



'A Family Affair'

The Fairbridge Junior Girls
B.C. Basketball Champions

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Introduction

As a former coach and sports reporter, I have always been intrigued with athletes and teams that 'on paper' seem to be inferior but overcome 'the odds' and are crowned champions.

Of course, sometimes the win can be traced back to a particular outstanding play or the luck of the draw. At other times it can be attributed to long hours practicing and improving necessary skills, the great team chemistry, superior conditioning or the never-give-up attitude. At other times, it could be a team leader or coach that plays an important part in the success.

Decades ago, there was one such team—a high school basketball team—that seemed to have all the odds stacked against it. They came from a very small farm school on Vancouver Island. It was so small in fact that almost all the girls in the junior age group at the school had to be members of the team. However, unlike other teams they competed against—and usually beat—they had something going for them that no other team had; they were in many ways a family. This team came from the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School which was near the rural community of Cowichan Station some three kilometres south of Duncan in the Cowichan Valley. They were often described as aggressive, rough and determined—not to lose.

At the beginning of the 20th century there were district leagues and games between various Island communities. Even Duncan, a small town of a few thousand had, by 1912, been awarding league trophies and cups for a few years. During these early years, at least in the late 1890's, only men competed in the sport although soon after the turn of the century women started taking up the sport and in 1903 the Vancouver papers reported on a game held between the Seattle High School team and Victoria College.

The women's game in Canada gained significant prominence thanks to the Commercial Graduates Basketball Club, their official name, but better known as the Edmonton Grads. Initially a high school team in 1915 the team stayed together until 1940. Only 48 women ever played for the legendary Grads during this 25-year span and winning 93 per cent of their games. They never lost an Underwood International Championship series winning 23 times; they also won all 24 games played in Europe, and 4 world championships. Of the 502 games played they lost only 20. Between 1915 and 1933 they played 147 official games, winning them all and later the Grads had another winning streak of 78 consecutive games. Dr. Naismith called them "the finest basketball team that ever stepped out on a floor." Newspapers from coast to coast carried lengthy reports of their wins in the same way professional hockey and football dominates the sports pages today.

It would be remiss not to mention another great team, the 1930 University of British Columbia women who, before a crowd of 10,000 fans in Prague, Czechoslovakia, beat France 18-14 for the world championship.

Basketball was very popular during the 1930's and '40's both on the Island and throughout much of the province. There were town leagues and high school teams in all the communities from Port Alberni to Nanaimo down to Duncan and Victoria. As roads improved teams that previously had to take the train now could travel by car or the bus to the other towns or cities for evening games. Competitions were always 'home-and-home' affairs with the cumulative score determining the winner. There was court action usually two or three nights a week each featuring 3 different contests. Often, when the high school teams played a dance followed to round out the evening.

Fairbridge and the New Game

There won't be a team from the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School challenging for a British Columbia basketball title ever again. The school is long gone; history. But it did exist, for a few years—from 1935 to 1950—and during the 1940's the junior girls' team were crowned provincial high school champions not once, not twice but three times.

It was on September 25th, 1935 that the first Party of 41 children, including 14 girls, arrived to their new school from Britain with great fanfare. Many of these young boys and girls would form the nucleus of the teams that played and won a large number of championship matches in just a few short years.

If you think that this place wasn't like any high school you are familiar with you would be right, it wasn't. And what is this 'Party' stuff and the entire team being like a family, strange too? Right again. It may be helpful at this point for a brief explanation about the school and how it was run before mentioning the junior girls' basketball accomplishments.

The Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School was unique—the only one established in Canada. As the name implies, it was a school at a farm; a very large working farm of over 415 hectares. The idea of bringing poor and underprivileged children from the British Isles to the colonies was the idea of Kingsley Fairbridge who had set up the first such school at Pinjarra, Western Australia in 1912. Two additional farm schools would be set up some years later in other Australian states (1937) and also one in Rhodesia (now called Zimbabwe) in 1946. Other organizations had been sending child migrants to Canada as early as 1833.

Girls and boys as young as 4 years old made the long sea voyage from Britain, usually landing at Quebec City or Montreal, before taking the train across the country and eventually arriving at the Vancouver Island school where they would grow up in what seemed to be an idyllic setting. In total 329 children, in 17 Parties of different sizes, came to live at the farm school between 1935 and 1948. A few were orphans but most were from large families that were in dire straits during the depression years. Unable to support all the children it was believed, rightly or wrongly, that some of the young children would have a better opportunity to succeed in life if they went out to the Canadian farm school; or to one of the other similar establishments in Australia. There are a number of internet sites that have more historic information and photographs about the Fairbridge Farm Schools.

