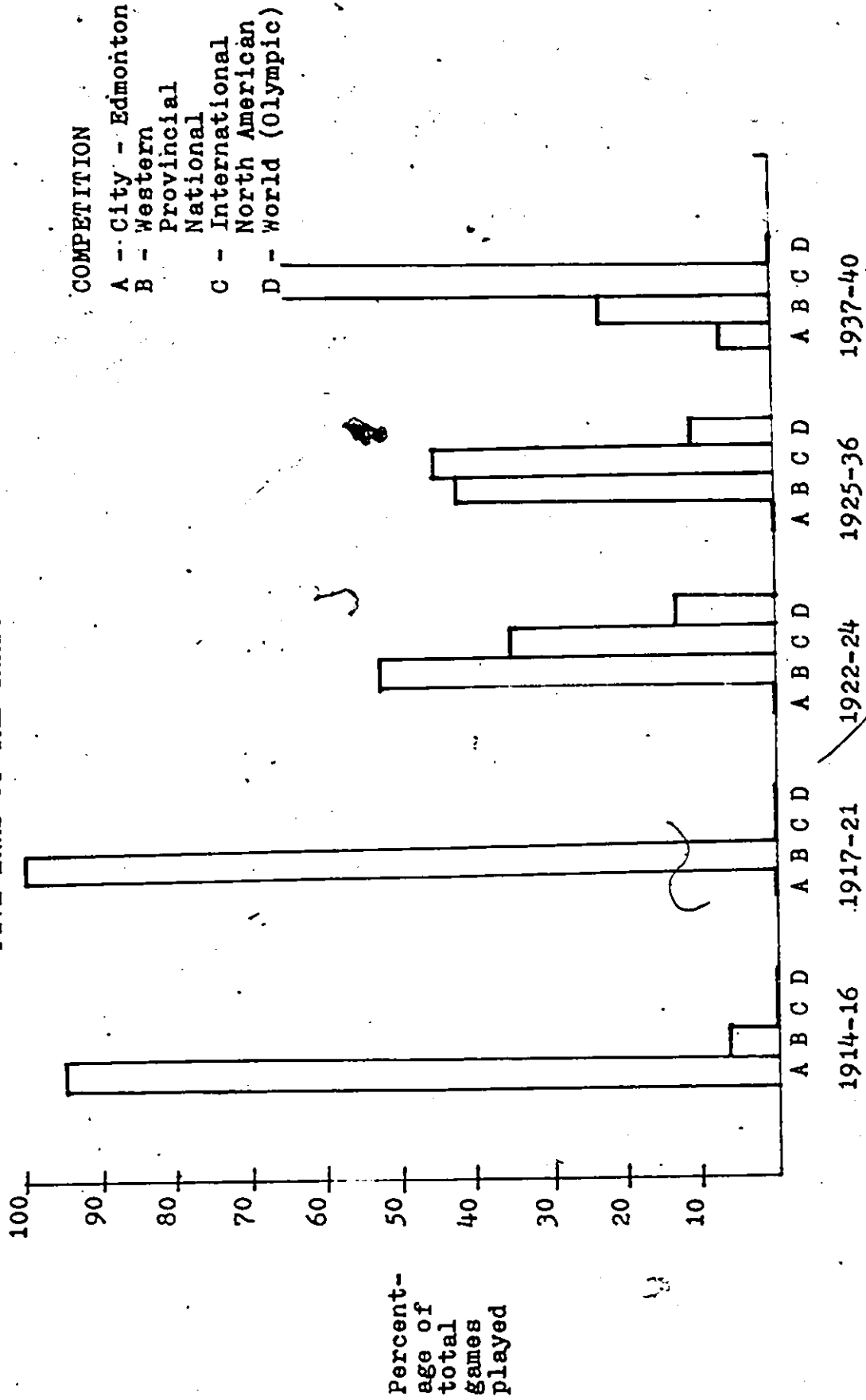


FIG. II. TYPE OF COMPETITION DURING FIVE ERAS OF THE GRADS' HISTORY



established on a city versus city basis. The perceptual aspects of each type of success were not so much negative as absent. At this point the team's achievements were nothing special and attracted little notice beyond the fans who went to the games.

During the Formative Years, their competitive success and ability to attract paying customers greatly widened in scope. At the same time, local groups began to perceive the value of the club's accomplishments while individual expressions of support continued to mount.

By the beginning of the Peak period the Grads had lost some of their ability to lure fans to the arena. Yet the championships were being successfully defended and the team had also become a national as well as a local and provincial representative.

The slumping attendance continued in the Final Years although expressions of support other than at the box office continued unabated. As in the previous period, international competition proportionately outweighed all other types of participation, domestic opportunities becoming particularly scarce.

The divisions outlined here and the different levels of success already indicated provide the pattern on which the following historical account is based.

## THE INITIAL YEARS 1915-1921

The first seven years of a long and eventful existence found the Edmonton Commercial Graduate Club initiating and establishing itself as a basketball power first in Edmonton and then in Alberta. High School and local competition was the focus of its activities during 1915 and 1916. From 1917 to 1921, the team withdrew from city leagues and was almost exclusively involved in provincial challenge matches. As they evolved from their position as the unknown challengers to being the defending champions, the Grads attracted a substantial following both on and off the court.

The following section deals with these two periods, chronicling the various aspects of the team's success.

### 1915-1916

The Edmonton Grads began their career in 1915, according to most of their official publications.<sup>6</sup> However, their story begins in 1914 with the transfer of the two Commercial classes, sixty students, from Victoria High School to McDougall High School in the fall of that year. The commercial course had been held at Victoria High School since 1912, under the direction of a young teacher imported from the East, John Percival Page. He also moved to McDougall, taking charge of the classes there. Then, according to the popular Grad legend, Page lost a coin toss

to determine physical education responsibilities and was 'stuck' with the girls.<sup>7</sup> Since basketball was gaining popularity in the West and Page knew something of the game, having played in high school, he incorporated it into the physical activity program.

That fall there was a high school basketball league in operation, which included Strathcona and Victoria High Schools and the Technical School. These teams were competing for a trophy donated by W. L. Richardson, the director of Technical Training for high school competition.<sup>8</sup> Since a fourth team was needed to balance the league, McDougall High School was asked to enter a team. They did, and coached by Page captured the league championship, winning six games and losing only one, with an average score of 11 to 7. Sporadic newspaper reports of the initial games reveal little about this 'pioneer' team, with scant attention paid to playing style or players' names, which are not mentioned until 1915.

In 1915 the same team consisting of six girls, won the Intercollegiate Basketball League title. In these competitions, the team consisted of Nellie Batson and Ella Osborne at forward; Winnie Martin and Geraldine Reid at guard and centres Ethel Anderson and Mary Bremner. These six girls played against teams from two other city high schools in the Intercollegiate League; as well as one team from University of Alberta and a team which represented the city teachers. In evaluating their chances for taking

the title the Edmonton Journal rated the Commercial team thusly:

The Commercial team, winner of the Richardson Trophy (1914), are excellent individual players and if combination can be developed this team will take a lot of beating.

The eight local girls' games were quite popular, drawing a capacity crowd of 300 fans to one Commercial - Strathcona game.<sup>10</sup> Other games drew several hundred fans, mainly students supporting their interschool team. At this point, the team was referred to as the Commercials or C.H.S.

Following their impressive Intercollegiate League win, where they outscored opponents 13 to 7 over eight games, the team sought further competition:

J. P. Page, manager of the champions is out for bigger honours and home and home games will probably be played with Camrose High School girls for the Provincial Championship.<sup>11</sup>

Journeying to Camrose on March 27, C.H.S. beat the Normal School Students 12 to 7 to win the first provincial women's basketball title in Alberta.<sup>12</sup>

"The Commercial team, consisting of a bunch of youngsters lived up to advance notices and their speed and combination was a treat to watch."<sup>13</sup>

The return game was never played, due likely to the upcoming exams of the Normal Students.

October 1915 was the second year of competition in the high school league for the Commercial High team, with the same six girls playing. They lost this competition for the Landsdowne - Toronto Cup (also known as the Richardson Trophy) but not before winning a thrilling game against



Strathcona High School, to cause a tie in the standings and a playoff game. Up to this point the Commercial team had an overall record of twenty-five wins and four losses chalked up against the various teams in the league: two from Victoria High School and one representative each from McDougall High School, Technical High School and the Teachers.

In February and March 1916, the same sextet competed in and won the Girls' City Basketball League in the senior division, again attracting large crowds to their games. There was also a junior league and girls from Commercial High School won that title too. Having captured the city title, Commercial stated its willingness to defend the provincial championship which it had won in March of the previous year.<sup>14</sup> Although they had been the unknown quantity in the 1915 provincial tilt, this year the Commercials were the favourites to win, since they were undefeated during the regular season.<sup>15</sup> Camrose Normal School again provided the challenge to the title-holders and were soundly defeated on Friday March 31, by a score of 13 to 2. According to the Edmonton Journal, the outcome was never in doubt:

The Alberta championship, held by the girls' basketball team of Commercial High, did not even rock on its base last night, for the Edmonton basketballers outplayed the Camrose Normal School challengers at every angle . . . winning decisively.<sup>16</sup>

The addition of a second provincial championship to their collection left the Commercials with twenty-nine wins against

only four losses.

Throughout this period the team is referred to as the Commercials or Commercial High School and is composed of the same six players: Batson, Osborne, Anderson, Bremner, Reid and Martin. The term Grads does not appear.

In the fall of 1916, Commercial High School had both senior and junior teams entered in the high school league. In competition involving high school teams only, the seniors lost and the juniors won their respective titles. However, in a letter to the sports editor of the Edmonton Journal, Percy Page indicated that this particular senior team was not the same one which held the provincial title, many of the 1915 team having graduated.

The Commercial team which holds the provincial championship consists of graduates of C.H.S., practically every member now being employed in business offices.<sup>17</sup>

The letter further indicates that the Grads represented the Commercial Athletic Society formed by the girls themselves, who wished to remain a team after graduation. The membership of the society included "any student, graduate of C.H.S., and business girl who may have gone to some other business school."<sup>18</sup> This then was the team which held the provincial title and which first defended the Harold A. Wilson trophy. The Wilson Company of Toronto had donated the trophy for Alberta girl's competition in 1916 and J. P. Page, the Grads' manager, was a member of the three man committee charged with administering the cup in provincial challenge competition.

16

Thus the first formal mention of the Grads is made in December of 1916. The team that became known as the Grads had won two High School League Championships; two Intercollegiate League titles and two Provincial Championships, both against Camrose Normal School. They functioned as a high school team with all the players being students and the coach, J. P. Page, a teacher at that school. The opposing squads in the High School and Intercollegiate leagues were all from Edmonton and included local high schools, and teachers' teams as well as representatives from Alberta College and the University of Alberta.

#### 1917-1921

Having had their status explained to the public in 1916, the Grads nevertheless did not compete under their 'new' name until March 1917. This particular contest, against Alberta College, was termed an exhibition game and served as a warmup to their provincial title match against Wekaskiwin. Despite not having played since the previous challenge approximately one year earlier, the Grads won easily defeating Wekaskiwin by a score of 30 to 14. The players were the same, with only one exception, as those of the original aggregation: Batson, Osborne, Reid, Martin, Anderson and Elena Todd, who replaced Mary Bremner at the side centre position. There is also mention of a substitute centre, Dorothy Shaw, replacing Ethel Anderson who fouled out of the game.<sup>19</sup> Their sixteen point win seemed to indicate that a year's absence from the game had not dulled

the Grads' talent.

At this time the business graduates were playing basketball according to 'girls' rules. The game consisted of three periods thought to be approximately eight to ten minutes in duration. The rules provided for six players: two guards; one side and one jumping centre and two forwards each playing in their own two thirds of the court, and required that a player be disqualified from further play after accumulating four fouls. The two forwards then were an important element in any team's success since they were the only individuals allowed to score. In Nellie Batson and Ella Osborne the Grads seemed to have been blessed with two outstanding players, causing an Edmonton Journal writer to state:

"There are few men's teams in the province who boast a pair of sharpshooters who possess the scoring aptitude of Miss Batson and Miss Osborne."<sup>20</sup>

Until November 1917, there is no further mention of the Grads. At this time, Ella Osborne, Elena Todd and Gerry Reid combined with three Commercial players, Elizabeth Elrick, Connie Lamont and Evelyn Macauley in an exhibition game against Varsity (University of Alberta) which the combination of Grads and Commercials won, 39 to 12.

In the intervening period the Commercial High School teams played in the High School League and won both senior and junior divisions. Following this High School competition in the fall, two Commercial High School teams competed in the Intercollegiate league with a schedule.

extending from January to March 1918. Again the Commercial tradition was upheld, C.H.S. I placing first and C.H.S. II fourth.<sup>21</sup>

The Grads once again are inactive for almost a year, until October 1918, when they successfully undertake a defense of their provincial title against a team from Stettler. The long layoff between official competition, almost two years, would seem to be a handicap, but the Edmonton Journal apparently expressed common opinion when it stated:

The ability of the locals is well known and the admirers of the Commercial girls fail to see anything to it but another win added to their already long string.<sup>22</sup>

This edition of the Grads had three of the recent Commercial High School graduates: Elena Todd, Eliz Elrick and Connie Lamont; as well as three of the 'old guard': Batson, Martin and Reid. After only a couple of weeks to practice and playing before hundreds of spectators with others turned away for lack of space, the Grads defeated their taller, huskier opponents 17 to 7, to wrap up the fourth provincial title in as many years.

The Grads are once again challenged for the provincial title, this time by the Varsity team in the a spring of 1919. As well as having to overcome six month layoff between games;

The Commercials will be severely handicapped by the absence of their captain, Miss Batson and their star defense, Miss Martin, both of whom will be out of the city.<sup>23</sup>

More specifically, the absence of Miss Martin is linked by

the Edmonton Bulletin to the fact that she is a student at the University of Alberta.<sup>24</sup> With Connie Smith and Mona Karran of Commercial High School substituting for the missing regulars, the Grads went down to their first defeat in provincial competition on April 19, 1919, losing 14 to 16, before a packed gym.<sup>25</sup> It appeared as if the infrequent practice and inability of the rookies to keep up with the Varsity stars were the main reasons for the loss. However, one further theory was advanced by the Edmonton Journal, which felt that:

The best 'team' did not win - it was the win of a brilliant single performance over team play that with any kind of luck in shooting would have won nine times out of ten.<sup>26</sup>

The Grads requested an immediate rematch for the title and the Wilson trophy, but were refused by the three man committee governing the championship, which enforced the two month limit between challenges. The team was also refused in its request to have a whole new roster represent the club, within the two month limit.<sup>27</sup> As a result the Grad - Varsity battle did not resume until November of that same year.

In the intervening period the Edmonton Monarchs, a group of Commercial students, including Dorothy Shaw who had previously played as a substitute centre for the Grads, challenged and won the title from Varsity. No game was played, however, the Monarchs winning by default since the University students could not take time off from exams to play. This matchup was repeated in October with Varsity

regaining their title.

Presumably having practiced all summer, since they had rented the Victoria High School gym and having played two practice games as a warmup, the Grads met the C.H.S. seniors to determine which of the Commercial teams would have the privilege of challenging for the provincial title.<sup>28</sup> On November 4, 1919 they met and defeated the C.H.S. seniors 33 to 21, using veterans Elena Todd, Winnie Martin, Gerry Reid, Connie Lamont, Eliz Elrick, and rookie centre Eleanor Mountifield.

The stage was set for the Grad - Varsity confrontation. Public interest was high, as evidenced by the fact that the Commercial girls sold out one hundred tickets, their share of the gate on the first day they were offered.<sup>29</sup> Before a packed gym and with their coach J. P. Page acting as the official scorer, the Grads narrowly defeated Varsity 21 to 18. By this victory, they regained the Wilson Shield and Provincial Championship lost to Varsity in April of the same year.

As they began the 1920 season, with their Provincial title back in its place, the Grads were not in a league, but had been competing regularly.<sup>30</sup> During April, a rough game in which a couple of players were knocked out for a moment or two, the Commercial Graduate Club again successfully defended their provincial title against Varsity winning 16 to 7.<sup>31</sup> Basically the team was unchanged with the same six players from the 1919 squad all returning, the

exception being Connie Smith who substituted at a guard position in the second half.

This substitution caused a conflict which was not settled until November. The game and its outcome was protested by Varsity on the ground that Smith, since she was still a student at Commercial High School and not a graduate, was ineligible to compete for the Grads.<sup>32</sup> The fact that she was a member of the Commercial Graduate Club and had played for the Grads against them in an earlier game was disregarded by Varsity because Commercial High School had challenged too, and the University team maintained that Smith should be playing for the high school squad not the Grads. The protest was upheld by the trophy committee and the game was ordered replayed, this time with Connie Smith as a spectator. The Grads, with two alternates whose educational status did not affect the game, Mona Karran and Mary Dunn, lost the rematch and the provincial title by 8 points.<sup>33</sup> The University of Alberta team then successfully defended their title twice; once against Commercial High School (C.H.S.) in April (whether Smith played is not mentioned) and in November, versus Wainwright, with the Grads looking on.<sup>34</sup>

In November the Grads got their second chance and with the addition of Nellie Perry and Connie Smith to replace Connie Lamont, Gerry Reid and Mona Karran, regained their Provincial championship. The business team had an overwhelming margin of 25 to 3 and played before a crowd



packed into the Varsity gym.

The feud between the two teams did not end with this game however. The Gateway, the University's student newspaper charged the Grads with several improprieties relating to the November game.<sup>35</sup> An article in the University publication inferred that the Grads had played dirty basketball and influenced the referees to call the game in their favour. The charges were refuted in a letter to the sports editors of both the Edmonton daily newspapers, the Journal and the Bulletin, after the Gateway refused space for the Grad's rebuttal. The Executive Committee of the Commercial Graduate Club (C.G.C.), which authored the letter, refuted all charges and indicated that the Grads would waive the time limit, choice of floors and choice of referees to prove their point and show their sportsmanship. The offer was not accepted and provincial challenge competition ended for the year, with the Grads once again reigning as champions. Thus on a year to year basis, the Grads had held the title continuously from 1915, the only two losses being avenged in each case before the year was out.

Up to this point the six high school players who eventually came to be called the 'Grads' in 1917 and subsequent team members, had competed mainly against local Edmonton teams, with provincial competition against Camrose Normal School, Wetaskiwin and Stettler, all Alberta teams. The first instance of the club competing outside the province or against any but Alberta teams occurred in December 1920

when they travelled to Saskatoon and played the Saskatoon YWCA and the University of Saskatchewan. Both games were played on the same day and were won by the Grads. The second one, played before a packed house against the University team gave the Grad's the Interprovincial or Western Canadian championship.<sup>36</sup>

### Summary

The year 1920 marks a division of note in the Grads career. The 1922 team is the first one to have games officially recorded and for this reason is recognized by the Commercial Graduate Club itself, as the original Grad team.<sup>37</sup>

In the preceding years, from 1914 to 1920, the Grads and the high school team from which they originally came, played forty-nine official games, as well as numerous practice contests of which only two were recorded.<sup>38</sup> The official games consisted of seven in the exhibition category; thirty-one high school or intercollegiate league encounters, as well as ten for the provincial title and one for the western championship. Of these, the Grads lost only six while amassing two High School, two Intercollegiate, six Provincial; and one Western or Interprovincial championships.<sup>39</sup> The practice games served as warmups for provincial championship series or took the place of league competition and usually involved the Commercial High School senior girls team. City competition in the high school or intercollegiate leagues, began in the fall of 1914 and

effectively ended in 1916, and formed the bulk of these early games, thirty-one in all. The trend towards local competition continued, as only four of the games played for provincial titles involved teams outside Edmonton with the University of Alberta providing the opposition in five or fifty percent of these games. Also, until the two games in Saskatoon in 1920, the Grads had not competed outside the province. Thus during this period almost ninety percent of their games were against local opponents.

The few games for which crowd size is reported seem to have been well attended, with 200 - 300 as the maximum seating capacity. Paid attendance, first reported in 1916, did not seem to deter any of the fans, many of whom were students.<sup>40</sup> The 1920 rematch between the Grads and Varsity in November, produced the largest crowd ever at the University of Alberta gym, approximately 450 spectators.<sup>41</sup> Their continuing success, and the fact that they overwhelmed their opponents by an average score of 21 to 8, set the stage for the developments in the Grads career that began in 1922.

## THE FORMATIVE YEARS 1922-1924

During the second stage of their career, the Grads embarked upon a pattern of competition that was to remain substantially unchanged in the remaining years. Western, National, International and World championships were established and the Edmonton businesswomen became regular contestants. In so doing they captured widespread recognition for themselves and the city of Edmonton, while drawing a large number of spectators to the games, both at home and away

### 1922-1924

By this time provincial competition in Alberta had changed from the challenge series to an annual competition between designated sections of the province. Edmonton constituted the Northern District and the Grads played in a league with Victoria High School, the Normal School and The University of Alberta to determine the local representative to the provincial playoffs.<sup>42</sup> One entry from Calgary and three from Lethbridge completed the list of those competing for the provincial title in the first year that this contest had been regularly arranged.<sup>43</sup> The trophy for the new competition had been donated by Edna Bakewell, a former University of Alberta athlete, at the Alberta Basketball Association annual meeting in 1921.<sup>44</sup> In a six game

schedule the Grads won their district title and then defeated Barons in a one game playoff. The Johnson sisters, Dorothy (Dot) and Daisy were new additions to the lineup, with Eleanor Mountifield, Winnie Martin, Connie Smith and Nellie Perry back from the 1920 team.

Following the Provincial win and despite some mediocre league performances which were attributed to constant lineup juggling, Percy Page and his team decided to challenge London for the Canadian championship which that Eastern team had claimed. Coach Page, speaking to writers from the Edmonton Journal, indicated that at the behest of local sports enthusiasts, the Grads had challenged the London Shamrocks to a two game series.<sup>45</sup> The Londoners had won their second successive Eastern Canadian title and women's basketball in the East was enjoying a revival, with a single game played before 800 fans, more than had seen basketball in Edmonton all winter.<sup>46</sup> Although it had been originally suggested that the series be held in Winnipeg - a half way point for both teams - the Grads played two games against the Shamrocks in London, winning one and losing the other, in the first Canadian basketball championship for women. Since the Eastern women used the equivalent of Western men's rules and the Edmontonians played according to Spalding Ladies' Rules, one game of each was played. The Grads' margin in their own style of play was enough to give them the victory in total points - 49 to 29 and thus bring the first Canadian championship ever to Edmonton. The train

trip east, undertaken by six players, the coach and chaperone had been made at a cost of \$1,500; \$600 of which was the guarantee put up by the London team, along with \$500 raised from the Edmonton public and \$400 which the players themselves provided.<sup>47</sup> On the trip the Westerners played four games in four days, exhibition games with Toronto and St. Thomas having been arranged to help meet expenses.

