

**Mabel
League**
1990 — 2025

*35th Anniversary
Yearbook*





Land Acknowledgement	4
Disclaimer	5
The beginnings of Mabel	6
Softball at Britannia	8
Gay Games 1990	12
Womyn Warriors	16
Kinesis	16
Queer History on the Drive	19
Why Softball?	24
Trans Inclusion	25
Alumni Stories	26
Mabel 1990 to Today	28
Teams Record	30

Land Acknowledgement

We recognize and honour that we live and play on the stolen traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The history of these peoples spans many millennia of living on, stewarding, and governing this territory, with a culture created from their lands, waters, and people over generations. To this day, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh and səlilwətaʔ Nations continue to practice their cultures and traditions on this land. As we live and organize queer space and sport as settlers here, we have an obligation to continuously work to repair harms perpetrated upon Indigenous communities, presently and historically.

We also remember that Turtle Island has always been queer. Indigenous peoples throughout the Salish Sea and beyond have had queer community members since time immemorial. Each Coast Salish society has its own distinct relationship with gender and sexuality. These understandings of gender are unique, diverse, and intimately connected to land, family and community responsibilities. Specific cultural knowledge continues to be kept about gender-varied and sexually fluid community members despite targeted colonial attempts to eliminate those traditions from history. Sometimes these community members identify as Two-Spirit or Indigiqueer, and sometimes they identify by other terms that are Nation-specific or individually defined by their own identity and experiences, which are not a monolith within Indigenous cultures in this place.

The historical European understanding of gender and sexuality is binary, which is not supported by an Indigenous world-view. Settlers arriving to Turtle Island brought this binary understanding of the world with them. Combined with beliefs in white, racial supremacy and the Christian patriarchy, colonizers saw whiteness, men and heterosexuality as superior. The formation of the residential school system in Canada was intended to instill these Eurocentric beliefs and social norms in generations of Indigenous children. The schools promoted assimilation into Christian society, isolating children from their culture, community and identity. Two-Spirit identities and traditions were targeted and erased through the policing of gender to ensure conformity to the colonial framework.

We remember that Indigenous Two-Spirit communities and identities today are alive, progressive and adaptive. An understanding of their existence cannot be frozen in the past. As queer communities, we need to commit to centering intersectional Indigenous identities, and acknowledging the role of colonial history and racialized violence in the continued struggles for queer equity and justice.



Dyke March for International Lesbian Week, 1991

Disclaimer

While diving into this research, we've been thinking a lot about memory and history. Memory is a fickle thing. It can bend, warp, and contradict other accounts. It can change over time, be passed down through rumours and stories, solidify in our collective imaginations in ways we could never predict. This project is an exercise in recording collective memory by volunteer members of our community. We were able to talk to some alumni of the league, but did not have a chance to hear everyone's stories. This project is by no means intended to be all encompassing, or even claim to be entirely accurate. It is an attempt to capture some of the stories that led to the creation of the Mabel League, a space that means a lot to so many of us in our community. The hope is that this will be the start of a larger, more in-depth project. We would love to hear from you if you have stories and information to add or include. This project is intended to be a living memory that is built together.

We also wanted to address the 'elephant-in-the-room' of this document. Much of the history documented here is about the lesbian community in Vancouver. The Mabel League, now and for many years, has been a space for not only the lesbian community, but also for bisexual women, non-binary people, trans folks and women allies. The history of all of these groups, as well as the wider 2SLGBTQ+ community, is complex and interconnected. This is also true of individual people who have played in the league throughout its history, whose public identities may evolve or change with time and in different social and societal contexts. The roots of the Mabel League are deeply tied to activism and coming together to organize for the benefit of marginalized communities. Sometimes, that activism has lacked intersectionality. It is our responsibility to call out those gaps, learn from our history, and determine ways that the league can evolve to work towards repairing historic injustices and harms.



LIL Tournament, 1987

The beginnings of Mabel

In the spring of 1990, 35 years ago this year, the first pitch was thrown to start the inaugural season in the Mabel League. That first season the league had at least 5 teams, including the Ratz, the Steppers, the Linedrivers, a team from a local organization called the Vancouver Lesbian Connection (VLC) and a team that would later be known as the Bracers. All of the teams played in the same division despite widely varying skill levels. Some teams were very competitive while others looked to the league as community-first.

The exact origins of Mabel are a little hazy, but there are stories about informal pick-up games where groups of queer people would get together to play softball and drink beer at the gravel field behind Britannia Secondary School, just off Commercial Drive, in the late 1980s. One of those people was Joanne Beatty, who said of the pickup games: "It was drinking beer and having fun. After a while, we started to think that we had enough women for a league." After some discussion, a few people applied for a BC Community Gaming Grant to get the

league started. With the money, they bought 3 bats and some gloves for each of the inaugural teams. They had a little bit of money left over, so they threw a kick-off dance at the Wise Hall, where the door prize was an actual door that someone took home. It wasn't until after that season was over that they had their first AGM, where the members voted on a name. The chosen name was in honour of Pam Brown, a player on The Ratz who was nicknamed "Mabel", though some alumni contend that members may have thought they were voting for "Maple" instead.

Mabel was the first lesbian sports league to be established in the Lower Mainland. During the early years, when it was just starting out, the league provided a supportive, safe place for lesbians to play sport they loved and became a social hub for many queer people to form close and lasting relationships. We spoke to a number of alumni who played in those early years. Many described meeting people who are still their closest friends to this day.



Pride Parade, 2003



LIL Tournament, 1986

Softball at Britannia

The teams and players who participated in the first Mabel season started playing together in the years leading up to 1990. Before the start of the informal pick-up games at the gravel field behind Britannia, a volunteer with the Lesbian Information Line named Kate Stewart got the ball rolling when she had the idea to start a softball tournament in June of 1986. At the time, the lesbian community was fractured into many different groups, most geared towards political organizing. These groups rarely intermingled, leading to a lack of communication and cooperation between each other. Organizations would end up working on the same political issues without realizing others were organizing around the same ones, or would sponsor social events and dances that were scheduled on the same days. Kate's vision was to create a space where all branches of the lesbian community in Vancouver could come together to have fun. She challenged a number of organizations to participate in a softball tournament on the first weekend of June that was sponsored by her organization, the Lesbian Information Line or "LIL". 39 years later, her tournament is still ongoing to this day.