At the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School, located in the Cowichan Valley, on Vancouver Island, the young children lived within a village setting, often referred to as the home site, which included 18 residential cottages, a dining hall, hospital, Principals residence, library, beautiful chapel, and a large 'day' school. There were also various sports field and paths leading down to a swimming hole at the Koksilah River. The actual farm surrounded the home site with most of the agriculturally related facilities (barns, equipment sheds and farm staff quarters) was on the west side of the tree lined Old Koksilah Road country road which wound through the centre of the farm school.

The day school building with an attached auditorium/gymnasium were constructed in 1936 and opening in January 1937 while a second wing of the school was added in 1938 as more children arrived and high school grades began to be taught at the school. By the end of 1937 55 girls and 85 boys lived at the farm school. A year later another 57 arrived including 15 girls bringing the total to almost 200 children. The family was growing.

All the children, no matter the age, had jobs to do around the Fairbridge Farm School. At the home site it may be cleaning up the dining room or the chapel, working in the laundry or other chores at their own cottage while over at the farm site they may be assigned to milking the large herd of Ayrshire cattle, feeding the pigs or chickens or, during the growing season helped plant, weed and harvest the crops. If one was ever punished for some reason as a young boy you were sent to the wood pile to split fire wood; usually in the middle of a hottest summer day. No going to the swimming hole for you! They also attended school like all B.C. children but were required to take additional agricultural and home making courses. After all they were brought here from the 'old country' to populate the 'colony' and become farmers and domestic maids.

There were, however, a few major differences at this school which played a big part in the students' success first in sports and later on in life at their chosen careers, which for the majority was *not* becoming a farmer or employed in domestic service.

Many of the girls who would be on the championship basketball teams had come over from Britain at the same time, often on the same ship in the same party and lived together in the same cottage. Each of the cottages accommodated from 10 to 14 children. When they became young teenagers, and during their last year -of formal education, which was about the age of 15, they would move to the 'trainee' cottage but still remained for the most part as one 'family' unit. Upon completion of the trainee year and turning 16 they would leave the farm school for employment. School sports for the boys during the winter months included a number of athletic endeavours such as boxing, wrestling, soccer as well as basketball while activities for the girls included badminton, gymnastics, basketball and more basketball from November on through March or April.

Knowing each other for so many years and with a new combination auditorium and gymnasium just a five-minute walk from the cottages everyone who played basketball had more than the usual opportunity to practice as much as they wanted to hone their skills. None of the children, no matter the age, knew anything about the game before arriving to Fairbridge but as soon as the doors to the gym were opened, they took up the sport with a passion. The game was just another challenge for them. Having faced so many other huge issues and events in their young lives, this one, playing a new 'Canadian' sport, was considerably more fun. Excelling at basketball, as they did, was something they just didn't enjoy but relished. In many ways it was an ideal sport and came to them quite naturally as they lived together, worked around the farm school together and now played basketball together—all done as a team.

The farm school also had its own newspaper, the *Fairbridge Gazette*, first published in 1939, and the students were the editors, reporters and photographers. With the help of the *Cowichan Leader* in Duncan doing the typesetting and printing the little eight-page editions that came out three or more times a year looked very professional and ranks as one of the most interesting school newspapers ever published in the province. In the first issue of 1941, 13-year-old Ena Taylor, who came with the 3rd Party in November 1936 at age 8, wrote the following story for the paper.

A Girl's Day At Fairbridge

We rise with the bell at 6:30 and get dressed and make our beds. We start some of the house-cleaning before breakfast, which is taken in the dining hall at 7:30 a.m.

After breakfast if we have a cold or any other ailment we go to nurse in the clinic for treatment and then go back to our cottage and finish our work before the school bell rings at 8:45 a.m.

We like to get to school a few minutes early and play on the swings before the bell rings for classes at 9 a.m. We have two periods in school and then a 10-minute recess and then two more periods before 12 o'clock—when we go home and get ready for dinner.

We go back to school at 1:15 and home again at 3:30 p.m., when we change and report to the matron for our duties from 4-5 p.m. Our duties are varied. We may be wanted to help with the sewing or told to wax the dining-room floor or be sent to clean the chapel or stack wood.

At 5 p.m. the knocking-off bell goes and we go home to supper, which has been prepared by the girl who is called the cottage girl and who goes home from school to help Mum with the preparation of the supper.

After supper there is basketball or gym, or else we remain in our cottage and do our mending and listen to the radio or else write letters. Of course, during the summer, we are out of doors more in the evening and go down swimming or else play games on the playing field.

This completes a normal day for a Fairbridge girl.

It didn't take long for the boys and girls to catch on to the game. They began playing inter-house matches and by the fall of 1937 league games. In fact, the first game the junior girls played, against Duncan, was a win, 12-1. Peggy Auton had scored 6 points followed by Joyce Pritchard, Jean Morrison and Sarah Dillon with two each. Other team members were Joan Buchan, Florence Cowans, Annie Usher and Katherine Taylor. All except the last two came with the 1st Party in 1935. They went on to win two more games against Duncan before the end of December.