On their return home the Grads were greeted as conquering heroines by a crowd at the train station which included the Mayor, City Councilers, school board members and hundreds of high school and elementary students. A parade to the Macdonald Hotel culminated in a breakfast at which the players and Coach Page were presented with medals.<sup>48</sup> A week later an exhibition game with the C.H.S. seniors was arranged, so the fans could see the new Canadian champions in action. Half the proceeds were to compensate them for the money they had contributed for the trip.<sup>49</sup> The taller Grads walked all over their younger opponents, winning 70 to 12.

The club's success created an increased interest in the game of basketball, and the Edmonton District of the provincial league had expanded to two sections with four teams each. The schedule started in December 1922 and continued until February 1923. In Section I the Merchants took first place in home and home series with C.H.S., the Legalites and the Teachers, while the Grads subdued the teams from Edmonton Normal School, Victoria High School and Varsity in Section II.

As the 1923 season began, further rule changes explained by J. P. Page in the Edmonton Journal, had divided the court into halves instead of thirds and reduced the number of fouls needed for disqualification.<sup>50</sup> With the absence of Daisy Johnson and Winnie Martin, Abbie Scott and Mary Dunn had been added to the team of Dot Johnson, Nellie Perry, Connie Smith and Eleanor Mountifield, with Elizabeth Elrick relegated to a substitute position.<sup>51</sup>

The Grads defeated the Merchantile team and then acquired their eighth provincial title in March with Barons again providing the opposition, what little there was. Barons, who had beaten Lethbridge by one point for the Southern Alberta title, was losing 2 to 22 after the first half and decided to concede the series and the championship.<sup>52</sup> The game was played without Winnie Martin, one of the Edmonton regulars, who was attending Queen's University in Ontario.

The Grads were now scheduled to play the London Shamrocks for the Canadian title, in Edmonton. The Westerners had been waiting for this particular series since March 10, but London wanted the games delayed until May 22, when exams were over for their student players. The Shamrocks also stipulated that they would play only if men's rules were used for the whole series.<sup>53</sup> Since there was no dominion governing body for basketball, the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada allowed the managers of the respective teams decide on such arrangements. The Grads agreed to use men's rules at a team

meeting, but felt that the suggested playing dates were too late.<sup>54</sup> The games were eventually played May 24 and 26 with the Grads successfully retaining their Canadian title. Public interest in the series was high, with 3,000 fans attending the first game, for which the Street Railroad company had provided special car service. A football association game had also been cancelled so as not to interfere with attendance at this initial game.<sup>55</sup>

June 1923, marked another milestone in the Grads' career and one which stimulated even more civic support; the initiation of international challenge competition between the United States and Canada. The Cleveland Favourite Knits team, holders of three consecutive United States championships, was the first to play the Grads for this title. Eleven thousand fans watched the two game total point series which pitted the middy-wearing Grads against the Cleveland girls outfitted in modern short jersey uniforms bearing the words 'World Champions'. The Grads won both encounters played according to men's rules, taking the series and the international title by a 53 to 33 aggregate score, effectively erasing Cleveland's claim to the world championship.<sup>56</sup>

Following the series, questions were raised concerning the allocation of the money taken at the gate and promptly answered by business manager Page in a letter to the Edmonton Journal. This communication outlined the arrangements the club had made - hiring a promoter to protect them against financial loss - and the fact that the



Grads share of the profit, nearly \$3,000, had been deposited in a bank for future use by the Commercial Graduate Club.<sup>57</sup> Reacting to this implied criticism of the local favourites, one fan wrote the newspaper to state that only fools would question the Grads and indicated that he felt they were beyond reproach.<sup>58</sup>

Three other international series took place that fall, with the Grads entertaining the Toronto Maple Leafs, Chicago Brownies and Warren, Ohio National Lambs. The championship with the Underwood trophy at stake, was limited to teams which were provincial, state or district champions and all three teams boasted highly regarded winning records in their own areas. The Grad organization had also received a challenge from a Youngstown, Ohio team early in September. Their demand for a \$2,000 guarantee, \$200 more than Cleveland received, was based on the fact that they had defeated Cleveland and therefore rated the extra compensation. As the defending team the Grads had to pay the expenses of the visitors and in that capacity offered Youngstown \$1,800, with a \$200 bonus if they won the series or \$100 if they came close.<sup>59</sup> The offer was refused so the Grads accepted Chicago's challenge instead.

Maintaining their use of the Arena, which had a seating capacity of 4,800, the Grads continued the advance mail order system of selling tickets instituted for the national championship series played in May. Ticket prices ranged from box seats at \$1.00 to a 50¢ general admission.

charge. School children were charged 25¢ to sit in two sections especially reserved for them, while the Grads sponsored contests the winners of which received a number of free tickets, usually for the second game of a series. The contests were simple enough, all the entrants had to do was predict the Grad's margin of victory in the preceding game or series.<sup>60</sup>

Winning all six games against their Canadian and American opponents the Grads successfully retained their international title, and these mounting successes served to further justify their solid home town support and ever widening fame. The Grads had played the 1923 fall series before a total of 28,000 appreciative fans and had even drawn "hundreds of railbirds" to their practice sessions which often consisted of a practice game against the McDougall High School Boys' team, the defending Edmonton and Calgary High School champions.<sup>61</sup> The players' modesty off the court and sportsmanlike play had endeared them to most Edmontonians, basketball fans or not, with the result that:

The public has been worked up to the stage where it is no longer the Commercial Girls as a team that the fans are thinking of, its a case of Edmonton with its back to the wall.<sup>62</sup>

This fierce pride in 'their girls' extended to the point where excited fans booed several of the calls made by Coach Page when he was forced to officiate one of the Grad - Chicago games because of a dispute over referee fees.<sup>63</sup> This fervent hometown support was understandable enough when the locals' record is examined. Their claims to being the

'best in the west' had given added weight by victories against the pick of Eastern Canada and the United States. The Grads' accomplishments had boosted the interest in basketball, previously only moderately popular, to a point where it was ranked even with or just behind ice hockey. Their skill and local superiority was further acknowledged when, at the annual meeting of the Alberta Basketball Association, the Grads were asked to accept a bye directly into the provincial finals.<sup>64</sup>

The Edmonton press too had become staunch Grad supporters, promoting them constantly and repudiating any unjust criticisms. The Edmonton Journal in particular, found it necessary to defend itself against charges of rabid criticism towards Warren, made by the Light an official publication of General Electric. The Journal responded by saying that their criticism of Warren's rough play and lack of talent was justified since the Lamps had come highly touted and did not live up to advance billing.<sup>65</sup>

Growing admiration of the Grads, was not limited to Edmonton or even Canadian boundaries. Prior to the three international series, a news service had syndicated a team picture for distribution in over 150 world newspapers and a London, England daily had applauded the Grad's good taste and modesty in uniforms.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the best indication of just how far the Grad fame had spread, was the offer by the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI) to set up a series of games for the team to be played in conjunction

with the Women's Olympics in Paris, 1924. An annual tournament had been held in France as early as 1921, and the Grads would be the first non-European team to take part.<sup>67</sup> The fact that the Grads' achievements and attendant publicity brought more than just the usual box office benefits to Edmonton was not lost on the local business interests. After the Warren series, Coach Page was given a Chevrolet Coupe his first car, by city businessmen:

A tribute for the fine publicity the city has received of late thru the notable basketball exploits of the Grads.<sup>68</sup>

The patterns of competition and success continued throughout 1924. Winnie Martin and Daisy Johnson had returned to the team and Helen McIntosh was added as a sub. Practice games at the semi-weekly workouts continued to attract as many as 500 spectators. The Grads had accepted the series of European games to be played that summer. Before leaving on their first overseas trip, the Grads took time from jobs and training to defend their provincial, national and international titles. The University of Alberta, a team which had provided the closest competition for the early Grads again fielded a strong team but could not remove the Bakewell Cup from its place in the Commercial trophy case. Having already succumbed to the Grads in an international series for the Underwood trophy, the Toronto Maple Leafs tried again in April, this time seeking the Canadian title. They met the same fate as Varsity - defeat in a two game total point series. This triumph for the Grads effectively

undermined the criticism of the London (Ontario) Free Press which had earlier maintained that selection of a team for the world championships should be based on this year's series not that of the previous year.<sup>69</sup>

The Central States League champions, Chicago Lakeview Community team and the Cleveland Favourite Knits provided the opposition for the international matches; two game series which the Grads claimed handily.

On June 19 with a band and thousands of fans there to see them off, the Grads boarded the train to begin the initial leg of their European journey.<sup>70</sup> Before their return to Edmonton at the end of August, the Albertans had met and trounced six European teams and in so doing had established another milestone in their already bright career. Three teams from Paris and one each from Roubaix and Lille provided exhibition competition, while the Strasbourg game, which like the other five was won convincingly by the Grads, saw the European championship pass to the Edmontonians. Most of the games were played on outdoor courts, where the Grads used their short passing game to advantage and outscored their opponents by a margin of 60 to 10. Finally, the Grads received the highest honour of their career. After meeting in Paris, on August 1, President Mme Milliatt announced that the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale had awarded them the world title.<sup>71</sup>

The new world champions received an impressive

welcome on their return, greeted by the Mayor and numerous wellwishers. Local businessmen expressed their congratulations in a full page of newspapers advertising. It featured pictures of the individual players and their coach and a tribute to the Grads and the fame they had brought Edmonton.<sup>72</sup>

Sporting new uniforms which they had worn in Europe and minus the services of Captain Winnie Martin, the Grads embarked upon a fall schedule of practice and international games. Competition supplied by the C.H.S. boys at practices, had now been supplemented by the Gradettes, a team designed for girls training for future duties with the Grads.<sup>73</sup> The Warren Elks, an All Star team from Ohio and the Chicago Stars (formerly the Brownies), travelled to Edmonton bent on obtaining the Underwood trophy only to be disappointed, as all the other international challengers had been.

#### Summary

Local clubs and organizations continued their support of Grads in 1924 by entertaining the team and their opponents at dinners and dances. However the first sign that the Grads basketball success was being taken for granted locally came in October at the Warren series. The Grads had defeated the Elks quite handily, 33 to 11, in the first game and perhaps because victory was assured there was only slim attendance at the final match.<sup>74</sup> Yet 5,000 saw the Grads win a game in Europe and when there was no admission involved, as was the case for practice contests

and one exhibition game, anywhere from several hundred to 2,500 enthusiasts flocked to the gym. Sports Story Magazine, an American publication, ran a story on the Grads while a French newspaper heralded their performance against Strasbourg as "une brillante demonstration de basketball."<sup>75</sup> External support seems constant therefore both at the box office and in the press, while at home the turnstiles just were not clicking with the usual regularity.

Yet despite the apparent slide in attendance, other forms of local support did not diminish at all. The Grads' contribution to the growing interest in women's basketball was acknowledged and their exciting play became the standard against which other games were judged. One game in the senior league between the Morris School of Culture and Varsity was termed 'almost' as exciting as the Grads last games, while one of the stars "proved to be a second 'Dot' Johnson when it came to ringing up points."<sup>76</sup> One sports-writer even took to writing poems dealing with everything from the Grads' new uniforms to the fact that a certain citizen's newborn daughter would do best if she grew up to be a Grad.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the most eloquent tribute and example of how the local citizenry perceived the Grads was contained in a 'Certificate of Congratulation' presented to the Grads on their return from Europe. They were extolled as proof that "the Edmonton District produces the finest type of Canadian womanhood," since they had "not only won but at all times played the game."<sup>78</sup>

By the end of 1924 the Grads competitive schedule was almost completely standardized. Practice games with the C.H.S. boys or the Boy Grads as they later became known, and the Gradettes filled the void created by the lack of competitive local league contests after 1916. Exhibition games, which had previously been staged almost exclusively as benefits or demonstrations, continued and were supplemented by tours in the United States and Canada which encompassed anywhere from two to twelve games. Provincial playoffs usually occupied the first three months of the year, with the Western Canadian finals, immediately following. The Western title, first taken by the Grads in 1920 was officially reinstated in 1925 and continued intermittently until 1938. The logical progression to a National championship series took place in April or early May. The remainder of the spring season and the fall months were set aside for Underwood trophy competition, with two or three series in each time period. In the three subsequent Olympic years, 1928, 1932, and 1936, the Grads also played a series of games somewhere near the Olympic site. Some of these resulted in the acquisition of world championships, while the remaining games were exhibition affairs.

The only different type of competition to be included in the Grad repertoire in later years, was the North American championship. This best three of five series began on 1933 and continued only until 1936. The opposing teams, were those which held their respective National titles; Canadian and American.



## THE PEAK YEARS 1925-1936

During this segment of their career, the Grads continued to participate in the competitions initiated in the preceding period. Added to these were extended exhibition tours and North American championships begun in 1933. The nature of the support enjoyed by the team had changed considerably however, both in terms of box office receipts and media coverage.

### 1925-1936

The largest player turnover they had experienced left the Grads without four stellar performers at the opening of the 1925 season. The retirement of Winnie Martin, Abbie Scott, Eleanor Mountifield and Nellie Perry left the Johnson sisters, Connie Smith, Mary Dunn and Helen McIntosh as the nucleus of the team. Among newcomers later added to the roster were Elsie Bennie, Hattie Hopkins, Kate Macrae and Marguerite Bailey. Thus it was not surprising that after fifty-six straight victories, they finally met defeat. This occurred in the provincial series, but the Grads recovered and managed to hold on to the title for the tenth time. The businesswomen also reaffirmed their status as

Western Canadian title holders, this time against a Manitoba team. The road to the National Championship was not quite as smooth however. Since the Eastern teams had not registered with the national organization for championship competition, they were ruled ineligible. The Grads, as Western representatives, were therefore without opponents. As a result, they travelled to Vancouver and played a four game exhibition series, sweeping all four contests. Following this the Albertans indicated that instead of taking the National title by default they would play the Eastern winners, if they came to Edmonton.<sup>79</sup> The Toronto YWHA squad agreed to these conditions and lost both games played at the end of April. The conflict did not end on the court however, and on May 7, the Edmonton Journal quoted the Toronto Star as saying that a newly oiled floor had caused the Y's defeat and that in fact, the Grads had been outplayed.<sup>80</sup> By May 8, the Toronto manager had changed the story and insisted that the Grads had surprised them and were the better team. Two weeks later however the story, carried in Lou Marsh's column, had returned to its earlier tone, which the Edmonton Journal again staunchly refuted. The battle ended in June, aided by a letter to Marsh from one of the Toronto players who stated that the players had never agreed with their coach's negative opinion of the Grads. She also offered the information that said coach had been relieved of his duties by the Y.M. - Y.W.H.A. directors.<sup>81</sup>

The Grads played two successful international

series, against Chicago and Minneapolis teams. But they were successful from a won - loss standpoint only. The financial losses incurred as a result of these series and the one with Toronto forced the team to go on the road to play or face the forfeit of their international title.<sup>82</sup>

On a four week summer trip the Grads defeated the Guthrie, Oklahoma Redbirds to retain their title and played six exhibition games on the west coast, all without a loss.

Away from home, the Grads drawing power had not diminished. In Vancouver 2,000 spectators (a record crowd) attended one game, the same one which prompted the remark that:

The Edmonton girls have made a wonderful hit here, both by their modest demeanor off the floor and their wonderful play during the games.<sup>83</sup>

The games in Guthrie also drew record crowds, with 5,000 attending each of the international contests and among those in the stands was the inventor of basketball, Dr. James Naismith. Their performance prompted him to write a letter to Coach Page in which he echoed the sentiments of the Vancouver writer concerning the Grads' exemplary behaviour.<sup>84</sup>

The year ended with the Grads involved in another international series, with the Chicago Tri-Chi's, the concluding game being played in January. After winning this series and successfully defending the provincial championship, the Grads embarked upon what was to be their most disastrous series of games in the whole twenty-five

year career. The tour was undertaken primarily to defend the International title but a stop in Toronto on the way home allowed the Edmontonians to nab their fifth National championship. On the tour however, the Grads played and lost a series to the Cleveland Newman Sterns, thereby relinquishing the International title - so it seemed! Actually, when the smoke had cleared the 'Grad eight' had their title and reputation intact. It seemed that the original Underwood trophy had become Grad property after they had successfully defended it three times in a row. A new trophy was donated and eventually became the property of Cleveland, which necessitated that the series be in that city. To prevent financial loss and meet job obligations, the Grads had squeezed a month's worth of games into a two week period with the result that their playing ability was severely handicapped. The monetary problem arose because of the fact that no committee had been established to administer the new trophy or enforce the championship rules. This effectively freed the Cleveland team from the need to provide a guarantee for the Grads. Extra exhibition games were needed therefore to cover expenses and the whole tour was arranged by a booking agency to protect the Edmonton team against financial loss.

In May, J. J. Seitz, donor of the Underwood trophy and chairman of the board of trustees for the trophy ruled that the series with the Newman Sterns was not for the championship and consequently the Grads still held the

title.<sup>85</sup> Apparently there were two international trophies, and the one the Grads had competed for and lost was meant only for competition between Ontario, Illinois and Ohio. Furthermore, in prior communications J. P. Page had protected his team's interests by stipulating that unless the series was in Edmonton, the original title would not be at stake.<sup>86</sup>

St. Louis, Guthrie and Detroit closed out the year's competition, the Grads emerging with all their titles intact.<sup>87</sup>

The provincial to international sequence continued in 1927, the Grads playing twenty-one games and losing none, with relatively little excitement. Support continued in the same vein, with large crowds for the first game which the local won handily, then an almost empty arena for the inevitable second game. Away game interest had not changed either, with large crowds and favourable press reports at almost every encounter. Harland Rhome, a Chicago sports-writer even termed the Grads 'the New York Celtics' of women's basketball.<sup>88</sup> Once again however public opinion towards the Grads, although favourable, was not consistently transformed into box office success.

The opening of a new season, the second in which World championship competition took place, revealed an almost totally revamped Grad 'machine'. The change of personnel in 1927 left only Elsie Bennie and Kate Macrae, who were joined by Margaret MacBurney, Millie McCormack, Joan Johnston and the only two players in Grad history who

had not attended Commercial High School - Mae Brown and Gladys Fry.<sup>89</sup> These newcomers proved more than equal to the task of maintaining the Grad tradition, and the team easily retained Provincial, Western, National and World championships. Nine games had been arranged in Europe, and once again the Canadians swept the slate. Their wins over the Paris Linnets and the Paris All Stars gave them the French and World titles.<sup>90</sup>

Spectator interest seemed to be increasing somewhat, and one encounter with the Toronto Lakesides drew "the biggest crowd of fans to attend a sporting event here in several years."<sup>91</sup> The relatively small, for the Grads, two point margin of victory in the initial game had stimulated "talk about the city of taking things easy to get a good gate on Monday."<sup>92</sup> Thus while the Grads were lauded as being invaluable for the publicity they provided for Edmonton, the West and Canada; their success and notoriety brought with it the inevitable vigilance determined to protect against a fall from the prominence they had achieved.

Hoping a long layoff would draw inquisitive fans to the arena, the Grads had not played any fall games after their return from Europe.<sup>93</sup> Their exploits continued to attract attention to Edmonton and articles and pictures appeared in Maclean's Magazine, Canada Illustrated, Collier's, and numerous American publications.<sup>94</sup> Regular practice sessions continued and the Grads beat the Calgary Central Grads easily for the provincial title. Scheduling

arrangements which would have forced them to travel to British Columbia and then to Toronto prompted the Grads to pull out of the Western playoffs. The Vancouver Meralomas claimed the championship after meeting and defeating the Calgary squad. Thus the Grads had lost their title by default. When the East winner, Toronto, refused to bring the Vancouver winners out for the National finals, the situation seemed a standoff. Since they did not possess the drawing power of the Edmonton girls, largely because they had unwisely met the Grads in an exhibition game and been soundly defeated, the Meralomas lost the chance to contend for the National title.<sup>95</sup> The President of the Canadian Amateur Basketball Association settled the matter by indicating that East and West titles would be the extent of dominion competition for 1929 and no National championships were held.

The Grads managed to prove that they were Canada's basketball queens, unmatched anywhere in the country, by defeating a Toronto team in an exhibition series. The games were played as part of an Eastern tour and had no formal status. Yet the point was made clear, no team in Canada could touch the Grads, on the court or at the gate:

The Grads happen to be the only girls' team in the country that can make the turnstiles click when every click means cash.<sup>96</sup>

Four international series - eight games, drew fair crowds, bolstered perhaps by interest in the attractions the Grad organization added as a part of an evening's program.

An almost circus-like atmosphere prevailed during the May series with Chicago. A tumbling and hand-balancing troupe provided entertainment prior to the game and at half time, followed by a parade of all the girls' basketball teams in the city.<sup>97</sup> Their greatest following seemed to be on the road where people snapped up the chance to see the Edmonton wonder team without the enticement of sideshow attractions. For people outside Alberta, seeing a Grad game was potentially a once in a life time event and therefore was not to be missed.

Since April of 1926, on the occasion of the disastrous Eastern tour, the Grads were undefeated in all levels of official play. The 1930 season opened with the team playing one of its most important games against the University of Alberta and involved in a situation reminiscent of the 1920 conflict over Connie Smith. This time Gladys Fry was the reason for the controversy. In 1929 Fry had played with the Grads with the University's permission, since she was a student there. This year however University of Alberta refused this permission, largely to ensure her presence on the Varsity team which intended to challenge for the Provincial championship. Despite objections by the Alberta Amateur Basketball Association, the Grads had agreed to play a game against Varsity, with the winner assured of Gladys' services.<sup>98</sup> With Gladys in the stands, the Grads defeated Varsity 50 to 7 to ensure the presence of their starting centre in the lineup. It was further agreed however, that



Fry would not be used by the Commercial team if they played any other games with Varsity.

With this problem solved, the Grads set about the methodical process of updating all their championships to a 1930 vintage. Playing teams that as usual were highly touted and supposed to topple them from their lofty perch, the Grad club emerged victorious in all but one instance. In this case they lost the opening game to the Chicago Taylors Trunks but made up the margin of victory in the second. This performance prompted Eastern sportswriters to suggest a possible thrown game, but Edmontonians rallied unquestioningly to their team's support. City telephone service was disrupted when 100,000 people called a special number to find out the results of the second game.<sup>99</sup> At the arena 6,000 fans erupted into "scenes of wildest enthusiasm" and carried the team off the floor at the close of the game.<sup>100</sup>

In an attempt to bolster local enthusiasm the Edmonton Journal tried to show Edmontonians that the team they took for granted was regarded as an unparalleled phenomenon in the rest of the country. Andy Lytton, a Vancouver writer was quoted, as he asked of the Grads: "are they like Tennyson's mythical brook, to flow on forever?"<sup>101</sup> A Winnipeg scribe was similarly impressed, calling them "the Golden Girls of basketball and Percy Page . . . God's gift to them."<sup>102</sup> Local merchants took up the lead, sponsoring a two page spread of advertisements, boosting the

Grads and promoting the series with Toronto.<sup>103</sup> This plan succeeded to an extent, with over 6,000 fans attending the Toronto series. But it took the very real threat of a title loss to send the fans to the arena in droves, as happened at the Chicago series.