The first LIL was also played on the gravel field behind Britannia Secondary School. The fields were donated to the tournament for free, 2 on the Saturday and 2 on the Sunday. It was advertised in a number of lesbian publications at the time, including the Gazebo newsletter and Kinesis. Billed as a 'for fun' tournament, no experience playing softball was necessary to join. It is said that there was a tension between competitive and recreational attitudes to the game, with some teams taking the tournament very seriously while others were more focused on the social, community building aspects of the weekend. The tournament was played in a double-knockout format, with any team that lost 2 games being eliminated. Equipment was shared between all of the teams, with players bringing bases, bats, gloves and even catchers gear they had on hand. Kate Stewart remarked in an interview in 1987 that the greatest hurdle of the first LIL was that the tournament was short on umpires, and that the rules used by each of those umpires were not consistent from game to game.



LIL Tournament, 1986



Temptations, 1990



VLC at the LIL, 1986





VLC vs Ratz at the LIL, 1987

8 teams participated in the LIL that first year, all associated with various Vancouver lesbian organizations or social groups:

1. **Lesbian Information Line (LIL):** a volunteer phone line that was an institution in the lesbian community from 1976 to the early 1990s. Volunteers would answer calls from across BC and give people information about the lesbian community, provide counselling, assist people with coming out, and help people deal with family, friends, lovers and children. LIL's goal was to help alleviate isolation by emphasizing queer communal care.
2. **Vancouver Lesbian Connection (VLC):** a political and social organization for lesbian and bisexual women formed in 1984 to provide a space for political discussion, drop-in groups, health information, coming-out groups, artwork, poetry readings and performance. The group opened the Vancouver Lesbian Centre at 876 Commercial Drive in September of 1985 (now the Third Eye Tattoo Parlor in the building next to Womyn's Ware), which became a hub of activity for the lesbian community through the late 80s and 90s. VLC closed its doors in 1999 due to a lack of funding and volunteers, as well as the fallout from a discrimination case filed after a trans woman was barred from volunteering with the organization.
3. **Vancouver Outdoor Club for Women (VOCW):** a club formed in 1979 to counter barriers for women looking to explore the outdoors, providing them opportunities to learn outdoor skills and enjoy the excitement of being in nature together. Members would go hiking, canoeing, kayaking, cycling, mountain climbing, horseback riding and skiing together, among other activities. They had tents, packs and camp-stoves that could be borrowed from the club's equipment depot. It is said that by the 1980s the club became a known magnet for lesbians and the majority of the membership did not identify as straight. This LIL team eventually became to be known as the 'Bracers' and participated as a team in Mabel until the early 2000s. Another Mabel team known as the 'Rough Diamonds' was formed from other members of the club in the early 1990s. The Vancouver Outdoor Club for Women still exists today.
4. **Sitka Housing Co-op:** a 26-unit, women-only townhouse-apartment co-op located near 1st Avenue and Commercial Drive, built in 1986 by architect Linda Baker. The idea was to provide low-cost quality housing that would be secure for women throughout the course of their lives, including multi-bedroom units for women with families or lesbian couples, and one-bedroom units for single women or people who needed to move into smaller units as their children left home. It is remembered as a hotbed of adventure, fantastic parties and vegetarian barbecues in the 1980s and 90s. Today, there are still a number of players in the league that live in Sitka.
5. **The Out to Lunch Bunch:** a lesbian softball team from Burnaby sponsored by El Mercado on the Drive. They played together regularly in a league in 1986.
6. **RayCam Women:** a group of activist lesbians who worked at RayCam Co-operative Centre, a community centre located at the cross-streets of Raymur and Campbell St in Strathcona. The centre was the result of activism by the



VLC, 1985

Militant Raymur Mothers, who first fought for a railway overpass so their children could safely walk to school and later advocated for the opening of RayCam, which provided a food store, childcare, recreation services and social activities. This team was known as the “RayCam Ratz” and had a theme song.

7. **Lesbian Women’s Support Group:** a group of women who knew each other through participating in a support group for lesbians. We believe this team might have gone on to be known as “the Steppers” - a play off of twelve-step mutual aid programs to support recovery from addiction.
8. There was an additional team, but we were unable to find any information on who they were (Please reach out if you know anything about this team, or others who participated in the early LIL’s)

From photos, and from chatting with alumni from the league, we know the RayCam team were known as the “RayCam Ratz”. They created uniforms by wearing black t-shirts and using masking tape to write “RATZ” across the back of their jerseys. As mentioned before, they would go on to become one of the first Mabel teams to participate in the inaugural 1990 season. By the second annual tournament, many of the other teams had also taken on nicknames, including the Steppers, Slugs, and Raiders.

The Out to Lunch Bunch won the first LIL, with the Vancouver Outdoor Club for Women coming in 2nd and the Lesbian Information Line coming in 3rd. There was a trophy for the

winner, with a goblet at the top that some teams would drink beer out of if they won.

By the 4th annual LIL, in 1989, the tournament was broken into two divisions (competitive and recreational). 8 teams participated, including the Steppers, Deadlies, Breakers and Commercial Drivers. During these early years, it was common for groups to form teams just for the LIL - sometimes made from teams participating in other leagues, and sometimes they were a group of queer people who wanted to play softball together. People from the Sunshine Coast, Seattle, and Victoria all travelled to Vancouver for the weekend to participate. Kate Stewart mentioned that the tournament kind of took off by itself, with participants wanting to come back year after year.

Kate Stewart’s LIL was one of the first events to bring Vancouver lesbian softball players together. The tournament got the ball rolling, showcasing how many queer women in Vancouver were interested in playing softball. Many of the people and teams who played in those early LIL’s would go onto play in the informal pick-up games at Britannia on the weekends which spawned the idea to form the Mabel League.