By now the sport was gaining in popularity and at the start of the 1938 season there were 220 registered players and twenty-five teams playing in the various Cowichan Basketball League divisions, the most anywhere on Vancouver Island. In 1940 there was a very colourful *Cowichan Leader* article designed to spark fan interest and reads in part; "Depriving Duncan fans of basketball is like depriving a drunkard of drink; both fret during the barren period, and go for it with renewed gusto as soon as it is available again. Devotees of the game, most of whom had not caught a glimpse of the iron hoop since last year, jostled each other for places in the bleachers of Duncan Consolidate Schools' enlarged gymnasium on Monday night and yelled themselves hoarse while Chinese Students of Victoria forged ahead in the final period of an exhibition game and beat Duncan Grads 26-19." They also reported that the Fairbridge junior girls in an away game, "played out of their class against Ladysmith intermediates, lost by 14-20." (*Cowichan Leader*, February 8, 1940)

Even though they lost that game they did beat the Duncan High School team 13-8 and were district representatives in the Island playoffs. But again, in the middle of February they were defeated in the playoff home-and-home games against Victoria's Bob Whyte's Rookies with a combined score of 24-44.

The 1940-41 season didn't get off to a good start either as the juniors lost 8-20 to Shawnigan Lake in December 1940. Nevertheless, by January with the Fairbridge day school principal J.J. (Jock) Gillatt taking over the coaching duties for all the teams things started to look up, especially for the junior girls. At the end of January, they had a rematch with Shawnigan Lake and triumphed in an "exciting game", 32-14. Then the February 27th, 1941 *Leader* reported that the "Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School junior girls walked over Ladysmith juniors, 31-12, in the first of their home-and-home series" saying that the "Fairbridge girls, though comparatively new to the game, showed that they are right at home with a basketball. They carried out effective passing plays. Their best player and high scorer, E. Duffy had a knack of dribbling which baffled the Ladysmith defence."

They went on to beat Ladysmith in the second game and then played the Alberni Shamrocks for the Island championship. In the first game at home they lost 10-13. Travelling to Alberni the game was described as exciting from start to finish.

Basketball **Fairbridge Girls Just Fail** **To Catch Alberni**

Two free shots in the last minute were all that kept Fairbridge girls from winning the Island junior basketball championship after a great "British bulldog" struggle at Alberni on Friday night.

The first game here last week did not decide the series after all, but it did leave Fairbridge three points behind. Fairbridge closed the gap in the first period at Alberni and from then on the lead see-sawed, with excitement running breathlessly high.

A minute from the end the Fairbridge girls, who have come through many a series by sheer determination and refusal to admit defeat, were one point up and looking as if they might do it again. But their anxiety led to two fouls, and Alberni made both shots good to take the series by one point.

Fairbridge won the game by 23-21 but that wasn't enough to make up for the 10-13 loss suffered in Duncan, so the series score was 34-33 for Alberni's smart young Shamrocks.

Cowichan Leader, March 13, 1941

With the season ending in such a disappointing fashion it is more than likely the three returning girls eligible to play again in the upcoming season were bound and determined to see the team become winners.

The First Provincial Championship

By the time the season started in November both the midget and junior girls had played a number of games winning them all including two played on the Farm School court against Shawnigan Lake.

After the Christmas holiday break league play started again in early January with the junior girls continuing to chalk up the victories. In early March they played a two-game series with Chemainus taking the first contest by 10 points and the second by a score of 7-6. This set up a home-and-home playoff with the best squad from the Victoria City region a week later. The Fairbridge juniors took the first game in Duncan 21-12 before travelling south to Victoria where Bob Whyte's Comets won that match 13-17. The combined score of 34-29 gave Fairbridge the title. Ellen Duffy was the star player of the series scoring 14 points in the first encounter and another four in the second. Now it was on against Nanaimo to play for the Island trophy and

the local paper remarked, "If they win—and their record so far shows they have a strong team—they will be the first Fairbridge basketball team to take an Island championship." (*Cowichan Leader*, March 19, 1942)

As usual it was a two-game series with the first match played in Nanaimo and the team was starting to jell. They took that game handily, 27-19. The second game, held before a packed house at the Duncan High School gymnasium, saw the Fairbridge juniors totally dominate the game winning 23-3 making their total score 50-22. The write up says a lot about the determination of the team.

In B.C. Basketball Finals
Fairbridge Win Island Play-offs

Fairbridge Farm School girls proved on Tuesday night that they could beat young Canadians at their own game of basketball...

After D. Waung had got the Nanaimo junior girl's three points in the first quarter, the Fairbridge girls had the game to themselves, scoring nine points in the first half, four in the third period and 10 in the last quarter, when Edie Phelps made six points.

Ellen Duffy spread her eight-points total evenly over the four quarters and Olive Turner played a good game in the last half and scored four points. Ena Taylor, Fairbridge guard, did good work breaking up Nanaimo attacks. The playing and shooting style of Nanaimo girls seemed better than Fairbridge's but the aggressiveness and stamina of the Farm School girls were their strong points."