Since new players needed to be developed and no worthwhile challenge had been received, the Grads summer tour constituted the final competition of the year.<sup>104</sup> This trip took them to British Columbia and down the west coast of the United States where they played games against Kelowna, Seattle, San Francisco, Prince Rupert and Prince George, losing only one, to the 140 pound Pacific Coast Champions Men's team.<sup>105</sup>

The 1931 season brought with it the usual triumphs, acclaim and conflict for the Grads. The Western Canadian title was defaulted to them by the University of British Columbia and the champions then refused to play in the Canadian finals against Toronto.

The dates for that competition had been set and agreed upon when the Lakesides asked for extra time in which to raise the required guarantee. Coach Page and the Grads executive committee met and decided to accept only the original dates and offered to hold the series at anytime in Edmonton. Page told the press that they had based their decision on the fact that Toronto knew far in advance they would be sponsoring the title game and should have planned accordingly. As it was, the Grads and their coach had

already arranged to get the time off for the original dates. On April 3 Page, acting on behalf of the Commercial Graduate Club, issued the following statement:

Our club . . . instead of yielding in this instance as we have so frequently done in the past to keep peace in the family, we intend to sit tight and let the future take care of itself.<sup>106</sup>

The Canadian Amateur Basketball Association (CABA) awarded the national championship to Toronto on April 6, stating that the position taken by Page and the Grads was untenable. A month later Mr. J. J. Seitz, donor of both the Underwood and the National championship trophies, came to the Grads' rescue a second time and ruled that his trophy should only change hands through competition and thus rightfully belonged to the Grads.<sup>107</sup> The CABA does not appear to have accepted his ruling and when the Lakesides played a series in Edmonton during October, the President of that association stipulated that the Canadian title held by Toronto, was not at stake. As a result the opposition was billed as the Toronto All Stars although many of the Lakesides were in the lineup.<sup>108</sup>

Challenges from Chicago, Pocatello, Idaho and Leavittsburg, Ohio were turned back with ease, the Grads outscoring their opponents by an 88 to 32 average over six games. One disappointed coach charged Page with poor sportsmanship for running up the score on his outclassed team. The Grads won that one 109 to 24.<sup>109</sup>

This summer the Grads stayed home, playing exhibition games in the small Alberta communities of Wainwright,

Lloydminster and Vegreville. The Gradettes formed the opposition for these games which served to promote basketball in the rural areas and at the same time:

In some measure, repaid their many country supporters for the patronage which has always been a feature of of series played in Edmonton.<sup>110</sup>

The Grads closed out the year with a flourish, their competitive superiority enhanced and public following undiminished. The Alberta Basketball Association had designated them Class 'A' while all other teams in the province were Class 'B'. In future, the 'B' entrants would play off among themselves and if they felt they were strong enough, could challenge the Grads for the actual provincial title.<sup>111</sup> A committee had been formed in New Zealand to arrange a tour by the Grads but later had been shelved because of the Depression but in St. Catharines, Ontario one C. Browne had written an article about the Grads, "Canada's World Champion Basketball Team." Some things had not changed then, the Grads were still on top and justified the claim that:

Teams from the East,  
Teams from the West,  
No matter where from,  
The Grads are best.<sup>112</sup>

The 1932 Provincial title was successfully defended against a member of the family, the Gradettes. The Vancouver Witches were the victims in the Western final. Once again however arrangements for the National final caused problems. Windsor Walkerville Alumni, the new Ontario champions had demanded a \$2,500 guarantee to play in Edmonton. Since he

felt that the allowable expenses would only amount to \$1,700, J. P. Page referred the matter to the CABA. The national organization sided with the Grads on the money issue, but since the Windsor team lacked funds, the Canadian final depended on the Grads' offer. Making some concessions to cut costs without deviating on the flat guarantee, the Grads came up with an arrangement accepted by Windsor.<sup>113</sup> The series, played in April, gave the Westerners their ninth national title. One international series followed and the Grads completed their twenty-ninth consecutive defense of this title against the Chicago Red Devils. The same teams played an exhibition game in Calgary before 3,000 appreciative fans, adding to the 8,000 who had seen the series in Edmonton.<sup>114</sup>

The Summer Olympics in Los Angeles was the destination for the Grads on their annual summer trip. Unlike the previous two tours made in Olympic years, there were few games played in or around Los Angeles. The Grads went primarily as spectators, stopping off on the way home to play one game in San Francisco and two in British Columbia.<sup>115</sup>

The team personnel had changed radically, with Babe Belanger, Doris Neale, Edith and Helen Stone joining Gladys Fry, Elsie Bennie, and Marg MacBurney as regulars. Wholesale changes obviously had not affected their performance as a team however and in the year end summation of outstanding Canadian sporting events the Edmonton Journal ranked the Grads' Canadian Championship third, behind Sandy Somerville's

United States Amateur Golf title and the Toronto Maple Leafs' hockey championship.<sup>116</sup>

The Grads began the 1933 season with Evelyn Coulson and Jessie Innes of the Gradettes, replacing Bennie and McCormack. As usual, they wrapped up provincial, western and national titles by May. The national series was held in Edmonton again because the Eastern champion, the Toronto Ladies, could not afford to sponsor the games in their home gym. Rather than take the title by default the Grads took on the necessary expense of hosting the match and as a result, lost \$400.<sup>117</sup> A pair of international series also went smoothly, boosting the Grads record to thirty-one straight defenses. However, in June, disaster struck. A three game series with the Durant, Oklahoma Cardinals was the first ever played for the official North American championship. The series was staged to determine the North American representative to the women's Olympics scheduled for London, England in 1934.<sup>118</sup> As Canadian champion, the Grads met the winner of the United States AAU national tournament and to the horror of their fans, dropped all three games. The first and third games were close, with only nine points total advantage to Durant. The second game was played using girls rules which the Grad team had abandoned in 1923 and with which most of the players were unfamiliar.<sup>119</sup> It developed into a massacre, the Grads trying their hardest but losing 48 to 83.

Things returned to normal in 1934, with the three

standard dominion titles going down in order. A Calgary sportswriter labelled the Grads as "no better . . . than the average player in the Calgary Ladies league" and their own coach agreed, to a point, when he stated that the 1934 'machine' was not as strong as past editions but should still go undefeated.<sup>120</sup> These remarks indicated that the team might have expected a few close games, but even this possibility did not lure the fans and the Grads again lost money on the national championship series. However, they won the one international series played and redeemed themselves by capturing the North American title from the Tulsa Stenos. A large crowd saw them off at the station as the team left for a three week trip in August, promised by Page as a consolation prize after dropping the series to Durant.<sup>121</sup> The trip called for them to travel as far east as New York City, but the four exhibition games were all played in Canada.

Thus despite earlier doubts about their ability, the Grads came through again, undefeated in sixteen official games. Three new players; Mabel Munton, Helen Northup and Noel MacDonald had played this year and thousand still followed the home games, but on the radio instead of from the stands.<sup>122</sup>

In 1935, after the usual bickering over financial arrangements, the Grads arrived in Windsor to defend their Canadian title, having already reestablished their claim to the provincial and western championships. Sweeping the

three out of five series in three straight the Westerners did some visiting in Toronto before leaving for home. On the way back they stopped off long enough to show the Winnipeg Blue Eagles and the Saskatoon Grads a thing or two about basketball. Saskatoon was so impressed that they must have been taking notes: they lost 116 to 15.<sup>123</sup>

"Edmonton's own honest to goodness group of bonafide amateurs" found themselves involved in quite a struggle shortly after they returned home.<sup>124</sup> After a routine international series with Des Moines, the Tulsa Stenos came to town for the North American championship. The first game, went to the Grads, 53 to 49, in a game of "sheer basketball artistry . . . sustained excitement and thrills."<sup>125</sup> By an identical score, the second game fell to Tulsa. Thanks largely to the heroics of rookie Etta Dann who shut out the Stenos star, Sonny Dunlap, the Grads took the third game 37 to 31 for a 2 to 1 series lead. After that the Grads took no chances, winning the fourth game and taking the series, to the delight of 5,500 fans who, after the game, "surged across the floor and crowded around Coach Page and his girls."<sup>126</sup> The excitement of the series prompted one writer to lapse into verse in an attempt to express what the Grads meant to those who cheered them:

Nations may totter and politicians rave;  
Great issues may hang in the balance  
And even the end of the world may be in sight;  
But what does it matter?  
The Grads are playing tonight.<sup>127</sup>

Chicago and St. Louis both tried, unsuccessfully,



to pry the Underwood trophy loose from its base in the fall session of 1935. Unlike the Tulsa series when the arena was packed for all four games, interest dropped off after the initial game in each of the series with less than a 1,000 fans at second or third games.

The onset of another Olympic year provided a change of pace for the Grads. Invited to play a series of games arranged by the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale in connection with the Berlin games, the Grads passed up the annual dominion playoffs in 1936. Instead they played a series of Underwood trophy games and again retained their North American championship in spectacular fashion.

Feted at church socials, given numerous going away gifts and finally seen off at the station, a spontaneous gesture involving several thousand Edmontonians, the Grad embarked on the long trip to Berlin.<sup>128</sup> The team sailed from Quebec after playing exhibition games at Regina, Peterborough, Ottawa and Montreal. Although basketball was not an official event for women at Berlin, the Canadian Olympic Association honoured the team by cabling Germany to ask for permission for them to march in the opening parade of athletes as part of the official Canadian delegation. This was the first time the Grads had been priveleged to wear the official Canadian blazers and sit in the athletes section.<sup>129</sup>

The Grads travelled and played all over Europe in their two month stay there, taking time out to see some of

the events in Berlin. In nine games played in England, France, Italy and Germany, the average score was an overwhelming 77 to 12 for the Canadians. A margin of seventeen points was the smallest spread and resulted from a rough game with the Milan Ambrosians. The Italian press later apologized for the actions of their team and saluted the Grads as unquestionably the best team.<sup>130</sup> At their triumphant return, 3,000 fans and family turned out to greet them with cheers and requests for autographs and pictures.<sup>131</sup>

No competitions were scheduled for the fall but the Grads returned almost immediately to their practice routine. Revealing an offer to tour the United States playing games on theatre stages, Edmonton's favourites indicated they had turned it down in favour of retaining their amateur status.<sup>132</sup>

The Grads' great centre, Noel MacDonald was one of three nominated for the Rose Bowl as Canada's outstanding female athlete of 1936. She did not win this award but placed in the Canadian Press poll voting for the top female athlete. Noel may not have received top national recognition, but the Grads as a team did. A sportswriters poll found them tied with the Sarnia Imperials football squad as the best team in Canada in 1936.<sup>133</sup>

### Summary

Although John Percy Page had reversed his earlier decision to retire following the Olympic tour, the close of the 1936 season signalled a number of changes in the Grads' career. Public regard for the team, always high, continued.

Attendance at the games continued to be inconsistent but at the same time tended to reflect the shift in the Grads' competitive emphasis. Domestic competitions, from provincial through to national levels dropped off considerably, while North American and World competition ended completely in 1936. International and Underwood trophy competition thus became the focal point of the remaining competitive seasons and the fans interest.

## THE FINAL YEARS 1937-1940

The concluding chapter in the story of the Grads finds them involved in a diminishing number of domestic contests and fighting a losing battle at the gate. Irregular western, provincial and national competition is overshadowed by Underwood Trophy series which continue to attract fair sized crowds. The dearth of suitable domestic challengers effected the Grads return to city league games. Finally, the combination of several factors including fan support and available competition prompted the retirement of the team, which by now had achieved almost legendary status.

### 1937-1940

Provincial competition, left to the Gradettes in 1936, was resumed in 1937 when the Grads defeated Calgary to recover their title. Capacity crowds welcomed them in the Southern city even though an Allen Cup hockey game was played at the same time.<sup>134</sup> On their return home from Vancouver however, after winning the western championship, only a few friends were on hand to meet the Grads at the station.<sup>135</sup>

There were no Canadian finals held that year, so the Grads began their international series earlier than usual. A one page layout of ads and pictures contributed by local

merchants, kicked off the promotion for the first series against the Cleveland Fisher Foods. The Edmonton business women were obviously still recognized as the "best advertisers in Edmonton."<sup>136</sup> All three series were completed satisfactorily, with only the Tulsa Stenos managing to extend the three out of five series to four games. Memories of the exciting encounters previously staged between these two teams stimulated especially large turnouts for the Tulsa series, while crowd size ranged from 2,000 to 5,000 for the remainder of the international contests.

The continuing success of the Albertans prompted a writer in the Toronto Telegram to state that:

(The) Grads belong not to the western city only, but are an Canadian institution at large. All the Grad teams are a national feature in sports, not to say an asset to the whole country.<sup>137</sup>

Opening the 1938 season against Calgary, the Grads "handed the struggling southerners their usual spring defeat" in provincial competition.<sup>138</sup> Western and National championship opponents went down in order. The Grads win in the Dominion final prompted Alexandrine Gibb, a Toronto Star writer, to lament that to ensure victory over the Grads, Eastern girls needed six or seven years of practice and lots of dedication. This was something of which, according to her observation, only one person was capable:

I would say . . . that there is only one person in the world who can do it, and its because of him that the Grads dynasty seems perfectly safe.<sup>139</sup>

The Grads were never more popular or visible as in this period of their career. Crowd size remained inconsistent

and for the four international series averaged out to 2,000 per game. Recognition and praise however, was showered on the Grads from every direction. Fans wrote in from Red Deer, Alberta and St. Louis, Missouri while Toronto and Montreal writers agreed that "nothing this side of the equator can touch those Grads."<sup>140</sup> The President of the Alberta Basketball Association warned young players that their Grad heroines did not smoke, just a week before the Edmonton Journal called for the erection of a "Grad Hall" to alleviate problems caused when the arena was not available.<sup>141</sup>

Rumors that the Grads' retirement was imminent caused great consternation. Sportswriters felt a Canadian institution was being lost. Edmonton businessmen were a little more practical, urging support for the Grads not just because of their competitive success but because they were "one of Edmonton's best advertising mediums."<sup>142</sup>

Page himself had suggested that financial problems were the root problem, and his remarks may have been the reason for increased attendance at the fall games. Anxious to demonstrate their loyalty fans were also coming in droves to see the practice games, as many as 1,500 present at a single workout.

The Grads received national recognition later in the year when Noel MacDonald was named as the outstanding female athlete of 1938 by both the Women's Amateur Athletic Federation and the Canadian Press sportswriters poll. The team itself was also recognized, placing second to the

Toronto Argonauts football squad in voting for the Canadian team of the year.<sup>143</sup>

Starting with the 1939 season the Grads had been awarded a bye into the Canadian final. They were designated senior 'A' champions and the senior 'B' winners could challenge them for the title, an arrangement similar to the one instituted at the provincial level in 1931. No challenge was entered in 1939, so in February the Grads left on a two week goodwill tour of eastern Canada. Seven games were played and won by the Grads. Opponents included Niagara Falls, Windsor, Montreal, Detroit, and Toronto, as well as Queen's and McMaster Universities. Playing the University teams was something of a breakthrough for the Grads, since the eastern schools played girls rules, as did some of the other schools who nevertheless bought blocks of tickets for their students.<sup>144</sup>

Five international series, more than the Grads had ever played in one season, all resulted in successful title defenses. The Grads lost two of the sixteen games, only their fifth and sixth losses in fifteen years of competition. The situation at the gate was back to normal however, with fair crowds for the first game or after a loss, but few in between.

Twenty-two players had worn the famous red and white uniforms from 1932 to 1939, an unusually high turnover for the Grads. This difficulty in finding suitable replacements coupled with financial problems was leading the

Commercial Graduate Club closer to retirement. An argument with the AAU of the United States which developed over an Underwood Trophy challenge may have contributed to Page's feeling that it was time for the Grads to bow out.

The conflict began in early December when the Rochester Filarets, stating the Grads had avoided meeting them, claimed the World's Championship. Page, upon consulting with the Commercial Graduate Club executive, announced that a series could be arranged despite the fact that the arena would be unavailable.<sup>145</sup> Charges and countercharges continued to fly after the Rochester coach finally demanded that the games be played in Toronto, Montreal and Rochester. Since the Underwood Trophy rules clearly stated that the defending team had the right to choose the floor, it became apparent that a series would never materialize. The AAU investigated and approved the Filarets as amateurs in March 1940, but the American team was no longer communicating with the Grads. Shortly thereafter, Percy Page charged that the Rochester team had never intended to come and would never get another chance.<sup>146</sup> In retaliation, the American AAU forbade all American teams to play the Grads, as long as Page was the coach.<sup>147</sup> With this development, the Grads major source of competition had effectively been eliminated.

One Toronto sportswriter declared that Page was using the Rochester affair as a 'hype' to keep Edmontonians interested, but most felt the Grads were justified in their



stand. The CABA promised to investigate and two teams, Wichita and Chicago, defied the AAU by playing exhibition series in Edmonton during May and June.

Although they had been embroiled in controversy for almost six months, the Grads finished an uneventful season and exited gracefully. In the interim, perhaps because of the anticipated lack of competition but more likely to keep themselves and the fans interested, the Grads returned to city competition after an absence of twenty-four years. In the Edmonton Basketball League, the Gradettes, Grad Cubs and Varsity squads provided the competition which was organized on a handicap system. The more experienced Grads gave away 25 points to the Gradettes; 30 each to the Cubs and Varsity; and for exhibition purposes boosted the margin to 50 points and won both games played.<sup>148</sup>

In May, the Grads defeated Vancouver to ensure their retirement as Canadian champions. Public opinion, as revealed in local newspapers, indicated that although it was not a popular decision, people were becoming reconciled to the end of an era signalled by the team's retirement.

As the series with the American teams proceeded, accolade after accolade was heaped on Percy Page and his girls. When a contest to pick the all-time Grad all-stars was announced, 4,000 cast ballots for their sentimental favourites.<sup>149</sup> Coach Percy Page was lauded as the 'do everything' man behind the Grads, incapable of being replaced, while local merchants ran their traditional page

of advertisements to say farewell to the players and their mentor.<sup>150</sup>

Wichita was defeated, as was Chicago, with the final game played on June 5. Thus the Grads closed out their career twenty-five years after they began.

#### Summary

This final segment of the Grads' career embodies the paradox of their success. As talented as ever on the court, the club won ninety percent of its seventy-seven games. However, the decline in attendance which seems to have started as early as 1924, continues with a noticeable dearth of spectators at any type of domestic competition. International series continued to be the greatest attractions, although even these crowds were not enough to stave off financial loss. Talk of their retirement incited much discussion and stimulated sagging attendance to a small degree. On the whole however support for the Grads was manifested in press coverage and public interest, rather than at the gate.

## CONCLUSIONS 1915-1940

This historical analysis of their career was undertaken to substantiate the fact of the Grads' success, both in terms of competition and ability to attract and retain public support. The team's competitive records in official games, leaves no doubt that this particular aspect of success was indeed achieved. Exhibition games were scheduled consecutively for tours or played singly with a specific purpose, such as a benefit cause or to garner publicity and boost the public interest in the game of basketball. In this type of competition the Grads faced 107 opponents over twenty-five years, losing only seven times. Four of the defeats were engineered by men's teams, the remaining three coming at the hands of the Cleveland Newman Sterns. This total does not include contests played during the Grad trips taken coincident with Olympic years: 1924, 1928, 1932 and 1936. Travelling to Europe on three occasions the Grads won all of their twenty-four games. Some of these were exhibition contests but based on these results and games against the European and French champions, the Grads were awarded the world championship. In 1932 three games were played and won, but had no bearing on the world title.

Continued success in city league competition gained the Grads their initial recognition. They captured four

titles in the first three years of their existence but did not return to this type of play until 1940. It is estimated that they played approximately thirty-one games up until 1916. The complete results of the 1940 league are not available, although it is recorded that they played four games, possibly more.<sup>151</sup> Playoffs for provincial and western championships which culminated in a final series for the dominion title, yielded forty-nine out of a possible fifty-one championships for the Grads aggregations. In achieving this phenomenal record, they played 118 games, losing only six. An identical record propelled the Grads to forty-nine straight Underwood International championships. They did not lose a series in this event, instituted in 1923. The North American championships were harder to come by, relatively speaking. Losing the first series, the Grads bounced back to take the next three, with a nine win - five loss record.

In addition to these official contests, over 160 practice games were deemed significant enough to receive newspaper coverage, and the indication is that there were actually well over 200 played. Most of these involved local opponents, male and female, and were fully structured contests with qualified referees overseeing the action.

Twenty-five years after the original high school team decided to remain together, the cycle was completed and the Grads retired. An examination of the records of successive seasons reveals that the club played 416 official

games, winning all but twenty-nine; an impressive ninety-three percent.<sup>152</sup> These victories in turn yielded 108 championships which were representative of the Grads superiority at all levels of women's basketball, from local to world classifications. Of the recorded practice games, only thirty-one or eighteen percent were listed in the loss column. The evidence therefore supports completely the contention that this basketball team was successful, to an amazing degree, in the competitive sphere. Their accomplishments are further enhanced by the nature of the opposition involved. During the span of their career, the Grads had consistently defeated the best teams in the world. The process began in Edmonton against the best the city had to offer and rapidly developed into matches with the pick of Canada, the United States and Europe. The Commercial Graduate Club played against at least 150 opponents and in most cases wound up on the right side of the score. Exhibition games and even many of the title series resulted in lopsided scores in the Grads' favour, suggesting perhaps that team's accomplishments were achieved at the expense of inferior competition. Yet the record shows that the opposition, which was often hopelessly outclassed, was the best the rest of the world had to offer. European, American, and Eastern Canadian champions alike suffered defeat at the hands of the Grads. The Edmontonians therefore certainly had not padded their record through 'set up' games, they simply took on all the established champions and prevailed consistently.

Upon further examination however, it is discovered that there was another side to this competitive success. On the one hand, as a team whose goal by definition was to win, the Grads achieved actual competitive success. This conclusion can be supported by the figures available indicating their win/loss record. Another or perceptual aspect of their competitive success also presents itself. When they emerged as victors from a game or series, they were, in all but a few cases, reported as having 'played well', 'beaten bigger and heavier opponents' or 'come back against great odds'. In some cases, there was almost a 'good guys' against the 'bad guys' quality in the reporting of the games. As the 'good guys', the Grads epitomized clean play and decent living, while opponents were criticized for such questionable behaviour as fouling; berating the referee; and travelling without a chaperone. When the contending team was viewed in a better light, it was characterized a group of 'nice girls' like the home town favourites, the Grads; and the games which resulted were lauded as exercises in sportsmanship and fair play. The positive connotation of these comments indicates a particular perception of the Grads. They were seen or perceived to be 'good' in the sense that their victories were also good, or of positive value to those who witnessed or received results of the game. Local newspapers were the most obvious exponents of this perception. Yet individual letters sent directly to the team or the newspapers also indicated sympathy

for this view. Some writers berated anyone who questioned the Grads' integrity, while local merchants weighed the Grads' success on a more pragmatic level and pronounced it as beneficial to their business. In this sense the Grads achieved the ideal competitive success: they were winners and their victories were regarded as a positive achievement, a sentiment which remained constant throughout their career. The Grads thus had achieved competitive success both perceived and real.