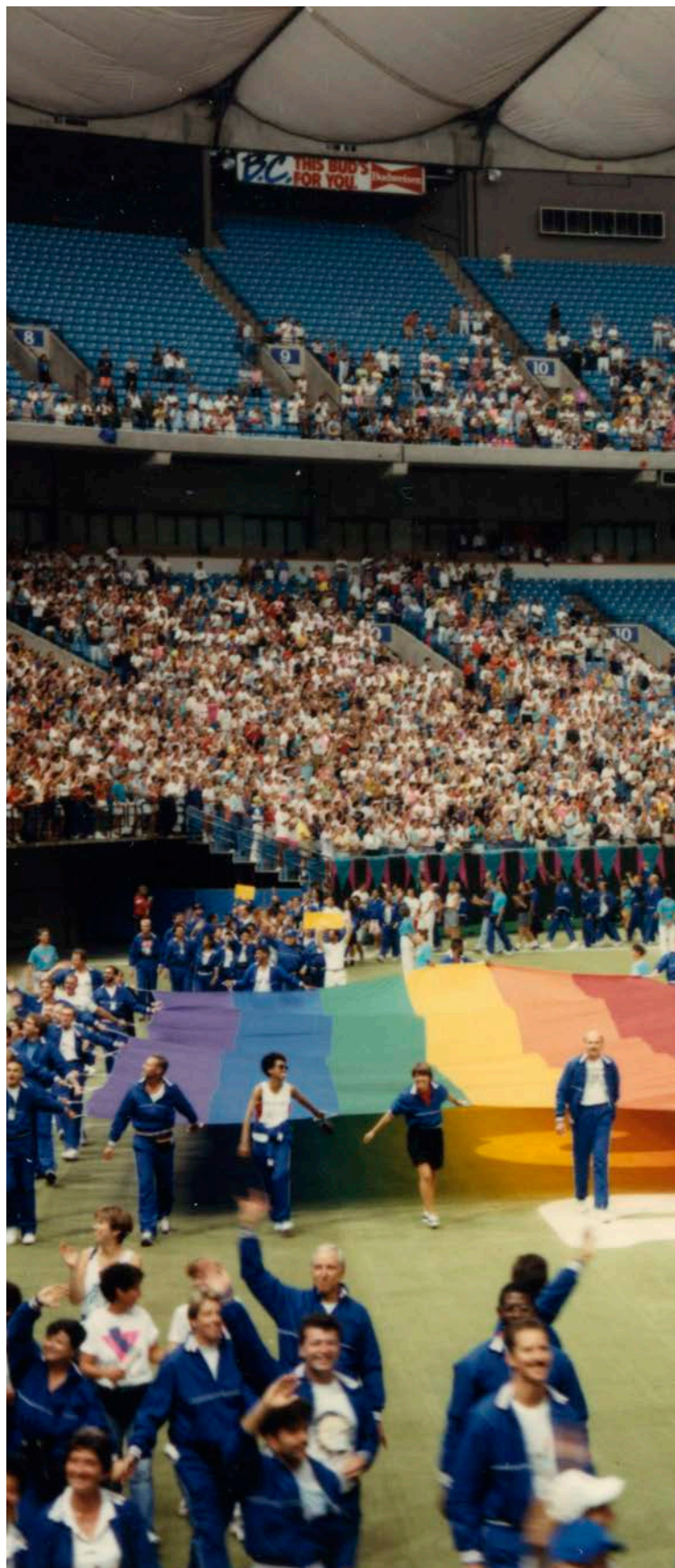
While reflecting on the first LIL and promoting the second annual tournament in a 1987 interview with “The Lesbian Show”, a weekly radio show on Vancouver Co-op radio at the time (Thursdays, 8:30-9:30pm on CFRO 102.7 FM), Kate Stewart was asked: “Can you envision a time when there might be a whole lesbian league that plays all year and has playoffs?”

She answers: “That would be something, wouldn’t it. I hadn’t even considered that.”

Gay Games 1990

In August of 1990, just after the inaugural Mabel season had finished, the Gay Games came to Vancouver. The Gay Games is a worldwide sports festival and cultural event for queer athletes and artists that was founded by gay ex-Olympian decathlete Tom Waddell in 1982. Devised as an event to be held every four years, the first two Games were held in Waddell's hometown of San Francisco, with the intention of establishing the games and then moving them around the world. Vancouver was chosen as the first international host city for Gay Games III in 1990, largely due to the support and capacity the queer community had in Vancouver.

From all accounts, having the Gay Games in Vancouver was magical. Thousands of queer people from all over the world descended on the city. Gay couples could be seen holding hands on the seawall and walking down Granville street. Queer people in Vancouver opened their homes to strangers from overseas, giving them a place to stay during the festivities. (One Mabel alumni we talked to said that there were 3 people staying with her in her 1 bedroom apartment, including 2 women from Paris she has stayed in touch with to this day.) BC Place was filled with people during the opening ceremonies. There were cultural events like poetry, music and art that filled the streets. People described it as an eruption of queerness into open space in Vancouver, an experience that was transformative, healing and free. In many ways it was a turning point for queer visibility and representation in Vancouver, a shift in the social fabric of the community that set the stage for Vancouver being a city that is welcoming to queer people.



Gay Games III Opening, 1990





The goal of the Gay Games was to embrace harmony and fun over cutthroat competition. Based in the spirit of cooperation, novices and experienced players played on the same teams. During the 1990 Games, there were 27 different sporting competitions held, including basketball, billiards, croquet, darts, diving, ice hockey, squash, triathlon and softball, among others. It was the first time fastpitch softball was included in the Games.

Many Mabel players and teams played in the fastpitch softball tournament against international competition, which took place at Connaught Park. The Ratz competed and proudly lost every game (but had the most fun). Kate Stewart played for the Out to Lunch Bunch - the same team that had won the first LIL in 1986 - and they placed 3rd in the tournament.