Cowichan Leader, March 26, 1942

Four days later the junior squad found themselves in a Saturday evening contest for the B.C. championships at the Duncan High School. In a tight game they triumphed over the Vancouver Tracys 33-25 in a sudden-death game and "became the first holders of the Harding-Taylor Memorial Cup, put up for annual competition by the B.C. Amateur Basketball Association." A few days following the match the two-foot-high trophy arrived from the mainland and was received by their coach, J.J. (Jock) Gillatt. Again, the local paper wrote up a long glowing report of the March 28th action on the court which is partly recounted below.

Basketball Playoffs
Fairbridge Junior Girls
Win B.C. Championship

Until the last quarter, when Ellen Duffy scored 10 of her 18 points, the lead shifted from Vancouver to Fairbridge and it seemed to be "anybody's game." Vancouver started the scoring with a field basket and a free shot, but Fairbridge brought the score soon to 4-3. Both teams seemed nervous in the first part of the game, but later settled down to some excellent playing, especially Fairbridge in the last quarter.

Faster & Neater

The Farm School girls made up for their smaller average size by faster, neater playing, and had an excellent defence. At half-time they were but one point ahead-9-8. Mary Duffy and Kathleen Anderson went on for Fairbridge in the last quarter when Edie Phelps and Kathleen's sister, Ethel were off on personals.

Up till then the same five Fairbridge girls had played without substitution and it seemed that the fresh players were what was needed to turn the tide. From then on the Farm School piled up points and soon left Vancouver far behind. Fast, accurate passing and Ellen Duffy's uncanny shooting were two of the things that helped to give Fairbridge the championship in those final minutes. Teams and scores: -

Fairbridge: E. Anderson (4), K. Anderson, E. Duffy (18), M. Duffy, S. Falcus, E. Phelps (8), Ena Taylor (2), Olive Turner (1)—33.

Vancouver: J. Lance (11), I. Carnes (2), A. Biles (2), D. Digby, D. Reader (5), M. Farrall, V. Miller (1), M. Ruttig, E. Crombie (4)—25.

Cowichan Leader, April 2, 1942

With the first Island and Provincial trophies now secure in their Day School display case along with the many other cups and sports shields won by the boys and girls for boxing, soccer, lacrosse, cricket, gymnastics, the annual cross country run, and scores of inter-house events, the players were looking forward to another season and the defence of their titles. There were six juniors from the championship team that would be returning for the 1942-43 season, but the team would be without leading scorer Ellen Duffy, Edith Phelps, Mary Pritchard and Olive Turner. They had now turned 16 and finished their schooling ready to become trainees for a year prior to being sent to their first employment.

With the Second World War well underway many goods were rationed. This included everything from food and clothing to tires, gasoline and even sporting events. Basketball was no exception. In February as the play-off schedule was being drawn up it was decided by league officials that should a home team lose by eight points or more a return game would not be necessary unless the home team wants a second match. "This was decided as a war measure because of transportation troubles, and in force only for this season." (*Cowichan Leader*, February 4, 1943)

Later in the month the Fairbridge junior girls' squad was eliminated from further competition. After winning the first game 14-7 against Duncan, the second game was not decided until playing two 5-minute overtime periods. Duncan triumphed in the game 20-10 and won the two-game aggregate 27-24.

By early November 1943 the basketball season was once again up and running with the junior girls losing two close games to Duncan. Over the Christmas holidays a number of matches between the Old Fairbridgians, who had returned to the school for the holidays, and the present children were held to help get the teams prepared for league play.

During the spring of 1944 the Fairbridge juniors were still having their troubles. Playing two district finals against Duncan they lost the first 17-9 while the second game was, "a nip-and-tuck affair and anybody's game right up until the final whistle", but again a defeat, 13-10. This year ended early and like the previous season there would see no further play-off action.

However other farm school teams were winning. The girl's midget squad was making all the headlines. At the end of January Victoria travelled up-Island where they were trounced 40-7 with the youngest of the four Duffy sisters, Agnes, sinking 20 points while Joan Vallentyn got another 10 and Irene Dobbs potted 8 points. Because of the lop-sided score and war time travel restrictions no one expected Victoria would want another match. Surprising everyone they insisted on a home contest so the midgets made a trip down to the capital. With Fairbridge blanking the home squad 25-0 they took the South Island title with the lop-sided score of 65-7 and were now on a roll that would carry them on through the rest of the midget season and into the following year as the junior team.

The Next Two Championships

On Friday November 10th, before a capacity crowd packing the Duncan school gym the 1944-45 league play began with 3 games on the card. It included the Fairbridge junior girls team winning a one-sided 18-2 game against the city team. A week later the results were reversed 13-12 after Duncan made a "terrific" late minute rally. Three days before Christmas the final games of the year saw the Farm School, now carrying 12 players, with 7 in their first junior year, winning another tight contest over Duncan 19-17.