The Grads were also hypothesized to have achieved a second type of success, defined as the ability to attract and retain support, admiration and respect from widely varied sources. It was theorized that this second category of success may have been a direct result of the achievement of competitive success. Whether or not this is true, which it seems to be, a similar conclusion was reached concerning the nature of this second type of success. It too can be broken down into actual and perceived, with different indications of both.

The obvious and perhaps simplest way to determine the actual support and admiration achieved by the Grads is to examine the variable of crowd size. Taking note of the location of the games and based on gym capacity and importance of the outcome, changes over time can be indicated and evaluated.

This measure has indicated that the Grads were not consistently successful in the admiration and support they

were able to elicit. Games played in places other than Edmonton were over time, continuously well attended. Taking gym size into account, there were no significant differences based on the type of competition involved. In Edmonton, however, a different picture is presented. Until 1924, most games regardless of their status or the gym capacity, were played before large crowds. After that point however, attendance patterns changed and declined, directly related to the expected outcome and importance of the contest.

Practice games actually increased in popularity towards the end of the Grads career, while the attraction of exhibition games varied greatly over the entire time period. Except for the few vigorously promoted series most western, provincial and national finals revealed the team's failure to retain support. International competitions also attracted varying numbers of people, but declined noticeably towards 1940. The decline in the cases of both domestic and international championships may be tentatively explained with reference to fan expectations. In both cases the Grads had continued to dominate their opponents in each successive series. Past the first game and after the novelty of seeing a different team had worn off, there was no excitement. The Grads were expected to win and most often did. Exceptions to their winning tradition serve as illustrations of the variance in attendance. If the Grads lost a game or found themselves in a situation when the outcome was in doubt, attendance jumped. Lured by the uncertainty of the contest's



outcome the Grad fans came to support the team. The same explanation may be applied to the four North American series played. Shocked by the initial loss and reinforced by the continually close scores, spectators consistently appeared in large numbers at these encounters.

The second type of success then, in terms of support attracted and retained, has been measured in relatively subjective terms. These are based on the amount and type of admiration and support expressed by widely varying sources. This type of success, again revealed perceptions of the Grads based on their performance. The impression received in this instance is that the Grads were well supported and admired at home and abroad. Directly in contrast to their actual behaviour, that is regarding attendance at games, Edmontonians consistently expressed support for their team. For the entire twenty-five years of their career the Grads were successful in retaining this type of support. Manifestations of this achievement came through the volume of letters written to the Edmonton Journal asking for information or indicating appreciation of the Grads' efforts, as well as in the crowds who met them after the completion of road trips. Ex-Edmontonians gathering in Toronto or California to cheer on the Grads was another example of the support they received. Articles in Canadian, American and European newspapers widened the scope of this admiration as did articles in different North American and European journals and magazines. Invitations to play in

Europe, New Zealand and against the Japanese provide additional evidence. That this admiration and respect was maintained continuously indicated that the Grads had achieved and sustained the perceptual aspect of the second type of success.

Using attendance at their games as an indicator, Edmonton fans demonstrated inconsistent and variable respect and support for the Grads. Yet their perception of the Grads as 'their girls', 'Edmonton's best advertisers' and 'the pride of Edmonton', indicated that over the period of the Grads career, their support and admiration actually increased. Outside of Edmonton, both actual and perceptual expressions of support existed and widened in scope as the years passed.

In terms of their success the Grads achieved both competitive and that involving admiration and support, in varying degrees. Actual competitive success is unquestionable and the reactions or perceptions of the public are almost completely favourable. Actual support and admiration measured by crowd size varies greatly and becomes interrelated with several additional factors. Support and admiration subjectively measured is achieved, increasing in scope over time.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>6</sup>The Story of the "Grads" (Western Veteran Pub. Co., Ltd., 1924); Sitting On Top Of The World 1915-1940 (Edmonton, 1940); Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships, 1915-1940 (Royal Bank of Canada, 1975).

<sup>7</sup>Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940 (Royal Bank of Canada, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, 29 March 1916.

<sup>9</sup>Edmonton Journal, 21 January 1915.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 19 November 1915.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 22 March 1915.

<sup>12</sup>The date of this contest is reported in the Edmonton Journal, 29 March 1915. However in the Grad record books it is listed as played in 1914 and therefore the next two Provincial Championships are also listed incorrectly as occurring in 1915 and 1916 instead of 1916 and 1917.

<sup>13</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, 29 March 1915.

<sup>14</sup>Edmonton Journal, 16 March 1916.

<sup>15</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, 31 March 1916.

<sup>16</sup>Edmonton Journal, 1 April 1916.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 4 December 1916.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 24 March 1917.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 2 March 1918.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 7 October 1918.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 16 April 1919.

<sup>24</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, 21 April 1919.

<sup>25</sup> Edmonton Journal, 21 April 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, 26 April 1919.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 19 May 1919.

<sup>29</sup> Edmonton Journal, 24 November 1919.

<sup>30</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, 5 April 1920.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1920.

<sup>32</sup> Edmonton Journal, 12 April 1920.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 16 April 1920.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 25 October 1920.

<sup>35</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, 8 December 1920.

<sup>36</sup> Edmonton Journal, 13 December 1920.

<sup>37</sup> The Story of the Grads; Sitting On Top Of The World 1915-1940; Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940; Daisy Johnson, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.

<sup>38</sup> This figure was arrived at on the basis of reports from the Edmonton Journal and Edmonton Bulletin during this time period. In the official Grad record books it is stated that during this period "it is believed that the team played 147 games." (Sitting On Top Of The World 1915-1940, p. 23). It seems likely that such a large number of games would have been reported as played or at least included in the early summaries of the team's record, which they were not. For the purposes of this study therefore it was decided to accept the statistics furnished by the newspapers. Major discrepancies between the total number of games played as reported in this thesis and in Grad record books are due to this decision.

<sup>39</sup> The 1921 Provincial Championship loss listed in the Grad record books refers to a pair of games played between

the Commercial High School team and Varsity. According to the Edmonton Journal (March 21 1921) there is no evidence that the Grads played any official games in 1921.

<sup>40</sup> Edmonton Journal, 25 March 1916.

<sup>41</sup> Edmonton Bulletin, 8 November 1920.

<sup>42</sup> Edmonton Journal, 21 January 1922.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 19 January 1922.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 24 October 1921.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 10 April 1922.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 11 April 1922.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1 May 1922.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 23 May 1922.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 31 May 1922.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 2 January 1923.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 19 February 1923.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 5 March 1923.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 20 April 1923.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 24 April 1923.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 21 May 1923.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15 June 1923.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 27 June 1923.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 29 June 1923.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1923.

- 60 Ibid., 20 September 1923.
- 61 Ibid., 24 September 1923.
- 62 Ibid., 13 October 1923. e
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid., 31 October 1923.
- 65 Ibid., 1 December 1923.
- 66 Ibid., 31 August 1923.
- 67 Ibid., 4 October 1923.
- 68 Ibid., 26 October 1923.
- 69 Ibid., 7 January 1924.
- 70 Ibid., 19 June 1924.
- 71 Ibid., 1 August 1924.
- 72 Ibid., 30 August 1924.
- 73 Ibid., 7 October 1924.
- 74 Ibid., 3 October 1924.
- 75 Les Dernier Nouvelles Sportives, 22 July 1924.
- 76 Edmonton Journal, 21 January 1924.
- 77 Ibid., 12 March 1924.
- 78 'Certificate of Congratulation', City of Edmonton,  
29 August 1924.
- 79 Edmonton Journal, 1 April 1925.
- 80 Ibid., 7 May 1925.

81 Ibid., 17 June 1925.

82 Ibid., 6 June 1925.

83 Ibid., 14 April 1925.

84 Dr. James Naismith, letter to J. P. Page, 8 July 1925.

85 Edmonton Journal, 5 May 1926.

86 Ibid.

87 In the Grad record books, the series with the Detroit team is categorized as a contest for the Underwood Trophy. However the game report indicates that the series was actually an exhibition affair played under girls' rules (Edmonton Journal, 27 October 1926).

88 Edmonton Journal, 9 May 1927.

89 Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 1.

90 Edmonton Journal, 20 August 1928.

91 Ibid., 24 April 1928.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., 13 March 1929.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 22 April 1929.

96 Ibid., 2 May 1929.

97 Ibid., 14 May 1929.

98 Ibid., 31 January 1930.

99 Ibid., 6 March 1930.

100 Ibid.

- 101 Ibid., 7 April 1930.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ibid., 15 April 1930.
- 104 Ibid., 15 October 1930.
- 105 Ibid., 11 August 1930.
- 106 Ibid., 3 April 1931.
- 107 Ibid., 9 May 1931.
- 108 Ibid., 29 October 1931.
- 109 Ibid., 5 May 1931.
- 110 Ibid., 6 August 1931.
- 111 Ibid., 26 November 1931.
- 112 Ibid., 16 October 1931.
- 113 Ibid., 23 April 1932.
- 114 Ibid., 18 May 1932.
- 115 Ibid., 28 July 1932.
- 116 Ibid., 31 December 1932.
- 117 Ibid., 18 April 1933.
- 118 Ibid., 14 March 1933.
- 119 Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 12.
- 120 Edmonton Journal, 28 March 1934.
- 121 Ibid., 11 August 1934.



- 122 Ibid., 23 April 1934.
- 123 Ibid., 30 April 1935.
- 124 Ibid., 28 September 1935.
- 125 Ibid., 27 May 1935.
- 126 Ibid., 3 June 1935.
- 127 Ibid., 1 June 1935.
- 128 Ibid., 20 June 1936.
- 129 Ibid., 3 June 1936.
- 130 Ibid., 10 August 1936.
- 131 Ibid., 31 August 1936.
- 132 Ibid., 23 September 1936.
- 133 Ibid., 24 December 1936.
- 134 Ibid., 29 March 1937.
- 135 Ibid., 5 April 1937.
- 136 Ibid., 14 April 1937.
- 137 Ibid., 14 June 1937.
- 138 Ibid., 7 March 1938.
- 139 Ibid., 9 April 19 1938.
- 140 Ibid., 4 May 1938.
- 141 Ibid., 16 March 1938.
- 142 Ibid., 29 September 1938.
- 143 Ibid., 4 January 1939.

144 Ibid., 23 February 1939.

145 Ibid., 31 December 1939.

146 Ibid., 14 March 1940.

147 Ibid., 2 April 1940.

148 Ibid., 6 January 1940.

149 Ibid., 6 June 1940.

150 Ibid., 5 June 1940.

151 The fact that the competitions between the Grads, their two sister organizations and Varsity were league encounters is based on two references made in the Edmonton Journal: January 6, 1940 (p. 11) and January 16, 1940 (p. 6). Here it is referred to as the Girl City or the Edmonton Basketball league. However other games are played during the same period and are designated as exhibition games using a similar handicap system. Resulting from this and the excitement of the Grads approaching retirement, the actual status and number of games recorded either as league or exhibition is confused.

152 This total was arrived at on the basis of reports made in the Edmonton Journal and does not include the exhibition contests played. The discrepancy between this figure and the official record has already been explained in earlier footnotes.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GRAD ORGANIZATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TEAM'S SUCCESS

#### Introduction

The structure and individuals as well as the relationships included in these two factors contributed significantly to the success achieved by the Edmonton Grads. Considered collectively, these three variables constitute the organizational system employed by the Commercial Graduate Club in the achievement of its goals. Both the system and the goals evolve and eventually increase in complexity over time. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the Grad organization and analyze its effect on the various types of success as outlined in Chapter II.

Since the organization does have as its constituent parts the structure, individuals and relationships involved in the successful attainment as its goals; logically then any activity of a group seeking to achieve its goal can be categorized as an aspect of its organization. In that case, the team or club unit, the players and coach; and their interrelationships could all be considered in this section. However, in this chapter the emphasis will be on the structural aspects of the Grad organization. Over the entire twenty-five year period this will include the

team unit; the club; the feeder team system and the merchant group. These appear to be the major structures operating within the organization. Existing relationships will be considered only within the discussion of each structure while significant individuals will be presented similarly. However, the most important individuals, the players and the coach will be considered separately and in greater depth in following chapters.

As mentioned earlier the nature of the organization changes and become increasingly complex as time passes. As a result, three distinct stages of development are evident in the Grad organization.<sup>153</sup> These stages correspond to the number of existing structures and any changes in the functions they perform.

The first part of this chapter then will provide a descriptive account of each of these three stages which are divided as follows: 1914-16; 1917-21; and 1922-40. The task or goal; structures and individual roles will be the focus of this section with special note taken of the changes which occur in each from stage to stage.

An analysis of the contribution to the Grads' success made by the different aspects of the organization will form the second major position of this chapter. As mentioned earlier, Stage I encompasses the years from 1914 to 1916 and since the team is the only structural feature of the era, the individuals and relationships are those which are inherent in such a system. These include the coach and

players; and their attendant interactions. Considered as integral aspects of the team structure are the following three variables: the nature and size of the population from which Grad players were drawn; practice and competitive opportunities.

The team unit of course is constant throughout the organization's history although certain of its characteristics may be altered. In Stage II the Commercial Graduate Club is the second structure to be added to the organization. Financial and public relations responsibilities characterize this unit. While an informal type of farm team support operated earlier, it was not formally installed until Stage III. Also active at this stage of the organizations development was a local merchant group. Player supply and training were the contributions of the feeder system while the merchants participated largely in the advertising sphere. The analysis of these four structures then will provide insight into the influence of the organization on the team's success.

## A. DESCRIPTION OF THE GRAD ORGANIZATION

The Commercial Graduates Basketball Club was officially formed in 1915, publicly acknowledged in December 1916, and played its first game in March 1917. The foundation for this development was laid in 1914 with the formation of the first Commercial High School team, and this provides the starting point for the following description.

### STAGE I: PRIMITIVE ORGANIZATION 1914-1916

In the fall of 1914, two commercial classes had been installed at the new McDougall Commercial High School, just west of the Armouries on the Hudsons Bay Reserve.<sup>154</sup> A high school basketball league was in operation which a group of girls from the commercial section entered and won. The same team entered the Intercollegiate Basketball league and also captured the provincial championship in 1915. An identical record was posted in 1916.

### Goal

The girls at Commercial High School had decided they wanted to play basketball and there was an individual available, John Percy Page, who fulfilled the coaching duties. The team's entry into league competition signified both coach's and players' aims of playing and winning basketball games. Based on their performance, the Commercial girls had succeeded rather well in achieving their single goal:

winning games and 'bigger honours'.<sup>155</sup>

Reasons for the setting of such goals may have differed between the two types of people involved. On one hand, the players may have seen the sport as an enjoyable activity which was a part of school life and a means of achieving a degree of recognition. The coach, on the other hand, in his role as a teacher and physical training instructor may have perceived basketball competition in another light, as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Whatever the philosophy of the participant groups, they had a common goal and as a result of the environment they shared, developed a structure to enable them to achieve their goal.

### Structure

The structure in this stage, can also be considered primitive in that no special arrangements or complex situations were evolved. The individuals involved assumed their roles and relationships based on ones which already existed. John Percy Page was the teacher of the commercial classes and in charge of physical education for the girls.<sup>156</sup> The team members were students in his classes and recipients of the aforementioned physical education instruction. Thus the teacher - student-relationship had already been established and transcended into that of the coach and player. The team, with its constituent groups and relationships emerged as the essential structure, with the school and league the environment in which it operated to achieve its goals.

Control

The system of control or distribution of power can be constructed inductively from a general conceptualization of the teacher - student relationship and the specific comments of players who appeared later in the Grad history. Pertaining to the first it would be logical that autocratic leadership behaviour of the teacher would be retained in the coaching situation. Not enough about this period in the Grad history is known however to make this more than an hypothesis. Players' comments indicate that later in his coaching career, Mr. Page was a perfectionist and had very high expectations for his players.<sup>157</sup> Other evidence suggests that Mr. Page controlled his team in every respect.<sup>158</sup>

It seems justified to assume therefore that the authority wielded by Mr. Page later in the Grad's career was a development of the teacher - student relationship which existed throughout the twenty-five years. Strict rules governing certain aspects of behaviour were understood rather than explicit and the coach made the final decisions on all matters. The players although they were striving for the same goal therefore had to decide whether they would conform to the expectations or discontinue membership on the team.

Thus although both groups, the coach and the players, had formed the organization to achieve a common goal of winning basketball games, the pre-existing relationships resulted in all authority being vested in the coach.



### Summary

This primitive stage in the development of the Grad organization is characterized by a single goal, structure and distribution of authority. The initiation of the McDougall Commercial High School team and its involvement in high school, intercollegiate and provincial competition from 1914 to 1916 is the result of this stage of development.

### STAGE II: STABLE ORGANIZATION 1917-1921

#### Goal

winning basketball games remains as the main aim of the Grads throughout the period of their existence. In this period of their career however, as in the one which follows, there are certain secondary objectives established. In provincial competition for example the Grads charged the fans 25¢ to help defray the expenses of the visiting Camrose team.<sup>159</sup> Thus the necessity of attracting sufficient numbers of fans to raise the required amount of money became a concern of team organization. As a result, several changes were made in the club structure to cope with these additional responsibilities.

#### Structure

In 1915 a transition is made to a more complex level of organization. Operating originally as a high school organization, the team decided to form the Commercial Graduate Club so they could continue to play after graduation.<sup>160</sup> The Club membership consisted of any student or graduate of

Commercial High School as well as any girls pursuing a business career and who may have attended some other business school.<sup>161</sup> The Club was organized to include patronesses and an honorary vice president, while club members filled the elected positions of president, secretary, and executive committee with John Percy Page acting as the business manager.<sup>162</sup> The team itself completed the formal club structure with an interrelationship between the administrative unit and the team maintained through the election of players to the presidential and secretarial positions.

Thus the Grad team represented and was sponsored by the club. When teams from Camrose and Stettler came to Edmonton in the provincial challenge matches, the club covered their expenses and organized the staging of the games. In the case of the games against Stettler in October of 1918, the public was informed that:

As the Commercial Graduates are under a heavy expense in bringing the Stettler team to the city, a charge of two bits is being made.<sup>163</sup>

In addition to the formal club structure, an informal system had been evolved in an effort to maintain the performance the organization had achieved. This was the feeder or farm team system which developed in 1916. In the primary stage there was only one team. This one represented the high school and was coached by Mr. Page.<sup>164</sup> Then from January to March 1916 there were two teams representing Commercial High School in the Girls City Basketball League; one each in the junior and senior divisions.<sup>165</sup> The senior

team in this case was composed of the same six girls who eventually formed the Grad team. By September 1916 there were three teams, all coached by Page and this continued right up to 1922. Even though these teams were not formally recognized as a part of the organization, they provided an informal system through which players passed on their way to the Grads.

### Control

An examination of the organizational controls indicates that although there was a tremendous change in the formal structure of the organization, the actual location of authority changed little. Both formal and informal systems resulted in most of the power residing in the hands of the coach and business manager, J. P. Page.

He retained the formal position of coach while as the business manager, Page was responsible for most of the duties formally invested in the whole administrative unit of the Commercial Graduate Club. He arranged the date, time and place of games and took care of the financial arrangements as well.<sup>166</sup> Public relations duties were divided officially between the Executive Committee and himself, but Page authored most of the releases given to the public.<sup>167</sup>

The involvement in the feeder system and his coaching responsibilities combined to give Percy Page the strongest and most important type of control in the organization. As the coach he directed the players towards the fulfillment of their commonly agreed upon goal - winning

games. As the director of the whole feeder system Mr. Page was able to train a group of younger girls in basketball skills and thus provide himself with a talent pool from which prospective Grads could be selected. Besides being able to select the talent with which he would deal through the feeder system, Page was also able to maintain the same relationship with all of his players. As with the original Grads the initial teacher - student relationship was established and changed little in the coach - athlete encounter.

#### Summary

The Grad organization developed considerably during its second stage. For the most part, the adjustments and changes were made at the onset of the period and remained constant until 1921. Considerations of crowd size and gate receipts had been added to the primary concern with winning games. All of these were reflected in the increasingly complex organization which evolved to meet the changing demands of provincial and western competition. A formal club structure and an informal farm team system were illustrations of the organization's growth. Yet despite the increasing number and variety of functions, the responsibility for their completion remained largely in the hands of John Percy Page.

STAGE III: ELABORATE ORGANIZATION 1922-1940

#### Goal

After their first trip East for the National

championship in 1922, the Grads' horizons expanded considerably. The first National championship followed in 1923; and in 1924 the first Olympic related tour was carried out. The goal of competitive success which has been indicated as the underlying motive for the original organization of the team, had already been supplemented by the need to achieve the second aspect of success described in Chapter I.

The costs of bringing in a team from Wichita or Cleveland far outreached those incurred through competition with Caurose or Calgary. That situation necessitated an increasing focus on the ways and means necessary to ensure large crowds at the games. Both the scope and regularity of such competition made the securing of adequate gate receipts very important and the ability of the club to meet expenses and/or ~~make a profit~~ then became another major organizational goal.

#### Structure and Control

During this period of the Grads career, the organization was changing and developing in order to meet the demands exerted by the extended scope of competition and the resultant need to achieve a certain financial status. There were four main elements of the structure which were significant. The first is of course the team unit, comprised of coach and players. The Commercial Graduate Club provides two additional units to be considered: the officers which fulfilled an administrative role; and the formal farm team system encompassing four basketball teams.

The fourth and final dimension of the structure was informal in nature in that it was not specifically mentioned as a part of the Grad organization, yet did have some relationship to and effect on the tasks which the organization carried out. The activities of a number of Edmonton businessmen, whose efforts were directed largely at the economic stabilization of the Grad organization, constituted the final structure to be considered.

The team unit which included the Grad players and their coach, J. P. Page, had not and did not change noticeably over the years. An examination of the team entity reveals two distinct characteristics which can be evaluated: composition and operation.

The composition of the Grad team remained relatively constant throughout this period. Usually comprised of six to ten players, the team continued to have graduates of Commercial High School who were working in the city as its members. A majority worked in business offices as stenographers or secretaries; while some were teachers. The pattern of team membership also remained relatively consistent, with players having had previous experience on one or more of the Commercial High School teams. This pattern was broken only twice, once by the addition of Gladys Fry to the team, and the other by the use of Mae Brown in 1937. Neither of these players had attended McDougall Commercial High School and they, among those who had played for the Grads, were the only two to have made the senior ranks without this

prerequisite. Gladys Fry attended Victoria High School and the University of Alberta, and was still a university student when she joined the Grads. Mae Brown learned her basketball in the country, and played for the Vancouver Canucks before she became a member of the Grad organization.<sup>168</sup>

The Club, as early as 1926, had indicated that any girl in Edmonton was eligible to tryout for a place on the team,

The Grad Management wish it distinctly understood that any girl in the city will be welcomed at these initial practices.<sup>169</sup>

Yet except for Fry and Brown, the team was composed completely of players who had come up through the 'ranks'.