Womyn Warriors

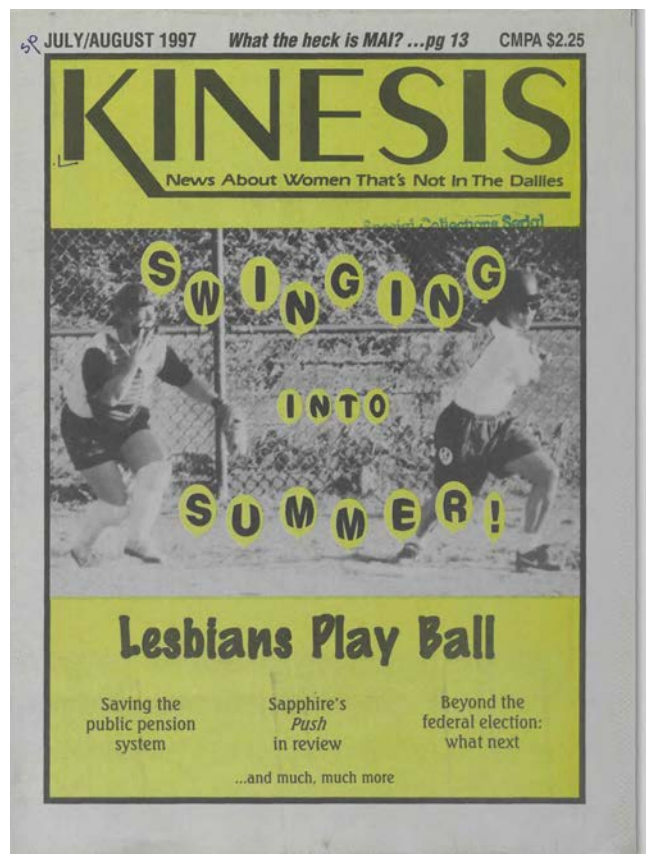
The first IBPOC team in Mabel was the Womyn Warriors, a group of women of Filipina, Chinese, Japanese, afro-caribbean, and European descent. They played from the early 90's onward, and notably held a massive fundraising campaign to get the whole team to Amsterdam for the '98 Gay Games. Patrice Leung, a team member and film maker, made a documentary of that trip which screened at the Out On Screen Queer Film and Video Festival in Vancouver in 1999. To raise the \$30,000 necessary for the trip they secured a VanCity donation and held a Bowl-a-rama, an auction, and a food booth at the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, among other things.

Lily Shinde, long-time pitcher for the Womyn Warriors, spoke at Mabel's 2022 Finals banquet. She shared stories from her time in Mabel and her experience as a POC lesbian in Vancouver. Lily challenged the league to push for more diversity and inclusion... a call to action that many in our community took to heart.

Kinesis

The publication **Kinesis: News about women that is not in the dailies** was published from 1974 to 2001 by the Vancouver Status of Women (VSW) and served as a vehicle for social change and women's liberation.

We have highlighted the publication here as a unique and prevalent voice in the city that "provided a forum for the expression of diverse feminist voices and perspectives from the local, national and international women's movements. Kinesis worked actively to combat oppression including sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, imperialism, anti-Jewish oppression, and other forms of marginalization" (from the UBC Library Collections).





Can you believe the roar of the crowd?

by Esther Shannon

18 Hours To Go: Friday Night, August 10
The lineup for the *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender* (LGBT) parade is a sight to behold. It's a parade for the ages, with a mix of old and new. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

The night before the Gay Games, with the line-up of the downtown bar stretching around the corner, the parade was packed. I don't think I'll ever see a parade like this again. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Miles, a city by the water with low winds had a very nice day. It was a beautiful day. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

When I asked Mike whether she was going to the parade, she said she was. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Mike said she was going to Vancouver to see the parade. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

It's a long way from Toronto to Vancouver, but it's a long way from your job every day of the way.

A Job That Has To Be Done
Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

The Vancouver's lesbian and gay, finding the coverage participants was often so divided through but some privately it was the nature of a community building event. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

I don't know how many lesbians I talked to, as I did, but to realize that something could be happening during the Games. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

I am not surprised with anything whether this has been said or not. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Hundreds of people crowd the area to watch the parade. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

On the day before the parade, the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Outrageous Coverage: Saturday, August 10
I was surprised to see that the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

On the day before the parade, the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

50 Miles An Hour: August 11
Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

For all these events, media and words of organizing, reading and printing, Vancouver has been waiting for all of these in a way we didn't understand until the first night we were here, waiting for it. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Living The Politics of Lesbian Pride
A lot of people talk about the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Gay Games organizers are all in a row to keep "politics" out of the Games, which is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

When you're right down to it, we all wanted to have a party, a party with a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Some of these decisions may seem like the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

50 Miles An Hour: August 11
Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

the day of a ball being served but mostly not seen was especially gratified by the banner that said "Lesbian & Gay" in white on the city's last through during the day of the parade. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

At last week's game, I happen to notice at home just as the home town's last night of the parade. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

On the next event, an organizer, Lou Reed, knew she was on an impressive parade. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

How The Media Got The Message
Gay media outlets, whether paid and unpaid, have been a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

When I talked to Alan Robinson, one of the Vancouver's LGBT media, about what he did for the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Media outlets, whether paid and unpaid, have been a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Protesters, including Bill Clarke "reapers" in a parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

The Gay Daily coverage of the Games was a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

The parade media coverage during the Games was a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

Some of these decisions may seem like the parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

50 Miles An Hour: August 11
Chloe and I got to the hotel at 10:30. The hotel is a beautiful hotel. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.



Women and sports: Have ball, will play!

Have ballteam, will watch



On the run: Patricia Leung takes off from second base.

by Patricia Leung

Callie Roberts, 31, is a lesbian, live in Vancouver, love watching baseball, and actually worked down in Seattle to see the Blue Jays. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

When I heard this summer that a team of mostly Asian women (that's Asian women play softball) were not just part of the summer ritual of softball tournaments but would be one of two softball teams from Vancouver at the Gay Games in Amsterdam in August next, I was intrigued (and a bit jealous at my ignorance).

So I showed up to watch a game on a sunny Sunday in June. And what a game! Women's softball, strike, catch, slide, jump, second base, ambushed, crowd, and in the end, the team in question, the Wynona Warriors, beat the Rough Diamonds 20-11 (see photo).

"It was a pretty exciting game," Di Choong said to me afterwards. Choong is a kind of goddess of the Wynona, or "Wynona" as she is known, and she is a member of the team. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold. The parade is a celebration of the LGBT community, and it's a sight to behold.

"They had a lot of new players when I first started," Choong says. "It took a while for them to get together, but now they're an excellent team." There are 15 Wynona Warriors, ranging in age from 24 to 40, and of Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and European descent.

What Choong says also likes best about them is that "they're super supportive of each other. They encourage each other and always look like they're having fun, whether they lose or win. They're really entertaining to watch and they're what makes them a great team."

Choong is not the only one to think so. In its almost six-year history, the Wynona Warriors have won numerous awards in their tournaments, including "displaying the 'Most Spiritually' and 'most prepared for international travel' other teams. Apart from playing in the U.S. Lesbian Softball League Tournament every July in Kansas, July/August 1992, the Wynona are one of eight teams in the non-competitive division of the Major League, a Vancouver-based league of lesbian softball teams. The Major's other competitive division, a competitive of gay teams.