At the beginning of 1945 the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School was having problems continuing. World War II was still underway, now in its sixth but final year. All efforts by the British were naturally focused on the war effort and the survival of their island nation. Little money could be spared to support the Fairbridge schools overseas so businesses and individuals from Canada, especially Vancouver Island, stepped up to the plate donating funds to pay the many bills. By now there were only 99 children left in residence. The last small Party of 10 boys and 6 girls had arrived years before--on November 1941. Even though the Fairbridge Society wanted to send many more children it was just too dangerous to traverse the North Atlantic.

The Fairbridge girls, playing in their dark chocolate uniforms with the gold farm crest proudly displayed, may have known that there wouldn't be too many years left for their team to exist. For what ever reason, the squad picked up the basketball and began playing at a level likely unheard of by a high school junior squad during the 1940's.

As the play-offs began in early February Shawnigan Lake was their first opponent. The *Leader*, reporting on a number of important matches that week including that the "Fairbridge girls played spectacular ball and their shooting was exceptionally accurate, which accounted for such a high score. Game one ended 52-12 and the second was even more lopsided, 72-17, "making a series score 124-29." Next up would be the Duncan high school team.

This junior girls contest was the main mid-week evening action. Since the teams playing very close contests earlier in the season everyone anticipated the two games would be hard fought with either team ending up the district winner. As it turned out, nothing could be further from the truth. The first game "was an easy win for Fairbridge by the one-sided score of 41-4. Half-time score was 18-2." The second Saturday evening match was the lead basketball story in the paper.

Basketball
Fairbridge Junior Girl's Team
Wins Series: Thrilling Games

Three of the most thrilling basketball games seen in Duncan for a long time were staged before a large crowd of spectators on Friday night in the school gymnasium.

Fairbridge junior girls eliminated Duncan junior girls in the second game of the series by the score of 52-6. Half-time score was 25-3. The winners were playing the usual Fairbridge style of ball and Duncan girls could not stop them. Score of the series was 93-10.

Cowichan Leader, February 22, 1945

Everyone expected the next games to be tougher with their opponents being the girls from Port Alberni who were always very competitive. The two games would be for the Island championship and, as the junior girls hadn't advanced this far for the past two years, they were determined to give it their best shot.

The first game was held in the west coast city where Fairbridge took a "decisive" 28-8 victory. With the next game slated for Duncan the junior girls were the talk of the town (and the farm school). One more win and they would be going for the provincial title to recapture the Harding-Taylor Memorial Trophy. With so many play-off games underway the results of the final game only warranted two "descriptive" paragraphs in the middle of the two-column report.

Fairbridge Junior Girls

Stocky, well-coached Fairbridge junior girls outplayed Port Alberni's leggy, spirited players in a fast, clean game. The precision teamwork of the home team was converted into points by sharp-shooter K. Duffy, who netted the ball from all angles to chalk up 16 points.

Port Alberni rallied in the last quarter, and P. Earthy delivered some fine long-range shots. The visitors' sporting fight to the final bell was deserving of a closer score.

Cowichan Leader, March 22, 1945

Once again, the evening championship game ended with Port Alberni getting 8 points; Fairbridge 25. The combined score was 53-16.

Even though it was not clear at the time the paper hit the street who would represent the rest of the province the big game was advertised for Saturday March 31st in Duncan. At it turned out it would be the Vancouver Lancerettes coming over to the Island with the results of the game naturally rated top billing in the local press.

Basketball
Fairbridge Junior Girls Win
B.C. Provincial Title Here, 25-21

A yelling partisan crowd saw Fairbridge junior girls defeat Vancouver Lancerettes, 25-21, to win the B.C. Provincial title, in Duncan High School gymnasium on Saturday night. In other games of a triple-header, Fairbridge junior boys scored a 30-25 win over Cowichan Lake. Duncan Zenith Club, several old players back from the forces, walloped Pat Bay, 30-12.

Will Cain welcomed and introduced the Lancerettes, B.C. coastal playoff winners (no Interior entries this year), and they were given a rousing ovation. Familiar, brown-clad Fairbridgians, Island champions, lined up to a thunderous applause

Off the mark with two quick baskets by M. Lister, Fairbridge's veteran teamwork carried them to a 10-3 first-quarter advantage. Taller, white-clad more individual in play, Lancerettes had difficulty sinking their shots. Sharpshooter K. Duffy was closely checked by board-wise visitors. An 11-6 half-time score ended the indecisive play of the second quarter.

Evenly Matched

Improved teamwork by Lancerettes made an evenly matched third quarter, Fairbridge still ahead on a 21-13 score. L. Matson, Lancerettes, converted a fine floor-length run by "Toots" Aetzel. A consistently fine game by M. Lister, with fine shooting by K. Duffy and P. Morrison, kept the home team on top.