The operation of the team also varied little in the time period studied. Initial practices were held in September with all the team members remaining from the previous season in attendance as well as any new hopefuls that were needed to fill vacant positions. Although Page informed the public that no players were automatically assured their previous position, each veteran player usually was successful in remaining with the team until she decided to retire.<sup>170</sup> The only time any deviations in this pattern occurred, was toward the end of the Grad career. At this point in time, a number of veterans had retired and several players were brought up from the Gradettes to replace them. The following season found these three girls: Winnie Gallen, Betty Ross and Frances Gordon back down with the second team and the Grads trying out a different group

of newcomers.<sup>171</sup>

The selection of the team was usually finalized prior to the onset of competition and the Grads prepared themselves through semi-weekly practices and games. There were usually two ninety minute practices per week held at the Commercial High School gym. Each one usually followed a formal pattern of running, drills, shooting and scrimmaging. In the process of preparing for a specific national or international series, the number of practices would usually be increased to three or four per week. Scrimmage games were the focal point of many practices with four, five and six ten minute periods being played against a boys' or girls' team. The games were carried off quite officially, with referees and statisticians present to ensure a close approximation of the game situation. In series preparations, a tapering off method was utilized. Regular practices and scrimmages were held at the beginning of a week followed by a light workout to finalize plays and discuss the competition which occurred usually a day or two before the initial game. Coach Page ran the practices and set the mood in which they were carried out.

Not a minute was wasted; the coach knew exactly what he wanted, everything was carefully explained and illustrated . . . efficiency.<sup>172</sup>

The actual games featured the precise execution of offensive and defensive strategy mapped out in the practice sessions. Page sent in substitutes and generally controlled the tempo of the game, despite his being probably the



quietest man in the gym.<sup>173</sup> The team's signature was a smooth and fast short passing attack, sometimes referred to as a fast-break offense, combined with a five man defensive system which seems to have involved a style similar to our modern man to man coverage.

The selection of players for the team as well as the decision as to who would start a game and who would be on the bench seem logically to fall to Page in his role as coach. For the most part, he relied on five or six players to play a large part of the game. However, when the team lacked an outstanding shooter or appeared to have a wide distribution of talent, a larger number of players were used. On one occasion Page experimented with a nine-man platoon system with Noel MacDonald centering both groups and on another, allowed the player to vote for the starting five.<sup>174</sup>

Players were selected on the basis of their particular talent for the standard guard, centre and forward position although changes were often made to offset problems caused by injuries or illness. Grad guards are usually described as being good ballhandlers, quick and tenacious on defense while the forwards were chosen for their shooting and passing skills. The centre position demanded some jumping ability as well as the knack of knowing when to shoot or pass to a more advantageously situated teammate. The excellent physical condition the players found themselves in as a result of practices and their own recreational pursuits, allowed them

to keep up a breakneck pace which usually wore down opponents by the closing quarter of the game.<sup>175</sup> Signal plays which were initiated from the jump ball, concentrated on making use of the short, quick passes to free a player for an easy shot.

The players' actions on the court although systematic, left room for excitement, usually provided by the exhibition of intricate teamwork and flashes of individual brilliance which effectively stymied any type of opposition.

No matter what kind of opposition . . . they always manage to meet and beat it.<sup>176</sup>

Although many other aspects of the organization gradually assumed a greater complexity in the effort to deal with changing responsibilities, the focal point of all this interest, the team, did not. Some developments did occur, as the implementation of regular practice games in 1922 indicates, yet the pattern and philosophy of play remained the same.

The officers of the club acted as a formal administrative unit although the exact extent of their responsibilities is not clear. The position of Honorary President seems to be consistently bestowed on an individual whose contribution to the club is recognized and appreciated. The managing director of the Edmonton Journal filled the position in 1924 and his successors at the newspaper achieved similar prominence in successive years.<sup>177</sup> In 1926 Winnie Martin Tait, who was a former team member and captain from 1915-1922, was named to the post of Honorary President.<sup>178</sup>

The Club's President and Captain were team members while Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Page filled the positions of Business Manager-coach and chaperone respectively.

Initially, the executive committee consisted of the President, Captain and Coach of the team.<sup>179</sup> Later, the minutes of an annual meeting revealed that three local personalities, prominent in both business and sport, occupied the offices of the executive committee. Also included in the club membership were an official team doctor, scorer, timer and referee. The Lieutenant-Governor and Premier of the Province, as well as the Mayor and Presidents of three local mens' clubs (Kiwanis, Gyros, Rotary), lent their names to the club as Patrons.

Since elected positions were filled on the basis of a vote at the annual fall meeting, it appears that the remaining players were voting members of the club.

As alluded to earlier, some of the exact responsibilities of Club members are vague. The position of Honorary President as has already been described, was awarded in appreciation for service to the club. The Captain of the team was expected to act as a team leader in the same situation and was elected by her teammates to occupy a position in the Club's administrative unit. Originally she, along with the President - also a player, presided at Executive Committee meetings which determined actions taken by the Club and acted as a public relations branch of the organization. Changes in the membership of the executive

committee occurred but the basic responsibilities remained the same. The need for greater expertise in financial and public relations matters seems to have been the stimulus for these alterations which resulted in the naming of previously informal advisors to a formal position within the Club structure.

The players' contributions in terms of game tactics obviously would be of continuing value. A reference to a 'board of strategy' comprised of the Captain, President and Coach seems to indicate that this responsibility was carried out, although now on an informal level.<sup>180</sup>

Mrs. Page had acted as the chaperone on the Grads previous excursions and remained in that capacity until 1940. On occasion however other women escorted the team when Mrs. Page was not available. One, Mrs. Bennie, was the mother of a player; while another, Mrs. Michaels, was the wife of one of the men who helped the Grads in their financial dealings.

The roles of patrons seems similar to that which exists today. These distinguished people both gave and received recognition in allowing their names to be used by the Grad organization.

The role of coach and business manager was performed by J. P. Page, without interruption for the entire twenty-five year period of the Grads' existence. In his role as coach, the responsibilities for choosing players, running practices, determining the plays and masterminding the game

have already been delineated. As business manager, Page's duties increased along with the development of competition and the need for continuing fan support. In this capacity, Percy Page was responsible for facilities, equipment, and competitive arrangements; the managing of which was all open to public scrutiny.

Procurement of facilities was necessary for both practice and game situations and it was Page who made the arrangements financial and otherwise and dealt with problems as they arose. Usually the Commercial High School gym was the site of practices but often the arena was used to give the players the experience of playing on a larger floor. When several international series were scheduled, an arrangement was usually made with the Exhibition Board which controlled the area. In quite a few situations however the Grads mentor dealt directly with city, as was the case when it came time to pay the balance of rental owing after several unsuccessful series. In 1926 the Grads found themselves facing a \$429 deficit after the Guthrie series, so at the request of Page, who had gone to the city finance committee, the team was required to pay only the net cost, for arena rental.

As business manager, Page was primarily responsible for another aspect of the facilities - the floor, which the Grads owned. Built by the city, the floor was designed for use over the ice in the arena and could be picked up and laid in sections at short notice. This innovation allowed

the Grads to compete in the winter before a larger audience than would have been possible at the Normal School or High School gym. The procurement of uniforms, balls and other equipment, involved satisfying the needs of the four Grad teams and the high school teams, six in all. During one season "the teams used 18 balls at a cost of \$258.30."<sup>181</sup> But perhaps the most difficult of Page's responsibilities lay in the financial arrangements necessitated by series played in Edmonton and those for which the Grads had to travel.

As the host team the Grad were required to pay a certain amount of the visiting teams' expenses as stipulated by the organization under whose jurisdiction they were playing. This varied according to the distance travelled by the visiting team since it was usually calculated on the basis of train fare, meals and accommodations. Not all of these expenses were covered by the Grads, the common requirement being that they pay the equivalent of ten round trip train tickets and some meal money. In the case of visiting Eastern Canadian or American teams it became a major expense, totaling approximately \$2,000. Other expenses which had to be met included arena rental fees, officials fees, costs of transportation for the visiting team once they were in the city, advertising and promotion fees, along with any other incidentals that arose.<sup>182</sup>

Being able to fulfill all these commitments was contingent upon the success of the advertising campaign in

drawing paying customers to the arena or gym where the games were being held. Except for a couple of instances where a professional promotor was engaged, as was the case with the first international series in 1923, Page handled all these responsibilities himself.<sup>183</sup> Series advertisements in the local papers and methods for the buying and selling of tickets were devised and carried out officially by the Club and in reality by Percy Page.

On road trips, financial worries were limited if the Grads were receiving a set guarantee. In these cases, Page had to be concerned with budgeting that money to meet transportation and food costs. In addition, he was responsible for all the travel scheduling, which in 1924 involved a train trip across Canada, a cruise to Europe and transportation while there, not to mention the reservation of rooms in all the same places.

If it was necessary to arrange a game by game tour or sandwich exhibition games between a national series in order to meet expenses, the business manager carried that off too. In 1922 two exhibition games, one each in St. Thomas and Toronto, were arranged to help cover travelling expenses.<sup>184</sup> A few of the tours, like the ill fated East coast trip in 1926 when the Grads played eleven games in twelve nights, were arranged and guaranteed by a promotor which reduced Page's responsibilities considerably.

In the midst of these dealings Page was also responsible for coaching, so it is obvious that the developments in the

type of competition and consequently the goals of the club, had affected Page's position to a large degree. His responsibilities increased beyond the proportion of those involved in other positions in the administrative structure of the club. In fact, it may be justified to state that all of the additional administrative responsibilities were being consolidated in the duties of the coach and business manager.

There is another aspect of the club structure itself which also becomes more important with the increasing scope of competition and the need for financial success. This is the feeder or farm team system, which in 1924 becomes formally incorporated into the Grad organization.

Initial developments in the feeder system provided an intermediate league competitor, the Gradettes. This team was established to provide trained recruits for the Grads when any of the senior players decided to retire.<sup>185</sup> An examination of the roster reveals that throughout the early part of its existence the team is composed primarily of Commercial High School senior players.<sup>186</sup> In fact then, naming the squad the Gradettes and including it in the Grad organization were actions which merely formalize and extended the farm team system that had already been established with the Commercial High School teams. The relationship between the teams, during which the intermediate team acted as a pool for new Grad talent, had not changed but had been formally recognized.

- Gradettes have been carried along by the senior girls throughout the season in the hope of developing some



promising material when it come time for further depletion of the senior ranks.<sup>187</sup>

The inclusion of the Gradettes in the formal system of operation allowed the team to benefit from the financial resources of the club and widened the competitive opportunities available. As indicated earlier, the Gradettes were considered an intermediate level team and competed at that level for the provincial championship paralleling the Grad efforts in the senior division. Coached by Bill Tait until 1936 the Gradettes, as well as acting as a training ground for future Grads, performed several additional functions. Implicit in the statement that they were to be a pool for Grad talent was the idea that the Gradettes would be trained and coached in the same manner as the Grads. Mr. Tait worked off most of the rough edges and when a player moved to the Grads Mr. Page did the final polishing.<sup>188</sup> In Bill Tait, the team had a leader cast in the mold of Percy Page. The Gradettes became not only a source of talent or a diversion to keep potential players occupied, but a highly trained and skilled talent base whose members could be plugged into the Grad lineup with no apparent difficulty.

By bringing along an intermediate team concurrently with the seniors and which to our way of thinking is one of the reasons for the Grad's outstanding success, someone is always available to stop into the breach at a moment's notice.<sup>189</sup>

Since there was no regularity in the year to year departure of Grads from the team, the advancement of each Gradette to the senior team was not assured and therefore the Gradettes performed another function, that of providing a competitive

outlet for a number of talented basketball players who otherwise might not make the Grad team.<sup>190</sup> Filling in as substitutes for one or two games because of injuries or illness and acting as scrimmage opponents in practice, were two additional functions fulfilled by the Gradettes.

The intermediate team remains the significant part of the feeder system until 1940. However in the interim there were other aspects of the system being developed, both formally and informally. The Commercial High School teams still were the bases of the overall talent pool and in 1933 they are renamed the Comets and the Cubs, the former being the senior team and the latter, the juniors. Membership on the senior team varied so that up to 1930 it was composed almost entirely of Gradettes. Until 1935 however the Comet and Gradette teams had completely different lineups and as a result there were four teams in the Grad hierarchy: the Grads themselves, the Gradettes, Comets and Cubs. Also instituted in 1935 was a Commercial girls basketball league in which three teams took part: the Macs, Dougs, and the Coms.<sup>191</sup> These three teams had originally been part of a group of all stars who attended a clinic organized by Clarence Hollingsworth, a Commercial teacher. He had asked each of the other city high schools to send their two best players who were felt to have special talent and wished to learn more advanced skills.<sup>192</sup> The three teams, provided with shirts by the Grads, played a short competitive schedule in 1936 and twelve of the all stars were then given

the opportunity to try out with the Gradettes.<sup>193</sup>

The Grad farm team system had been widened to encompass not only all the Commercial High School talent, which Page still coached, but the pick of the city's high school crop as well. In the final three years of the Grad organization the system had been consolidated somewhat and included three official Grad branches and the two high school teams. The Grads themselves were almost all Commercial graduates and played in national and international competition. The Gradettes combined the best of their members and the senior C.H.S. team (Comets) and competed at the senior 'B' level in national play. The Grad Cubs, who were entered in intermediate championship competition consisted of the alumnus of the Commercial league and Commercial High School, for whom there was no room on the Gradettes. The C.H.S. team, senior and junior, remained primarily in interschool leagues, with little extra curricular involvement like that of the Cubs or Gradettes.<sup>194</sup> Clarence Hollingsworth, Arnold Henderson and Bill Tait, all Commercial teachers at one time or another, divided the responsibilities for these teams among themselves throughout the sixteen year period. Each of them coached one of the five teams, except the Grads, at least once. The progression of talent established by the feeder system involved movement from the high school teams to the Cubs, Gradettes and ultimately the Grads.

Another team existed in the Grad organization, one

which was very important, although it never produced any players for the Grads. This was the Boy Grad team. As early as 1924 the Grads had instituted practice games against the C.H.S. boys, who were usually entered in intermediate competition.<sup>195</sup> Like the Grads, the boys decided to stay together after graduation, so they could continue to compete. In 1927 they became an official branch of the Commercial Graduate Club and continued to compete in the Intermediate provincial league. Until 1940 they were the Grads' chief practice opposition, with one or two regularly scheduled games played each week. The team was very important to the Grads in terms of competition, as the boys provided extra height and speed to work against which well prepared the girls for all their opposition. The Gradettes, as mentioned earlier, also were involved in these practice sessions but could not provide the same competitive challenge as the boys.

This network of teams represented the Grads' highly efficient feeder system. As a result of increased competition and the retirement of Grad players the system, which had existed since the Grads were formed in 1915, was expanded and made a formal element of the club beginning with the origin of the Gradettes in 1924. This farm team system fulfilled four important roles. First, and perhaps most important of all the factors, was the supply of players to the Grads for both permanent and substitute purposes. The training of such players in the Grad tradition

or style was the second task carried out in this system; through the provision of alternate competitive opportunities, which was the third function. The feeder system also provided practice opposition for the Grads, with the Gradettes and Boy Grad teams as the competition.

Thus in the club structure, both the administrative branch and the farm team system are expanded and formalized to meet the increased tasks demands of competitive and financial success.

The fourth and final aspect of the organization to be discussed is the informal coalition of Edmonton citizens and businessmen whose various activities were concentrated in the areas of finance and public relations.

Mr. J. J. Seitz, President of the Underwood Typewriter Company, seems to have been the first to act in this capacity for the Grads. On their initial trip East for the Canadian championship 1922, since the team was short of money with which to make the trip, Coach Page approached Seitz and asked him for sponsorship. The Grads would play as the Underwood Flyers in return for help with the expenses. Seitz, according to most stories, told Page that seeking such support was unwise and informed the Grads he would match half the necessary amount out of his own funds if they could raise the rest.<sup>196</sup> They did, the expenses were met and the first Canadian championship ever was brought to Edmonton. Although Seitz's benevolence continued, with the donation

of both national and international trophies, his type of support was the exception rather than the rule, during the Grads' career.

The group of businessmen who supported the Grads most frequently acted as 'cheerleaders' providing moral, rather than financial support.<sup>197</sup> Among them, John Michaels, Bill Freeman, Charlie Hepburn and Maurice Brown are most frequently mentioned. Mr. Michaels' Newsstand was often the centre for the distribution of tickets for the Grad games with mail orders received and filled over the counter.<sup>198</sup> For his service Mr. Michaels seems to have received no more than a pair of complimentary tickets. His fierce loyalty to the Grads and Page even moved him to disagree somewhat ungently with one who had the nerve to infer that Percy Page was probably making a tidy profit for himself from the proceeds of a particularly successful international series.<sup>199</sup> At games this group of prominent businessmen were reputed to be the most vociferous of supporters while at the outset of one trip to Europe they appeared at the station sniffing and waving hankies to express their 'deep' sorrow at seeing the Grads leave.<sup>200</sup>

On the one or two occasions when the Grads drive to raise money through tickets sales had fallen short, the 'cheerleaders' went into action and revealed their money raising talents. In the case of 1928 Olympics for example, they set up a committee to answer phones and receive pledges for donations and soon had enough money to cover the

Grads' deficit and help two other Edmonton athletes as well.<sup>201</sup>

In the years when attendance was flagging, these and several other city merchants were the ones which provided one or two full pages of advertising in the Edmonton Journal to promote an upcoming series.<sup>202</sup> Theatre and restaurant proprietors; and local service clubs - Rotary, Kiwanis and Gyros; all spent time and money on entertaining the Grads and their opponents whenever a series was played.<sup>203</sup>

Other individual's and groups contributed too. Some provided services at a discount or for free, including cleaning and photography while others gave the Grads little gifts in appreciation of their efforts.

This sort of thing has been going on for a long time -- quiet little courtesies which the public rarely hears of.<sup>204</sup>

The support of these groups and individuals was entirely voluntary and spontaneous, and its effect on the organization invaluable. They continually promoted the Grads and their accomplishments to an occasionally, in the later years, indifferent public sometimes succeeding in rousing some excitement; at other times failing to penetrate the apathy which existed. When money was needed they came through again. Their interest and attention made the team feel important and in the face of waning attendance, indicated that there still was a concern about Edmonton's girls'.

This facet of the organization had developed as response to the greater demands for box office success

generated in the later years of the Grads' existence. Although some of the men became official members of the organization at one time or another, through positions on the executive committee or as patrons, the large part of their activities were undertaken on an informal basis merely to help out 'their' Grads.



## ANALYSIS

An examination of the organizational structure upon which the Edmonton Commercial Graduates basketball team was based, reveals four facets of that system which originated and developed to meet the goals of the club. That the goals were met, has been established in Chapter II, while the introductory section in this chapter was designed to illustrate more clearly the characteristics of the structure. Having accomplished that, it is now necessary to indicate how these variables contributed to the achievements of the Grads' success. As has already been noted, there were definite types of success attained by the team, and the four facets of the organization affected differing aspects and degrees of this success.

The constant factor in the examination of the Grads' organizational system was change, both in the goals of the unit and the structure which were developed to satisfy those goals. Four main structures, including the team; club; farm team supply and informal system of merchant support comprise the organization and contribute to the Grads success.

### STAGE I

#### Team Unit

During this period the team unit, with attendant relationships and controls, was the sole constituent of the

structure. It was a high school team drawn from two classrooms of no more than sixty students in all, which practiced and then played games in the high school and intercollegiate leagues.

The influence of the organization on the actual competitive success, which was the main feature of the period, seems minimal at this stage of the Grads' development. The Commercial team had as its opposition nine teams, eight from within Edmonton, four of which were also high school based. Therefore, they would have had a similar organization, in which all of the players were students and the coaches probably filled the same role as Percy Page - that of teacher - coach. Practice and competitive opportunities would have been relatively equal with the advantage probably going to the other teams like Strathcona High School and Victoria High School in the case of the size of the population from which the players were drawn. This would occur since the other high schools were drawing from the total school female population, while Page's players emanated from the aforementioned sixty in the Commercial classes. The only way this arrangement could have benefitted the Commercial High School team was the fact Commercial students could be from anywhere in the city, whereas the average high school players seem to have been limited to designated areas. The significance of the larger Commercial boundaries and their contribution to the Grads success is felt to be minimal, since at this time competitive opportunities at the schools

were relatively equal. Thus there was no reason for a student to attend Commercial High specifically for its basketball program. The fact that Commercial High School practiced on "the outdoor dirt and grass court at the south end of the school grounds" may also have been a disadvantage, since teams like Victoria High School had an indoor gym to use.<sup>205</sup>

Since all nine of the Grad opponents during this period had their origin in the educational system, it seems unlikely that team structure would give the Commercial women any significant advantage over their opponents. The structures were all similar, with the Grad system at some times being distinctly inferior. In this early period therefore their organizational structures served only to give each of the competing teams a common base from which to operate and any success must be attributed to other causes.

## STAGE II

The second stage of the development saw the team remain as the central focus of the organization, while various support systems were being developed to complement it. Included among the support systems were the administrative or club executive branch; and the farm team aspect of the organization.

### Team Unit

An examination of the team unit again reveals a number of extant characteristics which can be evaluated in

terms of their effect on the team's success. At this time, the high school players had graduated and the team was now known as the Commercial Graduates Basketball Club. Again, the variables related to the coach, players, nature and size of the population; as well as practice and playing opportunities will be considered.

#### i Coach

The coach, John Percy Page, remained with the team as it embarked upon its initial extra-educational efforts. Page was still a Commercial teacher and as such continued his relationship with the players on both levels, as teacher and as coach.

#### ii Players

Some fifteen players are recorded as having played at least one game in a Grad uniform during this period. Five of the original six remained in 1917 and two of these were still with the team in 1920. Ten additional players then had performed in the intervening years. All of the players were drawn from Commercial High School, having had experience on at least one of the teams there. Thus the players, since they were at one time Page's students, still had the teacher-student relationship as the basis of their initial contact with him. At this point however, the educational status of the team had been eliminated, since the players had graduated and were all working in local offices or businesses.

### iii Nature and Size of the Population

The 1917 edition of the Grads was composed of graduates from the original high school team and throughout this period the players continued to be drawn from the same source. The population from which the team was drawn had expanded, encompassing not only the students but the graduates as well. Since Commercial students were potentially able to come from any part of the city, the Grads retained the advantage of a potentially larger talent pool.

### iv Practice Opportunities

Although it was probable that the high school remained as the practice site for the Grads, the extra-educational nature of the graduate team made it necessary to arrange formally for this service. Whereas before they had been assured of gym or court space, now their needs were secondary to those of the school teams. The fact that the girls were working also changed the nature and scheduling of practices. Such sessions now were something other than a conclusion of the school day and it became necessary to hold them at night when both coach and players would be available. The same non-school characteristic of the team, may have benefited the Grads though, in terms of practice continuity. Since they were organized on a club basis, the practice schedules did not necessarily start or end with the school years as it had in the past.

### v Competitive Opportunities

Competitive opportunities actually decreased as a

result of the extra-educational nature of the organization. The team was not allowed to enter the High School league, formerly its main source of activity and as a result its competitive schedule dropped off by more than fifty percent, from thirty-two games to fifteen.