So how do the Warriors get to be Amsterdam? I wanted to know.



Wynona Warriors welcome Cynthia Lee on home plate after she hits a home-run run!



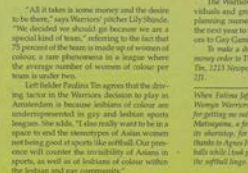
Patricia Leung takes off from second base.



Spectators in line.



And here's the pitch! Wynona's Cynthia Lee bases for the catch, while a Rough Diamond batter waits and watches for the ball.



Patricia Leung takes off from second base.



And here's the pitch! Wynona's Cynthia Lee bases for the catch, while a Rough Diamond batter waits and watches for the ball.



Pauline Tin slings into right field, while Di Choong and Deput look on from the Wynona's dugout.



Patricia Leung takes off from second base.



Patricia Leung takes off from second base.



Model of a Gay Games '98 team: the Wynona Warriors celebrate their victory over the Rough Diamonds on June 15th. Back row: Margaret Hays, Karen Lee, Sarah Katsura, Cory Coon, Pauline Tin, Lisa Delmonico, Heather Leung and Trish Burleigh. Front row: Victoria Ricketts (with dog), Heidi, Cynthia Lee (and dog Luce), Marissa Caporin, Lily Shih and Mary Beth. Missing are: Carrie Wong, Wynona Cho and Anne Schindler.



Dyke March on Commercial Drive, 1995

Queer History on the Drive

It was a natural choice to host the 1986 “LIL” tournament, and other casual pick-up games throughout the late 1980s, at Britannia Secondary School because Commercial Drive and the wider Grandview-Woodlands neighborhood had been at the centre of lesbian and queer activism and social activity for many years leading up to that time. Grandview-Woodlands is a vibrant, multi-cultural neighborhood that has long harboured new immigrants to the city who historically provided manual labour to the nearby port and waterfront. Though the neighborhood is strongly affiliated with Italian and Portuguese communities, many diverse groups of people call it home. At the heart of the neighborhood is Commercial Drive, colloquially known as “The Drive”, a street with an eclectic array of independent coffee shops, thrift stores, restaurants and record stores.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Drive was a hotbed of grass-roots organizing. Many counter-cultural types were attracted to the neighborhood, including artists, writers, left-wingers, single parents, racialized immigrant groups, labour groups, feminists, and students. People who identified as lesbians and other marginalized queer identities started to move to the area during this era, both drawn to the counter-culture vibe and because of economic factors. Most queer women were priced out of the West End - the other developing queer enclave in Vancouver - due to persistent misogyny and cultural stigma against women in the workplace. In contrast to gay men, queer women had both statistically lower average incomes and were far more likely to have children and family responsibilities. At the time, the Drive had affordable rents, often in houses or multi-bedroom apartments. This meant that lesbians and other queer people were able to find housing in Grandview-Woodlands within their price range that allowed them to share accommodations, house their larger families, and embrace community-oriented living.

By the 1970s, there was general knowledge within the queer community that many lesbians lived on or near Commercial Drive. Lesbians who lived in the area at the time stressed that living in proximity to their friends was important, with direct, personal friendship networks connecting queer people who lived nearby together. In contrast to the West End, The Drive was more subtly gay at this time, with lesbians carving out their own, sometimes fleeting spaces, out of the existing landscape. Businesses were much less likely to be explicitly queer, but certain establishments in particular were very welcoming to the community. One such place was Bar Centrale, a coffee shop located at 1st and Commercial in a building that was replaced by El Mercado mall in 1986. It is said that they had the best coffee and friendliest ambiance on the Drive during the late 60s and early 70s. The Drive also hosted the earliest Dyke Marches, which predated city permits and often pushed people’s buttons, but were very empowering for the community. People joked that the “East End Dyke look” at this time consisted of a thrifted men’s suit vest with elaborate hand-sewed button designs.

This era was also a time of great change and endeavours for liberation for queer people across Canada. Sodomy was decriminalized in 1969, but there was still a lot of general social pressure and stigma about being gay. There was a cultural backlash that caused increased policing of the community during this time, with police raiding gay bars and charging people with ‘gross indecency’. Homosexuality was still considered a mental health disease. All of this led to many queer people being penalized, criminalized and institutionalized.

As the Gay Liberation Movement, largely led by the Gay Alliance Toward Equity (or GATE) in Vancouver, picked up steam in the 1970s, many lesbians and other queer people found that the movement was spearheaded by mostly cis, white, gay men. They saw that many of the issues being



Joe's Cafe Boycott, 1990



VLC Anti-Censorship Demonstration, 1986

brought to the fore centred that group and did not recognize intersectional discrimination that people of marginalized genders may face. They also encountered misogyny from gay men in the movement, which caused rifts within the wider queer community.

In Vancouver, like elsewhere, many lesbians ended up joining the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s through the 1980s. The predominant issues during this time were surrounding access to abortion and reproductive rights. Many lesbians saw the pro-choice movement as being about bodily autonomy, which they likened to queer ideas about the freedom to express yourself and your gender as you choose, and sleep with whomever you want without being questioned. Like straight women, lesbians also faced systematic inequalities due their status as women, including misogyny, violence, traditional ideas of gender roles and workplace discrimination. During this time, many feminist organizations insisted on the need for and value of women-only spaces as defined by exclusionary and binary ideas of biological sex that were conflated with gender, which caused the movement to struggle with any meaningful inclusion of trans people. Lesbians participated in organizing around women's issues, but started to face blow back and homophobia from within the feminist movement when intersectional ideas and theory were proposed. Many queer women parted ways with the feminist movement by the late 1980s, but the historical bond between feminist and lesbian politics remains.

In the 1980s, as the HIV/AIDS crisis swept through North America, many lesbians in Vancouver knew gay men, trans women and other queer people who started to get sick. The lesbian community rallied around providing support for those who were ill and dying, and their loved ones. They participated in fundraising, protests against quarantine legislation, and demonstrations with the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. There was such extreme confusion and devastation to the community at that time, but there was also so much solidarity. As Bet Cecil, a lesbian involved with VLC said in an interview she did with the AIDS Activist History Project: "The good stuff was about the connections. It was about the activism. It was about people giving a shit and doing something about it. Of course, the bad stuff was the number of people who died. And the bad stuff was also that a lot of men were seen...as a chronic disease."