Close checking by both teams in the fourth quarter caused the game at times to resemble a rugby scrum. Scoring slowed, but eight points gained by the visitors reduced Fairbridge's lead, and the crowd grew wild as play closed. The neat twosome with which Fairbridge broke up

attacks cost the visitors many a break-through. Time after time their long-limbed players lost out trying to break between, rather than around, the stocky locals.

Fairbridge coach, J. Gillatt, had a bad moment when A. Richards, sturdy guard, came off with five fouls in the fourth quarter. His other guard, M. Wylie, was in hospital with a cold. The consistently fine ball played by Fairbridge this season is a tribute to his coaching.

Teams and scores were: --

Lancerettes – L. Matson (6), D. Mullins (6), T. Katch (6), T. Aetzel (2), S. Thayer, Z. Ruthven (1), J. Lord, --21.

Fairbridge Junior Girls – P. Morrison (10), K. Duffy (6), M. Lister (6), J. Loughs (1), J. Vallentin (2), A. Richards, A. Duffy, J. Dobbs, M. Preece, J. Wylie, --25

Cowichan Leader, April 5, 1945

A few weeks later all the basketball trophies and photographs were on display in the *Cowichan Leader's* front window. These included the Harding-Taylor Memorial Trophy described as a golden figure waving a laurel wreath, atop a pedestal, and the H.A. Barnett Trophy, emblematic of the District title. The junior boys from the farm school also won the District championship receiving the Cowichan Leader Cup. This was followed by a packed wind-up party for all the teams at which time the provincial trophy was presented to the Fairbridge captain with praise and great applause.

On July 29th the 13th Party of 17 boys and 10 girls (aged 9-13) arrived from Britain, the first new group since late 1941. Of the 100 students remaining at the farm school about 30 were girls. Nevertheless, when the basketball season began Fairbridge was once again able to put both midget and junior teams on the court. The eleven-member junior girls' squad only had four returning for a second year but with the excellent midget players that had made the team they knew, with solid aggressive play and the usual determination, there was a good chance it would be another winning season.

Early games saw the juniors beat the Victoria Hotshots 37-15 at home then went to Nanaimo for a match with Tuffy's White Owls winning 25-14 but evidently found the large court 'strange'. In the second half the White Owls could only muster 2 points. Their next game was another away contest this time in Port Alberni, where they won by four points, 16-12 and then four days before Christmas the Nanaimo high school junior squad travelled down to the Cowichan Valley where they were shellacked 31-4 by the Prince of Wales juniors. Six players scored, lead by Joan Vallentin with a half dozen points, and the paper remarked that they "seemed prepared to go for a quest of the Provincial championships won last year by holding their opponents scoreless until the last minutes of the game." (Cowichan Leader, Jan.3, 1946)

The two-game total point playoffs began at the end of January and the junior girls defeated the Duncanites 34-15 in the city and a week later it was another one-sided affair on their home court with the game ending 21-4. In the last contest Irene Dobbs was high scorer with 8 points. The series score was 55-20.

With the other four Island junior basketball divisions still involved with their playoffs it was decided to have a challenge match between the Fairbridge juniors and the older Duncan Dum-Belles intermediate team. Once again, the farm school took the game 17-12. This time Agnes Duffy scored 8 points followed by Vallentin with 6. (Cowichan Leader Feb. 21, 1946)

Next up would be the winners of the Victoria-Ladysmith series and it was Bob Whyte's Hotshots from the capital that Fairbridge tipped off against for the South Island title. The first game held on a Thursday evening at the Duncan high school gymnasium, which was much larger and could hold more spectators than the farm school facility, saw the Fairbridge girls clobber the visitors 43-10, "in convincing fashion."

The paper added, "The farm school girls scored 17 points, in the first half, without a reply from Victoria, which trounced Ladysmith earlier in the week." Joan Vallentin and Agnes Duffy were leading scorers with 13 and 15 respectively. (Cowichan Leader, Feb. 28, 1946)

Six days later, the busses were rolling south through the Fairbridge school gates, heading for Victoria and an afternoon match. Even though the team's captain and steady guard Margaret Wylie was in hospital suffering from pleurisy and would never play another game for the team, the squad was still expected to win given the fact they held a 33-point lead in the two-game series. The match proved to be closer than the first contest but still it was another win for the farm school ladies, 22-12 and again they were led by Vallentin- and Duffy, who combined, accounted for 20 points. Series total score for the South Island championship was a convincing 63-32.

With all other District teams eliminated except the Fairbridge midgets and junior girls teams the local press was starting to give them top billing. Unfortunately, the midgets would fall to Port Alberni girls early in March, losing both games, one by a single point. The next up for the farm school juniors was the Nanaimo White Owls squad fresh off wins against Alberni.