The lack of competition may have had a more important effect, the creation of a sense of togetherness among the players over the years, which replaced the high school affiliations of the previous era.

The monotonous grind; year after year, with little opportunity for competition, had at least one advantage in that it bound the girls closely together and developed a Grad spirit.<sup>206</sup>

#### vi Summary

The extra-educational nature of the Grad team had resulted in several changes in the nature of the team unit. Since at least four and possibly as many as eight of the nine teams which furnished opposition for the Grads were still operating on a school team basis, the new organizational unit contributed in several ways to the team's competitive success. The graduate team was able to draw its players from a larger pool than the majority of its opposition and potentially had wider practice opportunities; while the narrowing of competitive opportunities is suggested to have aided in the development of a Grad spirit which contributed significantly to the team's success. On the other hand however, many of the same aspects of the team's organization may have detracted from potential achievement of success or

again may have only served to place the Grads on an equal footing with their opponents. The fact that the team was extra-educationally organized caused problems in terms of arranging and securing suitable practice times and sites, while lack of competition may have hindered what actual competitive success there was.

In general then, the team unit as a part of the organizational whole provided no overwhelming contributions to the Grads success. The advantages accompanying its extra organizational development seem to have been balanced by the drawbacks inherent in the same system. We must look to other aspects of the organizational structure before concluding that the organization of the Commercial Graduates Basketball Club contributed significantly to its success.

### STAGE III

#### Team Unit

In the preceding period then, the team element of the structure is not seen as having contributed significantly to the Grads success. In the remaining nineteen years however the Grad team unit did provide advantages which affected their success. The main characteristic to be considered in relation to the team is its continuity. Percy Page remained as coach. The individual players changed but the source from which they were drawn still existed, while practice opportunities and competitive experiences were standardized. The same situation which had at best left them on an equal footing with their opponent or at worst found

them at a disadvantage, now worked for the Grads.

#### i Coach

Despite the announcement of his forthcoming retirement in September 1935, Coach Page remained with the club until it ceased operations in 1940. As the leader of the team he was responsible for practice and game activities and continued to administer these roles. As before, Page taught at Commercial High School and was the principal there. Since his players continued to pass through the school on their way to the Grads, the important teacher - student relationship remained.

#### ii Players

The players who earned places on the Grad teams of this period continued, with two exceptions, to be those who had passed through the Commercial High School system. The relationship established first in the classroom and then on the court also continued and played an important role in the ability of the team to attract and maintain admiration and support. Page demanded an almost blind obedience to his requirements for behaviour both on and off the court. This was the same behaviour which termed as 'ladies first, basketball players second', earned the team the respect of those who watched them.<sup>207</sup>

#### iii Nature and Size of the Population

The Grads continued to benefit from the largest potential talent pool in the city, and it was expanded even



further with the introduction of the Gradettes, Comets and Cubs. At their disposal, therefore, was all the talent in Edmonton, since the feeder teams were open to any player who wished to tryout. The educational boundaries which had previously limited the source of players, had now evaporated completely.

#### iv Practice Opportunities

The practice regimen adhered to by the team consisted of twice weekly workouts for an hour and a half, increasing to three or four with the approach of an important series. Arrangements were most often made to use the High School or Arena floors with forays into the Normal School and Varsity gyms on occasion. The training went on year round, with some time off in the summer or after the return from a prolonged tour. Thus the Grads were in constant readiness for competition and in excellent physical condition.<sup>208</sup>

#### v Competitive Opportunities

The Grads achieved world wide prominence and their competitive involvement also extended to an international level. The many tours and games, combined with the constant practice sessions, had turned the Grads into a highly cohesive unit capable of playing and winning almost anywhere in the world.

#### vi Summary

A consideration of the team as a unit within the organizational structure reveals an obvious contribution to

the Grads' success. The formation of a team is the prerequisite to achieving any type of success.

While this function of the team unit may seem obvious, there is another which is not quite as easy to ascertain. The particular characteristics of the Grad team justify its further consideration in relation to the success achieved. Initially, the team unit was part of an educational institution and possessed characteristics common to that type of organization. Since during this period one hundred percent of the opposition faced by Commercial team was organized in a similar manner, specifically in regard to coach, players and attendant administrative machinery; no direct contribution to the squads' success can be attributed to the way in which the team was organized. In the second phase, the changes in the nature of the team removed the Grads from the ranks of scholastic competitors and hence may have actually detracted from their achievements. With the onset of regular domestic and international competition however, the team and the practices accompanying its operation were standardized. It is posited therefore that during Stage III this structure contributed significantly to the actual competitive success attained by the Grads.

#### Club

The establishment of a formal club system, with elected officers and voluntary patrons marked the second phase in the organization's development. The functions performed by the club affected the Grads' success on the

second level, that dealing with the team's ability to attract and retain support both actual and perceived. Public relations and financial dealings carried out by the different agencies within the club made the significant contributions to this success. Public relations activities undertaken by the club were designed to assure the actual type of success - to draw paying customers to the games. This was accomplished through advertising campaigns immediately preceding a series although as noted earlier, this type of success was not consistently achieved throughout the Grads' career. The club also endeavoured to establish itself on a secure financial base, but as was the case in its public relations management, was not consistently successful. Inconsistent results did not detract from the other benefits realized as a result of the public relations and financial dealings. The fact that the club had established such machinery legitimized it in the eyes of the public. As well, the open and aboveboard way in which these functions were carried out contributed greatly to the admiration and public support enjoyed by the team.

#### i Public Relations

The public relations function of the administrative arm of the club was fulfilled in two distinct ways. The establishment of a club, with an executive and elected officers, implied efficient and professional operation. By this action the team had made itself legitimate and visible to the public, necessary steps in the drive for

success in all its forms.

Among the administrative functions was the performance of specific public relations activities, including advertising for upcoming series and devising a system for distribution and pricing of tickets.

#### ii Finances

A formal procedure and mechanism for handling financial concerns was the other contribution of the executive branch of the club. The Commercial Graduate Club sponsored the Grads and assumed the expenses of games or series which were played. As was the case in the consideration of the public relations function, the club structure legitimized the financial dealings of the club by formalizing them and opening them to public scrutiny. Instead of viewing the operation as the haphazard dealings of one or two individuals, the public saw a set procedure used to take in income, pay out expenses and record profits. For the club itself, the system provided a mechanism with which to carry out fiscal dealings and evaluate success.

#### iii Summary

The Commercial Graduate Club, with its inherent processes and responsibilities, did affect the success attained by the Grads. Simply stated, the significance of the Club lay in its ability to attract attention to the team. The simple formation of the club structure accomplished this, while the public relation activities of advertising and

writing letters to the local press sustained this attention and converted it to fan attendance at games. Thus its contribution is reflected in the achievement of both aspects of the second type of success.

### Feeder System

The feeder team or farm team system is the third aspect of the organization to be considered. Existing in practice since the formation of the first Grad team, this method of securing new players was formally incorporated into the organization in 1924 with the establishment of the Gradettes. Expanded to include up to four teams and potentially all of the talent in Edmonton, the system continued until 1940. Its main contribution of course is to the Grads actual competitive success, for without suitable replacements the team would not have continued its winning tradition

The term farm team or feeder system refers to existing team or teams which supply players for a parent or senior team. That a system such as this served the Grad organization, is illustrated by the movement of players through the Commercial High School teams to the graduate team. The senior high school squad supplied the entire Grad team in 1917 and continued to provide both substitute and regular players until 1940. The obvious contribution of the farm team system then is the provision of players for the Grads as necessitated by retirement or injury. An important but not as visible role of the feeder system, was

the supply of players trained in the style and manner of the Grads

#### i Supply

The maintenance of a suitable supply of players for the Grads was a necessary requisite for their competitive success. The need for a sufficient number of players was the basic concern, but one which never was a problem for the Grads - there were always more than enough players who dreamed of securing a place on the team.

The key then was the continuing supply of talented individuals, ones who could uphold the Grad winning tradition. Both the operation and the scope of the farm team system functioned to meet this need. Since young women knew that such a system existed and favoured those who actually attended Commercial High School, they gravitated to that institution of learning.<sup>209</sup> The Club policy, to consider girls from anywhere in Edmonton, further ensured that the best players in the city were available to the Grads.

Thus the feeder system provided the quantity as well as the quality of players needed to sustain the Grad records.

#### ii Training

Perhaps the most important aspect of the farm team system was the training it provided for potential Grads. Technically, the feeder system products were equal to those they replaced. The style of play and discipline inculcated by Mr. Page at the high school level was reinforced by

Mr. Tait when a young woman reached the Gradettes. By the time she reached the Grads, there was little left to learn and perfecting these skills became the main concern.<sup>210</sup>

Membership in the farm team system provided another type of training for the potential Grad. The initial encounter with Mr. Page came in the classroom and the relationship established here continued into the athletic situation. If a player wanted to play for the Grads she was already aware then of the expectations she was required to live up to. Thus members of the Grad team had a code of behaviour in common as well as a style of play.

### iii Summary

The farm team system then provided the continuity of talent needed to sustain the team and assured that the rookies would be trained in exactly the same manner as their elder sisters the Grads. An added benefit was the less tangible but important code of behaviour and discipline which was established. The players had also played with each other before reaching the Grads and thus had the advantage of 'knowing' each other well enough to function as an efficient unit on the court.

### Merchant Group

The relationship between the Grads and the group of Edmonton businessmen was an informal one and the last to be considered in the discussion of the organization and its contribution to the Grads' success. The initial interaction

between the two groups was stimulated by the expansion of competition between 1922 and 1924, to include national, international and world travel. The size and actual membership of the group cannot be completely ascertained but several prominent individuals have been identified in the earlier part of this chapter. They, along with other local merchants who provided advertising and complimentary services, contributed to several aspects of the Grads success.

The very involvement of such a group in the Grad organization, however informally, reflected the second level of competitive success that was discussed in the second chapter. They became involved as financial advisors and contributors as well as being promoters of the club, primarily because they perceived the Grads' competitive success as being 'good' for Edmonton and hence themselves. The Grads put Edmonton on the map and the favourable advertising naturally benefitted the local entrepreneurs.

Their activities naturally enough were inspired by the need to keep the greatest advertising medium Edmonton ever had functioning, in order to continue the benefits accrued through their success.

#### i Advertising

Advertising campaigns designed to get people out to the games, were an aspect of the merchant group's activities. They included promotional ads exhorting fans to 'boost' the Grads and occasionally were supplemented by 'Name the Grad' or 'Guess the Score' contests. At least one of these major



advertising endeavours took place each year with the contests appearing only on a few occasions.

The merchants themselves were some of the Grads' staunchest fans and attended practically every home game, without exception. The actual results of their endeavours can not be measured but it seems likely that their efforts inspired similar support from other Edmonton individuals and groups. 'Cappy' E. Kidd of Wainwright and H. Cheeseman, a former Edmontonian who had moved to Calgary were only two of these other fans who seldom missed an opportunity to see the Grads play.<sup>211</sup> Groups of railroad workers demonstrated their support for the Grads by attending the games in a large group, while rugby and lacrosse teams honoured the team by inviting the girls to be their guests at a game which often featured the Grad captain tossing, throwing or kicking the opening ball.<sup>212</sup>

The loosely organized group of local merchants led the way in supporting the Grads, both through their own presence at the game and through their promotional efforts designed at getting others out to the contests too. They therefore succeeded in some degree in effecting periods of financial success by their own attendance and promotional efforts. A far less tangible activity than raising money and encouraging fans to get out and see the Grads, was the continuing moral support afforded by these loyal fans. They did not so much contribute to this aspect of the Grad's success as form a part of it. The continued support of the

Grads reflected in letters of congratulation and mass turnouts at the train station was as much a part of the businessmen's concern as the contribution of their financial and public relations expertise.

The Mayor and representatives of Edmonton service and athletic clubs joined with local businessmen to provide a welcome for the Grads upon their triumphant return from Europe in 1928, while Mike's Newsboy Band was undoubtedly among those invited "to swell to noisy welcome that will be given our Grads . . . (noise being the first consideration)."<sup>213</sup> The original 'gang' had been somewhat dispersed by 1940, Maurice Brown for one, having moved elsewhere, but their antics as the Grads left on their first European tour were not forgotten:

Remember the weeping (?) that was staged for our benefit back in 1924 when Mike, Maurice, Bill Freeman, Joe Moir, Charlie Hepburn, Jim and Bill McGavin ranged themselves along side of the track and wept copious tears?<sup>214</sup>

## ii Summary

In their role as cheerleaders or boosters this group of men and their activities actually reflected rather than caused the type of continued support and admiration showered on the Grads. In their promotional efforts however, they contributed to the Grads' box office success and to the recognition of the fact that the efforts of the team benefitted Edmonton as a whole and deserved support - both financial and moral.

## CONCLUSIONS

The organizational structure surrounding the Grads has been examined and broken down into four constituent parts which contributed in varying degrees to the achievement of the different aspects of the Grads' success.

During the first stage of the Grads' career the organizational structure, characterized by the team unit, did not significantly affect the team success. It appears that the team was composed of a number of highly talented individuals whose skills exceeded those of their opponents. Thus the players were the determining factor in the early years, when actual competitive success was the dominant type.

From 1917 to 1921 the team unit is the major structure although the farm team system exists on an informal basis. An examination of its various characteristics indicates that the team structure served to place the Grads on an even footing with their competition. Once again it seems that the individual players provided the competitive edge. The club had been established and was active in selling tickets but the fan support appeared to be a function of school loyalty and friendship rather than any promotional undertakings of the Club.

The team unit; Commercial Graduate Club; feeder team system and the merchant group were the organizational structures which existed in the third and final stage of the Grads' career. Consistency and growth were the key characteristics of the success attained during this period and all

four structures affected it in some way. Competitive success, both actual and perceived, was significantly affected by the team unit and the feeder system; while the club and merchant group were largely responsible for the degree of admiration and respect earned by the Grads.

These are the most apparent relationships established between the team and its success. However it is also possible that the different structures may have influenced the team's success in other less perceptible ways not considered here. The exciting and clean style of play employed by the team may have stimulated attendance as well as public admiration and support. The existence of a feeder system limited by the city's boundaries may have had a similar effect. As well, the nature and type of activities carried out by the Club and the merchant group may have influenced the players and their competitive achievements. The efficient administration of the club and its business may have attracted potential recruits to the organization. Once, on the team, the players were able to concentrate on playing rather than being concerned with where the money was coming from the next trip. It seems likely that these and possibly other benefits were derived from the organizational system employed by the Grads. However the main contributions of the organization remain those which were considered and substantiated earlier.

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>153</sup>These stages approximate the pattern of development contained within Dr. R. J. Moriarty's 'Organizational History Time Series Analysis Model, ("The Organizational History of the Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union Central 1906-1965," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation The Ohio State University 1971), p. 14.
- <sup>154</sup>The Story of the "Grads", p. 3.
- <sup>155</sup>Edmonton Journal, 22 March 1915.
- <sup>156</sup>Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 2.
- <sup>157</sup>Betty (Bawden) Bowen, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- <sup>158</sup>Edmonton Journal, 30 May 1940.
- <sup>159</sup>Ibid., 25 March 1916.
- <sup>160</sup>Note: "To former members of the Grads" J. P. Page.
- <sup>161</sup>Edmonton Journal, 4 December 1916.
- <sup>162</sup>Ibid., 10 January 1920.
- <sup>163</sup>Ibid., 7 October 1918
- <sup>164</sup>Ibid., 11 January 1915.
- <sup>165</sup>Ibid., 1 February 1916.
- <sup>166</sup>Mrs. J. P. Page, interview with the author, Edmonton, April 1976.
- <sup>167</sup>P (Page) Hollingsworth, Ibid., Edmonton, December 1975.
- <sup>168</sup>Edmonton Journal, 24 March 1928.
- <sup>169</sup>Ibid., 9 September 1936.
- <sup>170</sup>Ibid., 21 June 1927.

- 171 Ibid., 4 February 1938.
- 172 Edmonton Bulletin, 29 October 1930.
- 173 Edmonton Journal, 4 May 1929.
- 174 Ibid., 19 March 1935.
- 175 Ibid., 4 May 1931.
- 176 Ibid., 2 May 1929.
- 177 The Story of the "Grads", p. 1.
- 178 Edmonton Journal, 17 September 1926.
- 179 The Story of the "Grads", p. 1.
- 180 Edmonton Journal, 21 September 1929.
- 181 Ibid., 2 March 1938.
- 182 Ibid., 27 June 1923.
- 183 Mrs. J. P. Page, interview with the author, Edmonton, April 1976; Pat (Page) Hollingsworth, Ibid., Edmonton; December 1975.
- 184 Edmonton Journal, 8 May 1922.
- 185 Ibid., 7 October 1924.
- 186 Ibid., 30 January 1925.
- 187 Ibid., 3 March 1927.
- 188 Betty (Bawden) Bowen, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- 189 Edmonton Journal, 6 January 1931.
- 190 Betty (Bawden) Bowen, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.

- 191 Edmonton Journal, 7 January 1935.
- 192 Pat (Page) Hollingsowrth, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- 193 Edmonton Journal, 21 March 1935.
- 194 M. Hemling, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- 195 Edmonton Journal, 19 September 1924.
- 196 Ibid., 30 May 1936.
- 197 Clarence Hollingsworth, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- 198 Edmonton Journal, 12 October 1923.
- 199 Mrs. J. P. Page, interview with the author, Edmonton, April 1976.
- 200 Daisy Johnson, Ibid., Edmonton, December 1975.
- 201 Edmonton Journal, 4 June 1928.
- 202 Ibid., 19 April 1930
- 203 Edmonton Bulletin, 14 May 1920.
- 204 Edmonton Journal, 22 March 1939.
- 205 Ethel Anderson Moore, "Origin of the Grads" (Provincial Archives of Alberta, Accession No. 20.367/6), p. 1.
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## CHAPTER IV

### THE PLAYERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE TEAM'S SUCCESS

#### Introduction

The players, as would be expected, were the heart of the Grads organization and made important contributions to the team's success. The various roles they fulfilled have been outlined in the previous chapter. However the effect they had both individually and collectively, on the team's success can be best determined through an analysis of their on court and off court activities.

On the playing floor the Grads were the best in the world for twenty-five years. They played and defeated all star aggregations; taller and heavier groups and even men's teams. The players can be considered on the basis of their individual skills. There were scorers, guards, centres, ball handlers, passers and team leaders. All of these in some combination, are necessary for a successful team and the Grads had individuals who could do some, few or all of these things. It is a common belief however that teams not individuals win games, and it seems to be a logical conclusion after an examination of the Grads record. For twenty-five years the Grads beat everyone in the world and were recognized as world champions. Pure common sense indicates that there was no possible chance that the best

basketball players in the world were all in Edmonton from 1915 to 1940. Rather it was the ability of the players to work together year after year that made the team successful. Year after year, new talent was successfully 'plugged into' the Grad machine with little or no indication that a different part had been included. In some stages of the Grads' career certain individuals stood out because of their particular talents, yet above all the 'team effort' is what sustained the Grads in their drive for championship after championship. The clean play and sportmanship continuously exhibited by the players won for them the admiration and respect of the public. This in turn resulted in positive benefits being attributed to the Grads' victories.

Away from the gym the players' behaviour had a tremendous effect on both the way the public perceived their many victories and the amount of support and respect lavished on the team.

In this chapter the players and their contribution to the team's success will be examined. The first section will provide a chronological account of the team membership for the entire twenty-five year period. Noteworthy trends are illustrated and an attempt is made to highlight the outstanding individuals who emerged throughout the Grad career. However, an in depth consideration of each player was beyond the scope of this study and left for future research.

An extensive account of the careers of four players,

followed by an examination of the effect the players had on the various aspects of the teams' success completes the chapter. The four players were chosen on the basis of their differing status within the team and also for the fact that their combined playing time spans the twenty-five years of the Grads' career. Two players were noted mainly as scorers, one for her defensive capabilities and the fourth was used as a substitute. Their background and competitive history encompass most of the characteristics displayed by the other players and so they are used as specific examples. The remainder of the analysis refers to the players in a general context as they were portrayed in the press and in personal interviews.

#### THE PLAYERS: 1915-1940

Throughout the entire twenty-five years, there were only forty-nine players listed in the Grad lineup.<sup>215</sup> Allowing for an original core of five players, the average turn over was less than two players per year. The need for new players never approximated this average however, and so it was not uncommon for five or six players to remain as the body of the team for two years and then retire, forcing a wholesale change. As a result, eight eras have been identified within the span of the team's existence, based on a dominant nucleus of players.

The first stage of the dynasty centred around the high school team, which remained relatively unchanged until the end of 1917. Nellie Batson and Ella Osborne were the

forwards; Mary Bremner and Ethel Anderson, the centres; while Gerry Reid and Winnie Martin played the guard positions. During their tenure, the team racked up a 33 - 4 won/lost record, building up consecutive streaks of five, six and eight wins, while outscoring their opponents by an average of 19 to 7. Misses Batson and Osborne lead the team and scored all the points, since according to the rules they were the only ones allowed to mount an attack on the basket.

While Reid and Martin continued in their respective positions they were joined by Elena Todd, Connie Lamont, Elizabeth Elrick and Eleanor Mountifield; and this unit completed three more successful seasons, notable mainly for the dearth of competitive opportunities. Only twelve official games are recorded, the Grads winning ten and losing two. Once again exact individual abilities are unclear but the local press in describing the Grads, continually lauds their teamwork and collective superiority over each opponent.<sup>216</sup>

Over this seven year period then, there were only ten regular players. Of these, several are singled out as individual stars. Nellie Batson, the Captain and Ella Osborne, two of the original players are specifically referred to as "excellent individual players."<sup>217</sup> In addition, Elena Todd was considered "one of the most remarkable shots to be found anywhere", while "Miss Batson specializes on shots away out, many of her scores being as

cleverly made as could be found in the men's game."<sup>218</sup> It is also significant to note that when Miss Batson and Winnie Martin could not play in the 1919 series against Varsity, the Grads lost the game.

It would seem therefore that the individual talents of the Grad players emerges as one factor and perhaps the main one, in the success of these early years. It could also be concluded that the continuity of players or in other words, the absence of yearly turnover, would result in a team cohesion or unity that would be an important factor in defeating teams that had individual stars or were taller and heavier overall.

In 1922, five new regulars joined the team as it began its march towards national and international prominence. Martin and Mountifield were joined by Nellie Perry, Connie Smith, Daisy Johnson and finally Mary Dunn and Dorothy Johnson. Abbie Scott and Helen McIntosh joined the team in 1924 and like the others remained until 1925. After losing in May 1922, the Grads compiled a forty-seven game winning streak, with a 51 and 2 over-all record.

Conditioning and adaptability seem to be the key to this group's success. Many of the players had experience in other basketball leagues and were involved in several other sports. This activity, combined with the energy expended through the main method of transportation - walking - left the Grads in fine physical condition developed further by their own practices. Not entirely unexpected then was

their ability to come through a complete game and feel that they had just gone through a light workout while opponents, like the Maple Leafs of Toronto, were gasping for breath.<sup>219</sup> Their all-round talent stood the Grads in good stead as they were shifted from position to position in an attempt to find the right combination. The bulk of the scoring seems to have been done by Nellie Perry and Daisy Johnson but Abbie Scott and most of the other players had their nights too.