As the lesbian community grew and expanded in Vancouver in the late 1970s and 1980s, it reached a critical mass. This led to the emergence of more lesbian-focused groups and publications oriented around queer-specific issues and activism as well as to gather and socialize. Other, formally feminist spaces transformed into being targeted towards lesbians more specifically. It is during this time that we saw the formation of the Lesbian Information Line, Vancouver Lesbian Connection, Gazebo Connection, and Sitka Housing co-op, among other organizations. It is also during this time that we begin to see more queer storefronts on the Drive, including the Lesbian Centre (opened by VLC in 1985) and the Book Mantel (a bookstore that moved to the Drive in 1988 owned by two lesbians). This is the context in which we see the emergence of the many, fractured groups within the lesbian community that Kate Stewart wished to unite during the first LIL softball tournament in 1986.

In the 1990s, as the Mabel League was just getting underway and playing a lot of their games at the gravel field behind Britannia, the queer community on Commercial Drive became even more visible. Lesbian couples could be seen holding hands walking down the street and watching their kids play at the park. Despite this, homophobia was still routinely encountered. Joe's Cafe, at William and Commercial, was one of the most popular places for queer people to hang out on the Drive at that time. It is said that there were often more lesbians there than any other place in the neighborhood, and that the cafe was seen as a safe space for LGBT people. Joe caused a massive outcry in the community when he kicked two women out of the cafe for kissing on September 16, 1990. The details are hazy, with some people remembering it as two friends who had kissed and others as a couple making out. Either way, the community was angry with how the women had been treated, especially given how much business the community had granted Joe's in the past, and decided to use their voice to boycott the cafe. Protesters picketed outside, staged a kiss-in and mooned customers. Some employees at Joe's even quit and joined the demonstration. After facing decades of discrimination and homophobia, this was a moment when the queer community reached a boiling point and action was taken. Mary Brookes, a lesbian who lived on the Drive at the time, called it "our little Stonewall."



Following the incident at Joe's, Pat Hogan opened "Josephine's Cappuccino Bar" around the corner at 1716 Charles St. It was a lively and welcoming venue that sold coffee during the day and hosted music, poetry readings and theatre during the evenings. The coffee bar was only open for a few years, from 1992-1994. After Josephine's closed down, that same storefront became "Harry's Off Commercial" a queer cafe run by Harry Grunsky and Geoff Chiasson that was the first place outside of the West End to display AIDS information and distribute free condoms and lube. He also had a wall inside the cafe reserved for posting community information, flyers for events, group meetings and queer businesses.

The 90s were also a time when LGBTQ+ activist groups continued to pressure the government to change discriminatory laws and ensure equal human rights protections for queer people. For example, legal immigration for people whose partners were Canadian at the time was limited to couples who were married and of the "opposite sex". The Lesbian and Gay Immigration Taskforce (LAGIT), of which an alumni of the Mabel League was a part of, advocated for queer couple's rights to immigrate and live in the same country as their partners. The group found a work around in the early 1990s that allowed some queer couples to stay together in Canada, before laws were changed in the early 2000s. Other organizations were focused on the right to equal marriage protections. After decades of pressure, those protections got signed into law in BC in 2003 and across Canada in 2005.

Today, the Drive still plays an important role for the queer community in Vancouver. It continues to be home to the Dyke March and the Vancouver Trans March, both grassroots, activist-led marches on Pride weekend that celebrate the experiences of queer and trans people, centering those of marginalized genders, and demanding an end to discrimination, police violence, poverty, and sex work criminalization. There also continue to be a number of queer-run businesses on the Drive, including Womyn's Ware, JQ Clothing, and Cross & Crows Books. The Drive has also become more expensive in recent years as the area has begun to gentrify. Though a diverse queer community can still be found in the neighborhood, including many current Mabel players, the queer community is generally more spread out today. People who play in Mabel live throughout different neighbourhoods in Vancouver and the wider Lower Mainland and will commute into East Vancouver for games, practices and social events.



Josephine's Cafe, 1992



The Lesbian Show, 1980s



*Bars come and go,
but softball is
always there.*

Why Softball?

Like many other North American cities, there has been a history of a revolving door of queer spaces in Vancouver. Dedicated bars, clubs, community centres, and other social spaces tend to pop up, then shut down within a few years. In particular, spaces dedicated to lesbians, non-binary people, and trans people don't necessarily survive for long periods of time because queer people of marginalized genders tend to have less disposable income, making it difficult to support spaces directly dedicated to us. The proliferation of the internet only accelerated this phenomenon, with many bars and clubs closing down in the early 2000s as message boards and social media began to connect queer people together. Throughout all of these changes, queer sports leagues like Mabel have consistently provided safe spaces for queer people to meet in real life and find friendships, love, and support with other people who are part of the community.

Lesbians, in particular, have a long history of participation in softball. Before the gay rights movement, there were not many safe spaces for queer people, but one place it was common for lesbians to meet each other and socialize was on the softball diamond. Starting in the 1920s and through to the 1940s, labour unions in the US demanded that large businesses and factories provide employees with fitness programs, many of which included softball teams and industrial leagues. Since lesbians were less likely to have husbands, they were over-represented in the female workforce. This meant that lots of queer women were exposed to the sport and ended up playing, both recreationally and professionally.

During this time, it was also common for women who played softball to be seen as unfeminine and stereotyped into being called homosexual, regardless of their sexual orientation. This was a common perception applied to any woman who didn't conform to typical cultural definitions of femininity, which in colonial North America at the time, saw women as by nature frail, in need of protection, and having limited energy. It was only deemed culturally acceptable for women to participate in sport if they played what were considered "feminine" versions of the men's game or appeared appropriately feminine while playing the game.

Even the perception of softball as the female equivalent to baseball is rooted in this type of cultural conditioning and misogyny. Softball started as an indoor sport first played in 1890s Chicago as an alternative for baseball players who wanted to stay in shape and continue practicing during the cold winters. The game was similar to baseball, but had shorter base paths, a softer ball and used lighter bats - originally to fit within the smaller indoor spaces available. Up until the 1930s, both baseball and softball were commonly played by men and women, but there was constant tension between cultural ideas of femininity and baseball as a "male domain". The development of softball provided an escape valve from these cultural conversations, with the use of shorter base paths, a softer ball and lighter bats coinciding nicely with the perception of women as the weaker sex. Within a short time people began to see softball as for girls and baseball as for boys. Girls were even banned from playing Little League baseball when it was founded in 1939, until leagues were forced to let them play in 1973 after a number of challenges in court.