Basketball
**Fairbridge Junior Girls Well
On Way To Regaining Title**

Fairbridge junior girls gained a good hold on the V.I. title when they defeated Nanaimo junior girls, 52-31 at the school gymnasium on Monday night. It marked the end of playoffs at the gymnasium this season.

The Fairbridge team will carry a 21- point lead into the second and final game at Nanaimo to-morrow night, in their bid to recapture Island and Provincial laurels won last year.

Good Shooting

Fairbridge junior girls were very accurate in their shots, and several times during the game scored on every attempt.

In the first quarter they were a trifle over-anxious. After gaining a slim lead, 9-8, they staged a mass attack on the Nanaimo basket, lead by Joan Vallentin, and they were ahead 23-14 at the half.

Three shots, and three baskets in the first minute of the second half was the Fairbridge opening sally. Play was wide open as players refused to play a close-checking game.

However, Nanaimo always appeared dangerous. T. Prazada, who scored their first four baskets of the game was closely checked.

Fairbridge: Joan Vallentin 20, Agnes Taylor, Betty Palser, Wilma Lynes 4, June Harding, Agnes Duffy 14, Irene Dobbs 11, Lily Clabby 3, Marg Caldwell—52

Cowichan Leader, March 7, 1946

The last *Cowichan Leader* article summarizing the exploits of the Fairbridge appeared on March 14th.

Basketball
**Jock Gillatt's Fairbridge Girls
Retain V.I. Junior Title**

Fairbridge junior girls won the Island title in their division in the second and final game of their series at Nanaimo on Friday against Nanaimo White Owls. The score was 21-16: they had won the previous game in Duncan by 20 points, 51-31. Total series score; Fairbridge 72, Nanaimo 47.

The farm school girls' team was the only one from this district to advance to the B.C. finals. The remaining team of the four Fairbridge teams coached by Jock Gillatt, Fairbridge midgets' girls, fell by the wayside in the Island finals last week.

Fairbridge junior girls will play the Mainland champions in an attempt to recapture the Provincial title, which they won last year, possibly this week-end, if arrangements are completed.

The Nanaimo game was noteworthy for its close checking, in sharp contrast to the previous Duncan game. Fairbridge won the game in the second quarter when they scored 11 points to two for the home team.

Leading Players

Nanaimo kept abreast in the first and last quarters, scoring four point in each, and outscored Fairbridge 6-2 in the third. High-scoring Joan Vallentin, Fairbridge, was checked continuously as was Prazada, top Nanaimo girl, who found Wilma Lynes, Fairbridge, hard to elude.

Wilma, playing her first season of basketball and her first game at guard, was a great factor in the team's win, coach Gillatt reports.

The game was fast at times, with players taking advantage of the large floor, but passes were inclined to be wilder than in the former encounter. Passing bouts were rare as teams emphasized a defensive game.

Fairbridge was without the services of Margaret Wylie, stellar guard, who has recently returned to the hospital at Fairbridge after a spell in Duncan Hospital, after an attack of pleurisy. Audrey Arnison also was not available because of an injury. Both players will be unable to make the Mainland trip.

Fairbridge: Joan Vallentin 6, Agnes Duffy 8, Irene Dobbs 6, Lily Clabby 1, Wilma Lynes, Marg Caldwell, Agnes Taylor, June Harding, Betty Palser—21.

All players were looking forward to the Vancouver trip and a chance to defend their title. But it was not to be. Phone calls were made by island league officials in an attempt to set up a date for the game, however, for some unknown reason no contestant from the rest of the province wanted to step forward and play a final championship match. Not only that, the Island junior girls' cup had gone missing for the past few years and Fairbridge asked the league to track it down. The cup was found in time for the year-end district basketball banquet and dance attended by over 200 players and supporters held for the first time at the farm school at the end of March.

When the summer 1946 edition of the *Fairbridge Gazette* came out it mentioned, "as there was no mainland champion declared this year, the junior girls were declared B.C. champions and the cup was sent to Mr. J. Gillatt, their coach." A team photo with ten of the eleven players, (Audrey Arnison is missing), and coach Gillatt, along with the Island Cup and the Harding-Taylor Memorial Trophy was proudly displayed on the back page. The team had only lost one game in two seasons, a feat that is still recalled at every Old Fairbridgians reunion.

Epilogue

With three British Columbia basketball championships from the 1941-42 to the 1944-1945 and 1945-1946 seasons the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School once again fielded another junior team for the 1946-47 season but they would never again be a powerhouse in the league or challenge for the provincial title. By the time the 1947-48 league play began only five or six junior girls were of eligible age to wear their proud and familiar brown uniform.

Between late November 1946 and the summer of 1948 only 49 more children arrived to the farm school from Britain and of these just two girls in 1947 and three more in 1948. Then, suddenly, without sufficient funds to keep the large school and farm going, it was announced in early 1949 that operations would be wound down. Later that year the farm animals and machinery were sold, then the farm was leased the following year and by December 1951 just 12 boys were left at the school. Soon they would also be gone, sent to foster homes in the Cowichan Valley and elsewhere on Vancouver Island to be cared for, finish their schooling and then make their way in life.