A new crew appeared in 1925 to join the Johnson sisters and Connie Smith. Names like Hopkins, Bailey, Macrae and Bennie showed up on the score sheets while one Margaret MacBurney picked up where Winnie Martin had left off. Winnie had been with the team since its inception; not a prolific scorer, but a leader and hence the captain of the team. Margaret MacBurney, handicapped by the need to wear glasses, was embarking on the first season of an eleven year career, which would see her eventually ranked as the Grads' all time leading scorer after playing 164 games. Connie Smith and Dot Johnson held sway in the scoring department until MacBurney perfected her 'side shot' which contributed greatly to her 12.6 point scoring average.<sup>220</sup> 'Maggie' also excelled at the free throw line, tying for second spot in a world wide contest with entries from North America, Europe and Asia.<sup>221</sup> Her super star achievements drew praise from Eastern writers, who dubbed her the "Candadian Queen of the Basket Game."<sup>222</sup> As a member of the Grads however, she was still one part of an intricate 'machine',

some parts of which were piling up respectable scoring averages for themselves while another - Kate Macrae was being lauded as the greatest defensive player ever.<sup>223</sup>

This collection of stars continued their involvement in other sports baseball appearing as the most popular, while working fulltime usually as bookkeepers or stenographers. Enroute to a 56 and 6 won/loss record, these Grads had begun another streak, which had reached twenty-nine by December, 1927.

The holdovers from this group meshed easily with newcomers Millie McCormack, Joan Johnston, and Marg Kinney who arrived in 1928. Hattie Hopkins and Marguerite Bailey had retired leaving Macrae, MacBurney and Elsie Bennie to teach the rookies the Grad winning tradition. There were two other additions to the team in the 1927-28 season who proved to be exceptions to a long standing rule. Gladys Fry and Mae Brown became the first and only players to join the Grads without serving the almost mandatory apprenticeship on a Commercial High School or Gradette team.<sup>224</sup> These Grads continued to follow the fine example set them by their predecessors and coasted to a 54 and 2 record prior to the 1931 season. Gladys Fry and Babe Belanger who had joined this group in 1929 emulated Margaret MacBurney both in the length of their careers - ten and nine years respectively, and in their scoring aptitude. Fry became the third highest scorer in Grad history, notching 1670 points for an overall 10.4 average. Noella 'Babe' Belanger, a city and provincial

track and field champion, had abandoned a promising track career to play for the Grads and eventually amassed a career total of 1441 points which placed her fourth in the all time Grad scoring list.<sup>225</sup>

Adding Millie McCormack's achievements to the list, this Grad team (1928-30) had four of the five top Grad scorers on its roster. Not surprising then is the fact that these players combined their efforts to score forty-nine points per game. Yet another aspect of this team is revealed when the opposition's total is computed. Their prolific scoring pace did not mean that the same players could not play the defensive end of the game. In fifty-five games, the Grad defenses gave up 876 points for an average of only 16 per game!

Another impressive record was posted by the team which operated from 1931 to 1934. McCormack, Johnston, Brown and Kinney had been replaced by the Stone twins - Edith and Helen, with Evelyn Coulson and Jessie Innes joining the team in 1933. Still boasting five of the top fifteen Grad scorers, these players took part in sixty-six games, losing only three. Again these Grads were in prime physical condition which combined with their superior talents enabled them to meet any type of opposition. Elsie Bennie, the captain, was essentially a defensive player while Millie McCormack was one of the Grads' finest ball handlers.<sup>226</sup> As always, the players all shared in the star billing, displaying equal ability at the offensive and defensive ends of the court.



A larger turnover than in previous years saw all four of the 1933 replacements exit and their places filled by Noel MacDonald, Mabel Munton, Helen Northup, Etta Dann and Sophie Brown. The squad which represented the Grad organization from 1935-1936 again featured a vast array of offensive talent, with fully half of the top sixteen scorers in this particular lineup. Noel MacDonald, a centre just under six feet tall, had joined the team in 1934 and was destined to be the best of all, finally retiring in 1939 with a 13.8 point average for 135 games.<sup>227</sup> Mabel Munton, who remained a stalwart of the team until its retirement in 1940, was ranked thirteenth on the all time scoring list yet was also another in the long tradition of fine Grad guards.<sup>228</sup> The balanced nature of the team was such that Page was able to abandon the concept of a starting five, in favour of "the five who have shown the strongest cohesive style of play during practice."<sup>229</sup>

Typical of the spirit which existed on the team, was Gladys Fry's statement that "I'll play any position you want me to play," when Babe Belanger was forced out of the lineup by a sprained ankle.<sup>230</sup> These talented Grads combined their efforts to take forty-four of forty-seven possible wins, including a European tour which reestablished them as World Champions.

1937 was a turning point for the Grads. Four of the team's veterans, who had a combined service record of thirty-eight years, had finally retired. MacDonald, Munton,

Northrup, Dann and Brown became the heart of the team, with seven other players seeing regular action over the next four years. Jean Williamson a lanky centre in the Fry - MacDonald mold, was being groomed to take Noel's place. Winnie Gallen and Babe Daniel were already renowned for their baseball talents and they too became Grads in 1937, having played for the Gradettes. Francis Gordon, Betty Ross and Kay MacRitchie rounded out the team with Betty Bawden jumping to senior company from the Cubs, making her the last official Grad. The speed and skill remained and allowed the last edition of the Grads to post a final record of sixty-seven wins as against six losses. Matching their opponents in speed and checking ability, the Grads used their shooting accuracy to full advantage. In a seven game tour of Eastern Canada, they played seven games and achieved baskets on fully forty-three percent of their field goal attempts. To be capable of such accuracy in one or two games would be outstanding in itself, yet game after game in the closing campaign witnessed the achievement of pinpoint precision. Their uncanny ability around the basket allowed Coach Page to concentrate on a fast break offense, which so times left the guards up the floor while the opposition was moving in to score. Page felt however that as long as the Grads were able to get off as many shots as their opponents their superior shooting accuracy would provide the margin of victory. 231

## ANALYSIS

### FOUR PLAYERS

The following players profiles were undertaken in attempt to illustrate some of the common characteristics of Grad players as well as the different roles that were contained within the team. Individually these women made different contributions to the team's success, collectively they represented the integral parts that were combined to achieve that success.

#### Winnie Martin: 1914-1924

Winnie Martin played on the original high school team and was the only pioneer Grad who became a member of the first official Grad team in 1922. She retired in 1924, after taking part in the first European tour. Just prior to that same tour Winnie announced her impending marriage to Dr. Robert Tait, with the official ceremony taking place immediately after their return, in Montreal. In the interim Martin had attended the University of Alberta after leaving Commercial High School and then missed a season with the Grads when she went east to complete her schooling at Queen's University. A standout player at both Universities, Miss Martin was primarily a defensive specialist for the Grads. As a member of the first team, Winnie Martin was one of those responsible for setting the example of sportmanship and excellence followed by succeeding generations of Grads

Her remarks in connection with a series in 1924, exemplifies the 'spirit' that became the Grads' trademark:

If we lost to a better team, we will be the first to congratulate them . . . but we're not thinking of losing!<sup>232</sup>

Her involvement with the team continued long after her retirement, as was the case with most former Grads. She continued to cheer the team on when it came to Vancouver and even was back in uniform for a short practice session at the opening of the 1937 season.

Elsie Bennie: 1924-1933

Another player who was noted for her defensive talent was Elsie Bennie who represented the succeeding era in the Grad dynasty. She played from 1924 to 1933 after coming up through the ranks of the Grad system. Her initial training took place on the McCauley Public School and Morris School of Physical Culture teams which had been entered in the public school and merchantile leagues respectively. Bennie relinquished her duties as captain of the Gradettes, to take a place on the Grads in 1925 and two years later was named captain of that team.

A 5'7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " guard, 'Red' as she was nicknamed, provided leadership and inspiration for her teammates and in 1940 she was seventh in the all star voting.<sup>233</sup> In 1932 at twenty-four years of age, Elsie had decided to retire, but the characteristic loyalty each Grad felt toward the team prompted her to return as a substitute during the 1934 season.

Working as a stenographer, Bennie maintained her

contact with the sport by coaching girls at the Edmonton Y and in 1936 she was elected as the second vice-president of the Canadian Amateur Basketball Association. This type of involvement was another aspect of the Grad tradition, since Daisy Johnson and Coach Page had earlier held executive positions in the national and provincial organizations. Like Winnie Martin, her predecessor at the guard position, Elsie continued to follow the Grads, appearing at practices as well as games and in 1940 was named Honorary President of the Commercial Graduate Club.<sup>234</sup>

Noel MacDonald: 1933-1939

Heralded as "one of the greatest, if not greatest, woman's basketball players in the world", Noel Macdonald is perhaps the best known of all the Grad players.<sup>235</sup> A relatively short career, as compared to those of Misses Martin and Bennie, saw her established as the team's leading point getter on a game to game basis. At 5'10½", Noel was the tallest Grad, and played, naturally enough, in the centre position. Her efforts here earned her three nominations for the Rose Bowl trophy awarded to Canada's outstanding athlete, a title she was finally awarded in 1938. The Canadian Press Poll accorded her the same honour that year and she was also in the running twice, unsuccessfully, for the Lou Marsh trophy given to Canada's outstanding athlete, male or female, amateur or professional. An all-round player proficient at both ends of the court, MacDonald played softball, swam and skied and like many of her teammates worked as a stenographer.

Showing early promise, she played for the Grads while still at Commercial and played an important role in many Grad victories. In one particular game against the El Dorado Lion Oilers in 1936, Noel's last minute shot gave the Grads a much needed win and left her in a state of exhaustion, to be carried off the floor by Coaches Page and Henderson.<sup>236</sup> Prior to her retirement in 1939, Noel MacDonald had personified the Grad spirit by playing despite injuries ranging from a sore back to a broken nose and at the closing of the 1940 campaign was selected by the fans as the greatest player in Grad history.<sup>237</sup>

Winnie Gallen: 1937-1940

There was another type of player which appeared in the Grad lineup. Of the many who wished to join the team, only a few were successful. Some were outstanding scorers, other, like Winnie Gallen, played mainly for the Gradettes or were employed primarily as substitutes for the Grad regulars.

Like her sister Grads, Winnie Gallen had served an apprenticeship in the feeder system, joining the Gradettes in 1936. A talented pitcher who played professionally in Chicago after the Grads disbanded, she was already well known in Edmonton sporting circles.<sup>238</sup> The first two seasons found her used mainly as a substitute and in 1938 she returned to the ranks of the Gradettes. With the retirement of four more players in 1939, Gallen again competed for and won a position on the Grads, remaining as a substitute

until the final games in 1940.

### Summary

The players profiled here represent idealized stereotypes that appear on many teams, not just the Grads: the highly skilled offensive and defensive players, as well as the all round competitor and the substitute.

Noel MacDonald contributed to the team's competitive success through her point scoring efforts. Her height and skill were combined to develop a scoring talent which was put to good use in the final stages of the Grads' career. The national recognition she achieved as a contender for the Rose Bowl and Lou Marsh trophies increased the stock of the team as a whole. Defensive talents and leadership qualities constituted Elsie Bennie's contribution to the Grad victories. Winnie Martin played during a period when the overall talent of the team was assumed to be the significant factor in its achievements. She typified the all-round performer but was used in a guard position and was a representative of the earliest Grad teams which had started the tradition which became so important to fans and players alike. The unrewarding job of giving the regulars a rest during a game or replacing them in case of injury fell to players like Winnie Gallen. It was unspectacular but nonetheless necessary, because the regulars did not play every minute of every game and injuries which incapacitated a player for a game or two were not serious enough to add and extra full time player to the team.

Each Grad profiled contributed to her team's success, though the type and degree of the influence may have differed. The same may be said of the rest of the players. Throughout the team's existence, prolific scorers like Margaret MacBurney, Gladys Fry, Ella Osborne and Babe Belanger were complimented by stalwart defenders in the mold of Mabel Munton, Gerry Reid, Mary Dunn and Etta Dann. Eleanor Mountifield, Daisy Johnson, Abbie Scott and Sophie Brown were among those who seemed to be equally adept at both the offensive and defensive aspects of the game. In addition there were others that did not play regularly, but who were as much a part of the Grads as anyone. Hattie Hopkins, Joan Johnston, Evelyn Coulson and Jessie Innes joined others who performed primarily in a substitute capacity.

The combination of these individual talents into a cohesive whole, a significant step on the team's development, was carried out consistently for twenty-five years. The qualities of the team unit had a significant impact on the Grads' success and are examined in the following section.

#### ON THE COURT

As a unit the players constantly exhibited the qualities of teamwork, clean play and sportsmanship which contributed to the Grads' competitive success and the team's ability to attract and maintain admiration and support from widely varied sources.

The emphasis on team play was evident throughout the Grads' career. Reports of the early games mention the team



effort while later descriptions depict the team as a machine with the players as component parts.

Eventually the Grads were regarded as the epitome of the closely knit team unit. The players indicate that team play and its adherent qualities of unselfish passing and shooting became a philosophy on which their playing style was built. Passes went to a place where a Grad knew a teammate would be and setting up the player with the 'hot' hand that night was ingrained into the fabric of play.<sup>239</sup> The same feeling that inspired Margaret MacBurney, one of the leading scorers, to pass off to Mae Brown - who usually played as a substitute; motivated the team to play an exceptional game when their star guard, Mabel Munton, was seriously injured in a car accident.<sup>240</sup> Dot Johnson continued playing despite a 'trick knee' which often had to be popped back into place during the course of a game, while Noel MacDonald and Mabel Munton kept their marriages a secret for more than a month so they would not be prohibited by Coach Page from playing in two international series.<sup>241</sup> In 1932, Margaret MacBurney, Gladys Fry and Elsie Bennie again demonstrated a loyalty that went beyond that which would be reasonably expected.

It is more or less an open secret that none of them was anxious to play during the forthcoming season, but in view of a strenuous spring program, they have consented to play one more season.<sup>242</sup>

The relationships established on the court expanded out and lengthened as the years passed. The players were friends off the court as well as on and this may have been

one reason for their ability to combine their varied talents so successfully.<sup>243</sup> Perhaps the most eloquent tribute to the team's spirit is the fact that thirty-six years after their final game the Grads are still a tightly - knit group. Meeting once every five years for a reunion, the women renew friendships and compare notes on families and friends. The reunions highlight the unique relationship enjoyed by team members. Some of the later Grads were not even born when the original team competed, yet all are joined in friendship by their common athletic experience.

The ability of the players to coordinate their talents and achieve consistent competitive success has been described as teamwork. Tangible evidence of such a concept includes the willingness to pass to teammates in a better position to shoot; playing despite injuries and playing harder when a star player was sidelined. It seems that eventually this concept of team play became the guiding philosophy or spirit of the team. However abstract this idea may be it can not really be disregarded. The Grads proved that skill alone was not enough to ensure a winning record when they defeated American all-star teams, which on paper were twice as talented. This seems to indicate that the Grads had a unity of purpose which other teams did not. This, combined with the abundant talent they did possess, gave the Grads an advantage over the opposition which was reflected in the totals on the scoresheets.

Other aspects of the Grads' play affected both the

box office success and the respect accorded the team. The Grads were applauded for their aggressive but clean style of play which resulted in exciting games but relatively few fouls.

Grads have been successful because they have played clean basketball, played it well, and thus earned the support of thousands of fans throughout Alberta.<sup>244</sup>

In the international series that were played throughout the Grads' career, the Edmonton girls averaged 8.6 fouls per game while the opposition got caught for over 11.<sup>245</sup> This trend is consistent throughout the team's competitive record, from exhibition to world championship games.

The vigor and enthusiasm which the players exuded in their games, whether won or lost, captured the public's imagination. The style of play featured a passing game, directed at getting the ball down the floor, working it in close to the basket and passing it around until someone could get a good shot.<sup>246</sup> The elan with which the Grads' approached this task drew praise from spectators from British Columbia to California and even made fans of individuals who previously had regarded any type of women's sport as a waste of time.

The girls are athletes of the first rank, (that) their comprehension of sport is quite as complete as that of any male team of any description, and the grace with which they do it is utterly and forever beyond the power of males.<sup>247</sup>

### Summary

Three facets of the players' behaviour in the game situation affected the team's success. The team cohesion

which characterized each succeeding Grad team seems to have been instrumental in the Grads competitive success, while their sportsmanlike and exciting style of play attracted fans and earned plaudits for the team.

#### OFF THE COURT

When the players left the dressing room after a game or practice they were not able to escape the scrutiny which attended a world champion. As a result, their actions off the court had an important effect on the way in which both the individual player and the team as a whole was perceived.

In Edmonton the players had an image to live up to; and their loyal but demanding fans watched and reported their every move.<sup>248</sup> But every girl who joined the Grads knew what was expected of her and acted accordingly.

They live up to the letter of being a Grad of Edmonton. Any girl who doesn't care to do that is at liberty to relinquish her uniform.<sup>249</sup>

When travelling away from home, Page's dictum of "ladies first and athletes second" became the rule of conduct. No smoking, drinking or dating was allowed.<sup>250</sup> There were probably deviations from the rules on a few occasions, but if infringements did occur, none were ever made public. Their strict adherence to the spirit of sportsmanship and unrepachable behaviour drew praise from those who met them.

Everyone who met the Grads on their visit to Hartford was impressed equally as much by their good looks, culture and ability to talk intelligently as by their spectacular exhibition of passing and speed at basketball.<sup>251</sup>

The players were not perfect by any means; nor did the standards they were expected to live up to limit their enjoyment of the benefits of travel and competition which accrued from their membership on the Grads. Basically, the players felt their activities and behaviour were no more circumscribed than that of any other woman of a similar age. 252 Like the concept of team play however, the 'ladies first' ideal became standardized as a Grad philosophy. Its pronouncement by Page made it a topic for public consideration. The players' exemplary behaviour then indicated the standard was being adhered to and thus earned the team the respect and support of those who followed their undertakings.

#### Summary

A key contribution to the team's success made by players came as a result of their behaviour in that situation. Collectively they lived up to the expectations of how a female athlete should behave and thus added to the patronage and support enjoyed by the team.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The players, as part of the human element of the Grad organization, contributed to two aspects of the team's success. The actual competitive situation involved their individual skills employed in a concerted team effort. The style of play favoured by the coach and carried out by the players was regarded as 'basketball at its best' and earned for the team the respect of fans and opposition alike. The

philosophy or spirit which guided their interaction as players and determined the style of play governed the player's activities off the court as well. Always well dressed and behaved, the Grads represented themselves and their country admirably from Guthrie, Oklahoma to Rheims, France.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>215</sup>Eleven of these players are not listed in the official Grad records: seven (Mary Bremner, Ella Osborne, Ethel Anderson, Nellie Batson, Winnie Reid, Elena Todd and Connie Lamont), are not considered because they played prior to the 1922 season, the team of that era being recognized by the Club as the 'original' Grads; three others (Dorothy Shaw, Mona Karran, and Kathleen Hall), played as substitutes in the same period; and one (Margaret Nairn) took part in practice games during 1927 but retired before the season began because of heart problems.

<sup>216</sup>Edmonton Journal, 15 October 1918.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., 11 January 1915.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., 7 October 1918.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid.; 28 September 1923.

<sup>220</sup>Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 22.

<sup>221</sup>Edmonton Journal, 4 March 1927.

<sup>222</sup>Toronto Telegram, 22 April 1927.

<sup>223</sup>Edmonton Journal, 17 October 1929.

<sup>224</sup>Mae (Brown) Webb, interview with (the author, Edmonton, April 1976.

<sup>225</sup>Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 15.

<sup>226</sup>Edmonton Journal, 12 April 1932; Ibid., 10 May 1932.

<sup>227</sup>Edmonton Grads 25 Years of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 15.

<sup>228</sup>Clarence Hollingsworth, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.

<sup>229</sup>Edmonton Journal, 8 January 1935.

- 230 Ibid., 27 April 1935.
- 231 Ibid., 18 May 1939.
- 232 Ibid., 5 April 1924.
- 233 Ibid., 6 June 1940.
- 234 Ibid.
- 235 Ibid., 24 April 1936..
- 236 Ibid., 1 June 1936.
- 237 Ibid., 6 June 1940.
- 238 Ibid., 14 June 1975..
- 239 Mabel Munton, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- 240 Pat (Page) Hollingsworth, Ibid.
- 241 Edmonton Journal, 11 October 1939.
- 242 Ibid., 8 October 1932.
- 243 Mabel Munton, interview with the author, Edmonton, December 1975.
- 244 Edmonton Journal, 4 January 1936.
- 245 This figure is based on statistics available for 106 of the 118 games played.
- 246 Noella 'Babe' (Belanger) Maclean, interview with the author, Edmonton, April 1976.
- 247 Toronto Star Weekly, 24 April 1926.
- 248 Noella 'Babe' (Belanger) Maclean, interview with the author, Edmonton, April 1976.
- 249 Edmonton Journal, 19 October 1938.



250 Edith (Stone) Sutton, interview with the author,  
Edmonton, April 1976.

251 Edmonton Journal, 6 November 1934.

252 Noella 'Babe' (Belanger) Maclean, interview with the  
author, Edmonton, April 1976.

## CHAPTER V

### JOHN PERCY PAGE: THE KEY TO THE GRAD'S SUCCESS

#### Introduction

A consideration of the importance of John Percy Page to the Grads' success forms the logical conclusion of this study. The preceding chapters have illustrated that a number of factors related to both the organization and the players were influential in the Grads' success. A further examination of this work reveals an even more significant point: that many, if not all of the variables which contributed to the team's achievements owed their existence to the efforts of John Percy Page. In essence, Page was both the architect and the main component of the Grads' success. He was instrumental in the development and operation of the four identifiable organizational structures, while his personal philosophy determined both who the players would be and the standards of behaviour to which they adhered.

Of the numerous variables which influenced the team's fortune, none were as important or indispensable as Percy Page. He was the unifying link without which success would have been much less likely if not impossible. If any other element of the environment which produced the Grads had been altered, it is possible that the level of excellence would still have been achieved. However the absence of Page

would have altered the essential character and possibly the success of the phenomenon that was the Grads.

An analysis of his contribution to the team's success logically involves an examination of the positions Page occupied within the organization and in relation to the players.

A biography of Page involving his activities before and during the Grad era will be followed by an analysis of his significance to the team's achievements.

Since Page's value to the team was derived from the extent and depth of his influence on every element of its success, the analysis becomes primarily a summary of the information found in Chapters III and IV. This section on Percy Page effectively completes the pattern of the Grads' success begun with the threads established in the preceding chapters.

#### JOHN PERCY PAGE: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

John Percy Page came to Edmonton in 1912, to coordinate the Commercial courses in the city's high schools. Born in Rochester, New York to Canadian parents, he later lived in Bronte, Ontario. After attending Oakville High School and Hamilton Collegiate, Page received his teaching certificate and a degree in Commercial Science from an American college in Des Moines.<sup>253</sup> On his arrival in Edmonton, Page brought with him an active sports background, including experience in high school basketball and also had played on the St.