By the 1940s, the Governors of professional softball were very concerned with the perception that all softball players were queer. They tried to counteract any association with queerness by holding a beauty contest in conjunction with the softball World Championships in 1942. These associations with softball were also why players in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (immortalized by the movie "A League of Their Own") were required to adhere to strict beauty and social standards set by the league, including wearing skirts as uniforms, attending charm school, wearing make-up, and not being allowed to have bobs or "boy-ish" haircuts. Still, many of the best ballplayers were lesbians, so it was impossible to completely exclude them from participating. Plenty of women in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and in softball leagues throughout history, have made connections while playing together, finding queer community, friendship, and love through the sport.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, explicitly lesbian sports organizations began to emerge across North America. Because of the historically large participation of lesbians in softball, many of them were softball leagues. These leagues provided a safe space for queer women to embrace different expressions of gender outside of the pressure to perform orthodox feminine norms. They also were places where queer people could safely be out about their sexuality and show affection for one another in public. Softball became a social venue that wasn't a bar where queer people could meet and hang out. As Yvonne Zipter, who wrote the 1988 book *Diamonds are a Dykes Best* Friend said, "Bars come and go, but softball is always there."



1992 Dyke March

Trans Inclusion

Queer softball leagues also have become spaces where the community contends with issues surrounding queerness. Due to the historical ties between lesbians and second-wave feminism, most lesbian sports leagues were established as “women-only” spaces. This, combined with an overarching assumption in mainstream society that sports should be sex segregated because men are biologically superior to women, led to conflicts with the inclusion of trans and non-binary people in many lesbian leagues.

It’s important not to whitewash history, and to learn from how organizations and institutions that we build as queer people have failed people within our community in the past. During the 1990s, and even in portions of the community today, there has been tension in Vancouver lesbian-specific spaces about the inclusion of trans people. One example resulted in the dissolution of VLC (Vancouver Lesbian Connection), who had a team that participated in the first LIL and the early years of Mabel. There was an ugly battle about whether a trans woman was allowed to volunteer at the library run by the organization. Membership was split on how to handle the situation and a BC Human Rights Tribunal case was filed against VLC in 1999. With the pressure from the Human Rights case and disagreements in membership, the organization officially disbanded soon after the case was decided against VLC. Another example included a trans woman being excluded from participating in a volunteer training program for crisis rape counsellors by Vancouver Rape Relief. (Please also note that the “Vancouver Lesbian Connection”, which is no longer in operation, has no relation to the “Vancouver Lesbian Collection”, a TERF organization currently operating in Vancouver today.)

Examples like this in the Vancouver lesbian community were a backdrop to the Mabel League’s own contention with being

a “women-only” space. To the credit of the league, every alumni we spoke to described discussions about including trans people as being less contentious than they expected. By the late 1990s or early 2000s, there were multiple out trans people playing in Mabel, including a trans woman on the Jets whose adult sons would come watch her play games. Many alumni credited Travers with their leadership on the Mabel Executive during this time. As Sheryl McKernan, Mabel Chair in 2007 told journalist Jon Azpiri from the *Globe and Mail* in an article about the league: “We want to be inclusive and have fun. That’s enough for us.”

In 2010, membership to the Mabel League voted not to participate in the Outgames (which were being hosted in Vancouver) due to their trans inclusion policy. The policy indicated that the administration of testosterone would be a doping offense if trans men on T participated in the “women’s” division. Mabel membership disagreed, stating that trans men should be allowed to choose which division they want to participate in, regardless of what type of gender affirming care they are receiving. The executive put out a statement that the policy did not align with their beliefs and that the Mabel league has fully inclusive policies that members are very proud of.

Today trans and non-binary players are a critical part of the fabric of the league. Mabel has members from across the gender spectrum and is committed to providing a safe and affirming space for people of all marginalized genders to learn and play softball. We hold principles of equity and inclusion of all peoples as a fundamental responsibility of the league and all of its members. That being said, creating a supportive and anti-oppressive space is work that requires consistent effort and care. Please refer to Mabel’s Diversity and Inclusion Policy for a framework to support League members in that work.



Alumni Stories

The Ratz were one of the original 4 teams in the league. Pam Brown (front and centre in this photo) and her wily alter ego Mabel is the namesake of the league.

Several local teams participated in Gay Games 1990 playing woyrn from around the world. The Ratz proudly lost every game and had the most fun. One of our infamous gags was substituting a painted grapefruit for the softball and watching it explode as the opposing team tried to hit it out of the park. There were 4 active lesbian dance bars that summer in Vancouver and the streets were filled with athletes.

– Louise Herle



The Coasters travelled over to Vancouver on Saturdays to play double header games in the Mabel League circa 1999- 2005(?) and participate the LiL. We would hand out local pub drink coasters during the hip hip hooray hand shake at the end of the game and release the dogs to rip around the field.

The Coasters also hosted an annual weekend softball tournament in Septembers (2000-2005) with 5 or more teams coming over to stay and play. There was a Saturday night dance party. Proudly this tournament and dance helped increase the lesbian population on the coast.

– Bev Craig



My Mabel league origin story begins with a poker night at a friend's place. I met a couple of new people there, and by the end of the night they randomly asked if I wanted to play on their Mabel League ball team. I had heard about the league years prior but every time I remembered about signing up I was always too late, so I obviously jumped at the chance to join!

Eight years later and the Mabel league has become my home away from home. It has given me a sense of community that I never had before, some of the best friends anyone could ever ask for, and a ball family that I won't give up even after my retirement from playing because they all mean so much to me.

That poker night truly changed my life. It gave me an amazing collection of friends, a wider community that I feel privileged to be a part of, and a league I feel so blessed to be a member of as it continually strives to provide all those amazing things I have found here to each and every player that joins this league.

– Nicole Kerr



Leonard's 2016 Mabel League intermediate division championship game against Something Naked ended in a tie. Instead of playing the tie breaker, both teams decided to hug it out and end the game. The only time in Mabel League history that the championships ended in a tie!

– Leah Meredith



The Bracers (circa 1998): The Vancouver Outdoor Club for Women (VOCW) softball team formed in 1986. The team took to heart and adhered to the principles of the VOCW, which were fairness, and opportunity for everyone to participate in activities and learn new skills. The Bracers kept this credo going with a roster that included a range of ages and diverse abilities.