Because a terrible fire destroyed the Duncan high school just days after the Fairbridge junior girls had won the Island title in 1946 the large Fairbridge day school once again became full of students. Instead of hundreds of children from the British Isles occupying the desks and playing in the gym and on sports fields, the school included Duncan teenagers. It continued to be used by the school district until 1962, and then left abandoned for another 16 years before finally being demolished. The rest of the home site residences were rented for a number of years before a small strata village was established in 1978. All the cottages as well as a number of other buildings were saved including the chapel (now an historic site).

The Old Fairbridgians have their own Fairbridge Canada Association, including a web site, and they still publish their *Fairbridge Gazette* school paper. Almost as soon as there were graduates from the farm school the biennial reunions started and since the early 1980's have been held in Duncan and Fairbridge. In so many ways it isn't a class or school reunion but the *family* homecoming one more time. Now the reunions often include the sons, daughters and grandchildren of the family that has spread far and wide around the world.



The Fairbridge Farm School Crest

Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School

JUNIOR GIRLS BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVINCIAL BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS

TEAM MEMBERS

	Party Number	1941-1942 Date of Birth	Age Arriving at FFS
Edith Phelps	1	March 26, 1926	9
Ellen Duffy	2	March 21, 1926	10
Kathleen Anderson	5	May 6, 1928	9
Olive Turner	3	September 11, 1926	10
Ena Taylor	3	November 13, 1927	9
Mary Duffy	2	October 8, 1927	9
Mary Pritchard	1	February 6, 1927	8
Doreen Pleasant	2	December 22, 1927	9
Sarah Falcus	3	May 31, 1928	8
Ethel Anderson	3	August 9, 1927	9
1944-1945			
Kathleen Duffy	2	January 18, 1929	7
Muriel Lister	1	July 7, 1929	6
Olive Morrison	1	December 7, 1928	7
Audrey Richards	4	December 25, 1928	9
Josephene Lough	2	January 5, 1929	7
Isabel Wylie	2	August 8, 1929	7
Molly Preece	7	July 15, 1929	9
Doreen Henriksen	3	December 25, 1928	8
Agnes Duffy	2	May 18, 1930	6
Joan Vallentyn	4	September 25, 1930	6
Irene Dobbs	9	May 17, 1930	10
Margaret Wylie	2	September 9, 1930	6
1945-1946			
Agnes Duffy	see above		
Joan Vallentyn	see above		
Margaret Wylie	see above		
Irene Dobbs	see above		
Margaret Cardwell	6	May 12, 1930	8
Audrey Arnison	6	January 8, 1930	8
Agnes Taylor	3	February 6, 1931	5
June Harding	9	June 6, 1931	9
Betty Palser	7	January 13, 1930	8
Lily Clabby	4	January 6, 1931	6
Wilma Lynes	(team member was probably a daughter of a staff member attending the school)		

Note:

Party 1 arrived on September 25, 1935 -41 children
 Party 2 arrived on October 22, 1936 -28 children
 Party 3 arrived on November 6, 1936 -28 children
 Party 4 arrived on September 22, 1937 -28 children
 Party 5 arrived on November 10, 1930 -14 children
 Party 6 arrived on August 23, 1938, -28 children
 Party 7 arrived on September 21, 1938 -16 children
 Party 8 arrived on November 24, 1938 -13 children
 Party 9 arrived on May 8, 1940 -30 children

More than likely all the children from both Party 2 and 3 were assembled at Craig House, in Kensington, London, and, as they were both large parties, simply split into two groups for easier travelling arrangements. Furthermore, many of the children probably knew each other. When possible, family members travelled to Canada together, like the 5 Duffy's, 1 boy and 4 girls, or 4 Turners, 1 boy and 3 girls.



*A Fairbridge Basketball Team.
Winners of the British Columbia Championship.*

1945

Front Row: Irene Dobbs, Molly Preece, Isabel Wylie, Josephine Lough, Kathleen Duffy, Pam Morrison

Back Row: Sheila Hendrickson, Agnes Duffy, Muriel Lister, Joan Vallentin, Audrey Richards

Photo: *Fairbridge Gazette*, Spring 1945, Vol. VI, No. 1



*Fairbridge Basketball Team
Winners of the British Columbia Championship*

1946

Front Row: Irene Dobbs, June Harding, Jock Gillatt, Margaret Wylie, Agnes Taylor

Back Row: Agnes Duffy, Wilma Lynes, Margaret Caldwell, Joan Vallentin, Lily Clabby, Betty Palser

Missing: Audrey Arnison

Photo: *Fairbridge Gazette*, Summer 1946, Vol.7, No.1