John Marathons, the Maritimes senior hockey champions, during his first teaching stint in New Brunswick. Moving to St. Thomas, Ontario, he played football and hockey and started coaching basketball.<sup>254</sup>

For the next two years, Page taught the Commercial courses at Victoria High School, which in 1914 were moved to J. A. McDougall School and shared the newly opened facilities with Grade 9.<sup>255</sup> Page, who was the principal and his assistant, Mr. Hyde, had to take over responsibilities for physical education classes since there were no other teachers. The choice of who to teach was left up to Mr. Hyde, who took the men.<sup>256</sup> Since basketball was gaining acceptance in Edmonton and he knew something about the game, Page used it for the girls program and when the students decided to form a team, Page naturally stepped in as coach. This was the first chapter then in the story of the Grads. After joining the players in forming the Commercial Graduate Club, Page remained as their coach until the team disbanded in 1940.

A remarkable man, Page was involved in many other aspects of basketball during his twenty-five year tenure as the Grad mentor and also took time out to record a number of other achievements.

Page's playing days were not ended by the move west. In 1917 he held a forward spot on the teacher's team in the city men's basketball league and must have found himself very busy, since his Commercial High School team played a

preliminary game on at least one occasion.<sup>257</sup> The Grad coach was still playing two years later, joined now by his associate, Ernest Hyde. Page was the captain of the McDougall All Stars and both he and Hyde were termed "masters of the game."<sup>258</sup> Page later concentrated on golf and curling, winning honours in both, including a provincial championship for the curling rink he skipped.<sup>259</sup> His interest in curling continued, and he served on the executive committee of the Alberta curling association and in March 1925 was elected president of the Royal Curling Club of Edmonton.<sup>260</sup> After his playing days were ended Page became involved in every other aspect of basketball both in Alberta and on a national level. In the preliminary years of the Grads' career, the Commercial High principal refereed, timed and scored games in the high school and intercollegiate leagues, including games in which his own team was participating. From 1917 to 1922 he continued to officiate at the high school level and even acted as the arbiter in provincial league games involving the Grads and their opponents. Needless to say, the team probably missed his presence on the bench and this may have been one factor in the Grad loss to Varsity in the provincial championship game of 1919.<sup>261</sup>

The refereeing chores continued until 1932 although he did pick up the whistle once again in 1935, when forty-eight years old, to make the calls in a Commercial Basketball League game between two of the Grad sister teams, the Gradettes and the Dougalls.<sup>262</sup> In the interim Page had

refereed both men's and women's games, ranging from exhibition encounters to league or provincial championship games.

Election to the position of secretary in the original High School Girls Basketball League signalled the beginning of a long and distinguished period of administrative service. Page held this position again in 1917 and then was named honorary-vice president of the newly organized Edmonton Basketball Association.<sup>263</sup> In 1922 at the annual meeting of the Alberta Basketball Association, the Commercial pilot was elected secretary treasurer. He retained this position into 1923 and was named as one of the Association's delegates to the AAU meeting, which were held at the same time. Page also represented Alberta on the Dominion Basketball Association, another new development; and was responsible for the coordination and scheduling of the Edmonton District competitions. In the election of officers for 1923-24, he was elevated to the position of president in the provincial body.<sup>264</sup> Page relinquished his presidency after one year however, but was then named as the representative of the ABA women's division at the CABA meeting.<sup>265</sup> The following year, 1925, Percy Page attained the rank of secretary-treasurer of the two year old CABA. His march to the top of the national organization resulted in his selection as first vice-president in 1926 and finally as president in 1927; a position he filled until 1929. That year, Mr. Page was named honorary president of the ABA and acted as the Alberta representative on the

Advisory Board of the CABA, Women's Division.<sup>266</sup> He is referred to as the Provincial body's Honorary President again in 1938 although it is not clear whether this was a reappointment or a continuation of the earlier position.<sup>267</sup>

Page's participation in the various administrative aspects of the game seemed to parallel the emphasis in the team's competition. As mentioned earlier, provincial and national contests declined in their ability to attract the fans while international challenge matches sparked more interest. The year after the Underwood triphy was donated, a committee of three men was established to govern its disposal. Page, along with donor J. J. Seitz and Julius Kemeny, an American coach, remained a permanent member of the committee.<sup>268</sup>

The other dominating influence in Page's life continued to be his teaching career at Commercial High School. He remained as the principal of C.H.S. until his retirement in 1952 after forty years of teaching and then spent three and a half years as a member of the Edmonton School Board.<sup>269</sup>

A new career developed in 1940 when Page was elected to the Alberta legislature as an Independent, a position he held until 1944. Re-elected as a conservative in 1952, he remained in office for seven years and then officiated as Lieutenant-Governor until his retirement in 1965.<sup>270</sup>

The evidence shows, and Page's players agree, that he was in fact the dominant factor in their success. Informa-

tion gleaned from Edmonton newspapers support the contention that he was involved in every aspect of the club's operation. The players, in singling him out as the most significant contributor to their accomplishments, differ as to the reasons for their decisions. Some felt that his ability to consistently "fit the right players together" was the determining factor in their many victories.<sup>271</sup> His tradition of helping players both on and off the court and the almost familial team relationship which resulted was another Page contribution.<sup>272</sup>

Collectively, these comments and the information afforded by the Edmonton papers, seem to indicate that Percy Page either directly or indirectly influenced each type of success achieved by the Grads. In the organizational setting Coach Page had a hand in every decision made and activity carried out. He also determined, to a large degree, the contributions of the players to the team's status. As coach he picked and trained each player; and was responsible for the philosophy which guided their play and off court behaviour.

His influence as mentioned, was manifest in various ways and varied across the years. The following sections illustrate both the nature and degree of Page's contributions to the Grads' success.



## ANALYSIS

### STAGE I

During the initial years of the Commercial team's operation, the coach and player groups constituted the entire organizational structure. As had already been discussed, the characteristics of the total organization do not seem to figure significantly in the team's competitive success. An assessment of the individuals within the team, indicates that as a teacher - coach, J. Percy Page had assumed an authoritative leadership roles which centred all decision making and controls in his hands. Page had some experience as a coach and the ability to assume such a position.<sup>273</sup> The players also knew something of the game, having played at Queen's Avenue Public School, and wished to continue their participation.<sup>274</sup> Although little information is available, it seems probable that Percy Page's knowledge and experience was not significantly greater than that of any of the opposing coaches. The importance of his involvement seems to be in his actual willingness to be the coach. Without his cooperation, the team may never have been formed.

Therefore it seems as if Page's major contribution to the team's success is in his decision to become the coach and thus provide the adult leadership required for competition. However, this conclusion is based on the consideration

of Page's influence only in terms of the formal coach's position. Despite the fact that the competitive schedule was primarily an element of the educational program and, by definition, had no need for fan support, J. P. Page acted as a publicity agent on several occasions. This activity generally was related to the participation of the C.H.S. team in the provincial finals. On one occasion he informed the press that the Commercial team would probably compete for the provincial championship. In another instance he announced the upcoming Commercial High School - Camrose tilt and the fact that the Commercials would entertain the visitors after the game.<sup>275</sup>

Later in the same year, Page performed the first official public relations task for the Grads who had not yet played under their new name. In a letter to the Edmonton Journal he explained that the current high school league team all attended C.H.S. while the Grads, who would defend the new Wilson provincial trophy, worked in local business offices.<sup>276</sup> At the same time he publicly identified the Grads, he was also explaining the nature of the organization the girls had formed.

In these formative years then, Page made the ultimate contribution to the team's competitive success by agreeing to take on the coaching duties. Once this relationship had been established he set the standards on which they would be based for the next twenty-five years. In addition, his efforts on the team's behalf succeeded in bringing it to the public's attention.

## STAGE II

During this second period of the team's development, the influence Percy Page wielded was magnified by the addition of two support systems; the club administrative unit and the informal feeder team system, which he initiated.

### Team Unit

The extra-educational nature of the team also changed Page's relative importance to the team. The Club had been formed at the behest of the players who wished to continue playing and Page agreed to remain as coach. The two groups then were still relatively unanimous on the goals that were established, though once again the reason for these extended competitive experiences may have differed. Except for the public relations duties, which had been formally placed in the administrative system, the coach's position remained relatively stable. As the coach, Page was responsible for choosing players and overseeing practice and competitive activities. Since the actual number of games was reduced by half the volume of the work was significantly less, even though the focus had shifted from primarily local involvement to provincial and interprovincial competition.

### Club

Page was officially regarded as the business manager in the hierarchical structure of the club administrative unit. As such he was responsible for all the financial concerns of the club. This included procurement of equipment

and facilities as well as payment of expenses incurred through actual competition, by both his own team and in some cases the visiting team.

Thus Page continued to be responsible for the date, time and place of competition and had shouldered further financial duties that accompanied the widening of the competitive scope. He also was involved in carrying out the public relations function of the Club organization.

#### Feeder System

Up until 1924, the feeder system was largely an informal development involving movement of players from the two Commercial High School teams to the Grads. Page's influence here can not be minimized. Since he coached all the teams which comprised the system, he held the ultimate control. Players trained in a particular style of play by Page, could only become a Grad on his initiative. At the same time he was able to base his relationship with the players on the teacher - student interaction which characterized their original encounter.

#### Summary

In the second stage of the team's development, Percy Page had extended and consolidated his control over the fortunes of the team through his involvement at both the team and club levels. Formally his activities were contained in the duties of coach and business manager, but as has been noted, in reality he controlled or had a part

in all of the other organizational activities.

### STAGE III

The introduction of national, international and world championship competition increased the demands made on the organizational structure, with the result that a more clearly defined set of relationships developed. Accompanying the maturation of the organizational structure was a corresponding development of Page's role and responsibilities.

#### Team Unit

His coaching duties remained constant and continued to operate on the basis of relationships and precedents established in the original educational environment. Page developed the actual system of play employed and drilled his players according to a practice system he devised.

#### Club

As in the coaching situation, Page's responsibilities appeared unchanged. However, the increasing variety and scope of competition dictated that the duties he performed expanded and thus took more time to complete.

As business manager, Page was responsible for arranging time, date and place of competition both at home and now - on the road. Since guarantees had to be provided for the visiting team according to the constitutions of the CABA and Underwood trophy, the Grad coach now found himself running a high finance organization. In this capacity he

was personally responsible for the outlay of expenses, the intake of income and the management of profits. The executive committee of the club structure seems to have evolved to provide a group to handle these matters but in reality all functions were centred in Page's role of business manager.<sup>277</sup>

The role of publicity agent for the club seems to have been divided between Page and the executive committee. However, Page had originally been responsible for the initiation of the practices employed in this manner which primarily involved advertising for upcoming series.

The facet of public relations he was most often concerned with, involved the promotion of the team on a day to day basis. A set procedure had been evolved to handle the advertising and ticket sales for a series, but the task of keeping the Grads in a favourable public light fell to Page and he handled it admirably. A standard code of behaviour was an outgrowth of Page's personal philosophy which naturally affected all his activities but is particularly evident in his role as coach and manager.

On a more superficial level, his presence at the opening of a soccer season, a baseball banquet or Rotary meeting gratified the public's desire to see more and know more about the team and succeeded in making the public aware of the team even if they were not competing.

A final aspect of the public relations function was Page's use of the media to air information concerning

the activities of the team (apart from actual competition), and state the team's position on the number of conflict situations which developed.

Feeder System

Page initiated the formal farm team system with the formation of the Gradette team in 1924 to provide a training ground for future Grads.<sup>278</sup> Later developments included the arrival on the scene of the Gradette 'B' or Comet team and the entry of the Grad Cubs in city and intermediate provincial competition. At the same time, the more informal system of prior apprenticeship on the Commercial High School teams was still in operation.

Page retained total control at the informal level until the late thirties when Arnold Henderson, Clarence Hollingsworth and Ken Shaw appropriated the responsibility of coaching the high school teams.

The same trend occurred earlier in the Gradette, Comet and Cub cases. It appears as if Page himself coached the Gradettes at least until 1931, when Bill Tait, another C.H.S. teacher took over the reins.<sup>279</sup>

Although direct contact was eventually eliminated, Page maintained his status as the director if not the coach, of these teams. Since they were part of a system designed to provide competent players for the Grads, it was necessary for the individual coach involved to use Page's approach in dealing with these younger players. The Gradettes, Comets and Cubs then were receiving instruction in both the

technique and the philosophy of the senior team.

Page's role in the feeder system had varied over the last segment of the Grads career. Direct control exercised through the position of coach was replaced by a more indirect influence through the involvement of others. The final power fell to Page however, for although Bill Tait or Clare Hollingsworth could train and recommend a particular player, Page alone was responsible for the final selection of girls to play for the Grads. He picked those from the Gradettes who would compete for an open position but also was able to select girls for any of the feeder teams. More importantly however was his final determination of who would make it to senior company.

#### Businessmen's Group

Page's position in this branch of the organization was one of an information seeker and publicist. In his capacity as business manager, he sought out financial support initially in 1922 and on one or two other occasions. These businessmen and merchants only too happily contributed either in the form of a donation or at the box office. Financial advice was also sought and received.

On the other hand the decision to include such individuals in the club strata and make them privy to the activities of the team, ensured that a basic interest in the team would be maintained.



## CONCLUSIONS

Through his involvement in all aspects of the team's operation John Percy Page established himself as the most important factor in the success achieved by the Grads. As with some of the other variable examined, his influence varies over the span of the Grads' career. However considering the team's achievements collectively there can be no doubt that Page can be considered the significant element. He was most visible in his coaching role and was responsible for determining both the style of play and the individuals who carried it out. His simple repertoire of plays and philosophy of drilling his players in the fundamentals paid off handsomely in the won/loss column. In the Club, Page was the combination secretary - treasurer and public relations agent. The activities undertaken in this capacity largely effect the second type of success at both levels. It is also indicative of the degree of his control in such matters that when questioned about the nature of the Club and its functions, several players were not even aware that it existed.<sup>279</sup> The farm team system operated according to his principles, providing suitably skilled replacements and individuals trained in the Grad style of play. The benefits derived from the expertise of the merchant group were reaped by Page in his financial and publicity dealings.

Percy Page's most visible contribution to the team's efforts was in his position as coach. However, it was his influence in developing or shaping the other variables which

contributed to the team's achievements that made him the most important single factor in the success of the Edmonton Grads.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>253</sup>E. Sutton 'The Honorable Dr. J. P. Page Lieutenant Governor of Alberta' Alberta Community Life, Winter 1964, p. 9

<sup>254</sup>Edmonton Journal, 17 June 1936.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 14 June 1975.

<sup>256</sup>Sitting On Top Of The world, p. 3.

<sup>257</sup>Edmonton Bulletin 29 November 1917.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 24 December 1919.

<sup>259</sup>Edmonton Grads 25 Years Of Basketball Championships 1915-1940, p. 2.

<sup>260</sup>Edmonton Journal, 31 March 1925.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid., 19 April 1919.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid., 23 January 1935.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 17 November 1919.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., 31 October 1923.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid., 28 October 1924.

<sup>266</sup>Ibid., 4 November 1929.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., 11 October 1938.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., 23 February 1924.

<sup>269</sup>London Free Press, 15 November 1972.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid.

<sup>271</sup>Betty (Bawden) Bowen, interview with the author, Edmonton December 1975.

<sup>272</sup>Noella 'Babe' (Belanger) Maclean, Ibid., Edmonton, April 1976.

- 273 London Free Press, 15 November 1972.
- 274 E. A. Moore, Origin Of The Grads, p. 1.
- 275 Edmonton Journal, 30 March 1916.
- 276 Ibid., 4 December 1916.
- 277 Mrs. J. P. Page, interview with the author, Edmonton, April 1976; Pat (Page) Hollingsworth, Ibid., Edmonton, December 1975.
- 278 Clarence Hollingsworth, Ibid., Edmonton, December 1975.
- 279 Ibid.
- 280 This included all of the players interviewed - see bibliography for list.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to document the success of the Edmonton Commercial Graduates basketball team and ultimately, to identify the conditions which made it possible.

An examination of the concept indicated that there were in fact two distinct types of success. The first was explained in terms of competitive achievements, while the second was manifested in the amount of support exhibited for the team. Further analysis seemed to indicate that the respective types were composed of two separate aspects: actual and perceived. Actual competitive success referred to the win/loss record of the team, while the public's evaluation of the status of those accomplishments was the perceptual aspect. The number of fans passing through the turnstiles indicated actual support and complimentary letters or invitations constituted the perceptual aspect of this second type of success.

The Grads record yields 387 victories as against 29 losses which substantiates the fact of their competitive success. The actions of local merchants and civic officials in promoting the team indicated that the winning record was perceived as having positive benefits particularly for the

groups mentioned. Both of these classes of success were attained consistently throughout the Grads' career.

The number of spectators at individual games illustrated that although achieved, the second type of success did not exist during all periods of the team's life. In Edmonton fan support increased in direct relation to the expansion of competitive opportunities, reaching a peak in 1924. From that time on it decreased somewhat and varied according to the importance of the match being played. Outside the city, attendance figures increased as the team's fame spread until they played almost exclusively before capacity crowds - a trend which did not alter noticeably. However both at home and away the Grads enjoyed the 'moral' support of fans and friends, which increased as the years passed.

A description and analysis of the Grad organization revealed several factors which contributed to the team's success. An analysis of the team unit, in which the players; coach; nature and size of the population from which players were drawn; practice; and competitive opportunities; revealed that in the early stages of the Grads' career the individual players made the major contribution to the success. In the latter segment, each of the variables listed combined to make the team unit an instrumental factor in the type of success that was achieved. The public relations and financial activities of the Commercial Graduate Club also influenced the degree of success attained. The supply and training of

potential Grads significantly affected the team's status and were carried out in the farm team system. Advertising and promotional campaigns staged by the merchant group also influenced attendance and the perceptions of the team. Within the four structures therefore ten factors were identified as affecting one of the four aspects of the Grads' success.

The players, considered a sub-unit of the team structure, were subjected to a further analysis which revealed individual and collective effects on the club's activities. Individually they were categorized as offensive, defensive, all-round or substitute players each with a specific though different function. Collectively the players exhibited teamwork, a clean but aggressive style of play and 'ladylike' behaviour. These seven variables were influential in the type and degree of success achieved by the Grads.

An evaluation of the role of John Percy Page indicated that his effect on the team's success went beyond that which resulted from his positions of coach, in the team unit; and business manager, in the Commercial Graduate Club. In fact he can be directly linked to the formation of three of the four organizational structures: the team unit; Commercial Graduate Club and feeder system. His influence continued after the establishment of these structures and was manifested in the operation of each. As well, the nine elements of the organization were directly affected by Page. The additional seven variables identified in the study of

the players also manifested his influence.

Thus of the fourteen variables categorized as contributing in some manner to the Grads' success, Page was shown to have affected at least thirteen. Additional emphasis must be placed on the fact that aside from affecting these variables by his own efforts, Page brought them into existence and determined their characteristics through the formation of the team, club and farm team structures, in which he was instrumental. As a result, Page emerges as the common factor in the variables contributing to the Grads' success.

As was proposed, the organization and the players both contributed to the team's achievements, with John Percy Page being the most significant single factor in the success of the Edmonton Grads.



## CHAPTER VII

### APPENDIX A

#### METHODOLOGY

##### A. DATA COLLECTION

1. An exhaustive study of the Edmonton Journal was carried out for the years 1914 to 1940. A number of other newspapers were also examined. In this process, the following information was extracted:

- A. data relating to each of the games played by the Grads and their predecessors, the Commercial High School team. This included: opponent, date, time, location, number of fans present, admission charged, score at end of each period, final score and individual scorers.
- B. data relating to the coach of the Grads, John Percy Page. This included: background in teaching, and coaching, philosophy of coaching, relationship with players, other activities and role in the organization of the Grads.
- C. data relating to the players, individually and as a group. This included on a year to year basis: composition of team, name, age, previous experience, education, physical characteristics, position played, points scored, individual basketball skills, other activities, employment and role in the Grad organization.

- D. Data relating to the Grad organization. This material related to both the form and function of the organization and included information concerning its origin, structure, participant individuals and groups and their interrelationships.
2. Personal taped interviews were carried out by the author with thirteen individuals connected with the Grads. Nine were players and four others performed some function in the organization. The interview was designed to obtain any additional facts not contained in other sources but its main objective was to solicit personal opinions and attitudes. As a result the interview was opened and the interviewer encouraged discussion not directly related to the questions asked. (See Appendix B).
  3. Related articles and record books were examined to secure additional information concerning the games, coach, players and organization; and to corroborate information contained in both newspapers and interviews.

B. STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL

1. Data was collected and stored in a computerized information storage and retrieval system for sport history at the University of Windsor. Information from each source was coded by year, type of competition (eg. national or local) and the particular references it contained regarding the games, coach, players and organization of the Grads.

### C. ANALYSIS

1. A history of the Grads was written, based on material drawn from the available sources, which chronicles the Grads' successes during the twenty-five year span of their career. This section deals with the Grads' game by game achievements and championships as well as their success in attracting admiration and support.
2. Each factor which contributed to the team's success was dealt with in a separate chapter based on information derived from the sources used.
  - A. Chapter III dealt with the organization which was described in each of the three stages of its development based on its tasks or goals; structures and individual roles. Based on this description was an analysis of the organization's contribution to the team's success.
  - B. The players and their contribution to the Grads' success were considered in Chapter IV. The first section provided a chronological account of the team membership; with important trends and individuals highlighted. An extensive account of the careers of four players followed by an evaluation of the effect the players had on the team's success completed this section.
  - C. A biography of John Percy Page and an examination of the position he occupied within the organization and in relation the players completed this analysis.

3. The conclusion drew together the variables considered in the achievement of the Grads' success, as well as the nature of that success itself, in an attempt to delineate the most important inference.

## APPENDIX B

### PERSONAL INTERVIEW

#### A. FORMAT

1. Using the data collected from newspaper and journal sources as background material, a questionnaire was formulated as the basis of the interview.
2. Twelve individuals were interviewed at their homes and one at her place of employment.
3. The interview information was tape recorded and later analyzed for information pertinent to the four areas mentioned in the methodology: games, coach, players and organization.

#### B. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Why were the Grads so successful?
2. Can you comment on John Percy Page:
  - i. as a coach
  - ii. relationship with players, on and off the court
  - iii. other activities
  - iv. his role in the team's success
  - v. would his absence have affected the team's success?
3. Can you comment on the players:
  - i. yourself and/or team mates
  - ii. skills - individually, as a group and as opposed to the other teams played

- iii. characteristics - personality, physical attributes
  - iv. other activities - while playing, at present
  - v. basketball experience, position played, years played for Grads, why retired, pressures
  - vi. contribution to team's success
4. Can you comment on the organization:
- i. origin
  - ii. structures, functions, participants, roles
  - iii. as apposed to other teams organizations
  - iv. importance of merchant group
  - v. public relations aspect - who, how, why, image
  - vi. influence on overall success?
5. What was the most important factor in the team's success?

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