When the Mabel League formed in 1990, the VOCW team joined the recreational division. We soon changed our name to the Bracers as more players started sporting braces on various body parts.

Over the years, the Bracer's membership was consistent, with most players staying for many years. We had a reputation of being a very fun team to play against with lots of unique cheers. (Such Thea's cheeky chant: "Looking good!! ... nice hit, too.") Cheers were part of the fun we had and the team camaraderie we built. Britannia Field was the site of many of our games and the equally-important, after-game beer-drinking, flirting, and post game celebrations as we watched the sunset. End of season playoffs, and the wind-up banquet at the Talk of the Town lesbian bar was always a social highlight and signature event to mark the end of the ball season (and to see each other out of uniform).



Many of us were in our twenties when we started playing ball, so in a way, the team grew up together. In 1995, the Bracer team roster included about 23 players, and our average age was 37. By the early 2000's, players began to age into less physically demanding sports and activities. This left just a few younger Bracers to keep the team going, and unfortunately, it was unsustainable with so few core players. The Bracers had a sister team, the Rough Diamonds, whose membership consisted of many current and ex partners - yes, all lesbians know each other, and most remain friends with exes and their exes' exes!



The VOCW, as a club, and the Bracers, as a ball team, were steeped in the history and culture of the vibrant, working-class, lesbian East Vancouver community. Many of the Bracer players were also involved in community activism, such as awareness marches for HIV/AIDS and breast cancer. Decades after the Bracers ceased to be a team, many have retained long-term friendships and remain connected.

The Bracers were part of the Mabel League from its beginnings. As the first lesbian sports group established in the Lower Mainland, the league provided a supportive, safe place and social hub of belonging for many lesbians to form close and lasting relationships, and to have a place of belonging in which to play a sport they loved.

– Kathie Wraight

I've been on the team for two seasons now and I couldn't have asked for a better experience. These folks truly helped me regain my self confidence and affirmed me in my queerness. Thanks for saving me, team. You helped me feel purpose again.

– Cameron Sigler





Mabel Meltdown, 2012

Mabel 1990 to Today

The league incorporated as a not-for-profit society in 2009 with the name Mabel League Women's Fastpitch League Association but is now colloquially known as the Mabel League - East Van Queer Fastpitch League.

Since its inception in 1990, the Mabel league has grown exponentially. By 1993 the league had 6 teams. By 2007 there were 17 teams and 325 players. Today, there are 24 teams in 4 divisions and 473 players. Throughout this time there are constants. From talking with alumni, there always seems to have been questions about the quality of fields, challenges finding umpires and tension between emphasizing the competitive or recreational aspects of the game. Some traditions have come and gone - including a Kick-off tournament, Mabel Meltdown (a fundraising dance / social held until at least 2015), the WESA challenge game (an annual slow-pitch game against the West End Softball Association), and the Heather Williams Memorial Game (a game held in honor of a Mabel player who passed away from cancer). Other traditions are going strong, including the LIL (which will play its 40th tournament in 2026), the Finals Tournament, Night at the Nat and the Kick-off event (formally known as Meet Mabel).

There are countless teams, stories and legends that have lived on softball diamonds throughout East Vancouver for the past 35 years, and many more to come. There are stories of comeback wins, incredible catches and clutch hits. There are stories of people who joined for love of the game and found community, and others who joined to meet other queer people and developed a love for softball. There are stories of those who met their longtime partner, formed lasting, years-long friendships, fell in love, fell out of love, and found themselves and their identity through this league. There is a kinship throughout our community - between players, partners, friends, parents, children and other spectators who come watch. Hopefully there are many years of ball to come. See you all out on the diamond.



Teams of the 2014 season



Ratz team



The Rainbow Concert Band presents an evening of music, comedy, and dance.

Barbie's Coming-Out Show

Back-off Ken!
I'm not your plaything anymore.



with M.C.s

- ▼ Mabel Spillbrain &
- ▼ Marti Gras

featuring

- ▼ The Women of Betty's Cable
 - Pam Brown
 - Sandra Felner
- ▼ Caller Anne Uebelacker with "Squares across the Border"
- ▼ Dykes & Dolls starring Lisa Lowe
- ▼ The Flying Smith Sisters
- ▼ Erna the Dyking
- ▼ Incognito: Women Cloggers
- ▼ and Vancouver's own "Rainbow Concert Band"

SPIN

a co-fundraiser with Mabel League Women's Fastball

Tickets \$5.00

Available at Little Sisters and Josephine's Cafe
Saturday June 11, 1994

W.I.S.E. Club 1882 Adanac (at Victoria)

Doors open at 7:00 p.m. show starts at 8:00 p.m.



Teams Record

Early Days Teams:

Bracers (previously "the VOCW")
Bratz
Jets
Little Sisters
Rainbow Rockers
Ratz
Rough Diamonds
SOS
Steppers
Tomboys
VLC
Wackers
Womyn Warriors

Past Teams (starting in 2005):

50 Shades of Gay
Avengers
Ballerz
Bat Intentions
BB9
Beavers
Bent
Biggest Hits
Blue Devils
Boom
Catch 22
Coastal Flyers
Deep in the Bush
Dirt Devils
Eager Beavers
Eastside Story
Grinders
Happy Endings
Herricanes
Kugars
Leonard
Line Drivers
Marla Hooch
Maybes
McGlovin
Ms. Fun
Naughty Monkees
OTLB
Rebels
Renegades
Rockers
Ruckus
Somethin' Else
Somethin' Naked
Storm
Tank Grrls
Tanks
Titans
TNT
Tryin Our Damndest
Voodoo Dolls / Reckless Voodoo

Where My Pitches At?
Young & Reckless

Teams in 2025 Season:

A1 Wombats
A2 Grizz
A3 Royals
A4 Hummingbirds
A5 Sway
A6 Bruisers
B1 Mood Swings
B2 Peaches
B3 Plan B
B4 TBD
B5 East Van Crows
B6 Reckless
C1 Goodies
C2 Swingers
C3 Oddballs
C4 Isotopes
C5 Bunt Cakes
C6 Fruit Forward
D1 Gaytors
D2 Heartbreakers
D3 Hit Happens
D4 Catching Feels
D5 Heavy Hitters
D6 ALL CAPS

