

Collection of Memories

*The Vancouver JCCA Nisei
Baseball Team*



1951-1960

Introduction

This booklet is dedicated to the present and past players, managers and coaches of the Vancouver JCCA Nisei Baseball Team and their families who supported them.

How did the Collection of Memories start?

Elmer (El) Mori visited the Nikkei Museum in 2015 and asked if they had any published information on the JCCA Nisei Baseball Team. He was informed not to their knowledge. In late 2016, a reporter reached out to him, and proposed writing a book about the team, but this did not materialize. Elmer then started to look for some of his teammates, and some players knew other players in the Lower Mainland. Some of the “found” players got together for a reunion of sorts, and Elmer proposed putting together a booklet about the team.

As a collective group, the players felt it was important to capture some of the history about the JCCA Nisei Baseball Team as they were all proud to be a part of this team and wanted to document the information they had, and capture some fond memories. This is how the Collection of Memories began to take shape.

The players have worked on this Collection for several months. Due to limited resources and a desire to capture information within a relatively short period of time, it was not possible to locate the approximate 60 players (or their families) who played over the 10 years the JCCA Nisei Baseball Team was in existence. The players who worked and contributed to this booklet apologize if they have not contacted existing players or if any information is not accurate or is incomplete. The contributing play-

ers had to rely on information from the internet, personal collections of newspaper clippings, and their collective memories to create the most accurate record of the JCCA Nisei Baseball Team. Much of the resource material available was not complete, and in some cases contradictory, so some assumptions had to be made.

The players who worked on this Collection of Memories (listed below) would like to thank everyone who contributed pictures and articles. The information that started flowing in once the request went out was greater than the space available in the booklet, so while not everything could be included, it is hoped what was chosen is a good representation of the team and their memories. The players also wanted to thank their children and families who helped support them in submitting their collection of memories. It is their timely assistance that enabled this booklet to come together in a few months.

- Bill Haraga
- Eddie Hayashi
- Frank Kika
- Mas Kitagawa
- Hubbo Matsuzaki
- Bobby Miyagishima
- Ron Montgomery
- Elmer (El) Mori
- Joey Oikawa on behalf of George (Azu) Oikawa
- Tom (Toru) Nishi
- Danny Okano
- Dick Stein
- Tom Tasaka
- Don Uyesugi on behalf of Mush Uyesugi
- Roy Wakabayashi

History

The Asahi Baseball Team played their last game in 1941 when the war broke out. Although World War II ended in September 1945, the Japanese Canadians were not formally allowed to return to the Vancouver areas and to the BC Coastal Region until 1949.

The Vancouver Japanese Canadians loved their baseball and wanted the tradition to carry on with a new team. In 1951, there was a high school team called the Vancouver Nisei High Schoolers that used to play at the Powell Street Grounds. As more Japanese Canadians returned to the coast, it is believed that the Vancouver Baseball Club under the sponsorship of the Vancouver JCCA wanted to create more opportunities for players to play and develop, and be the feeder teams for a higher level team.

On April 14th, 1951 the Nisei Ball Club held a meeting led by Nobby Fujisawa, who presided as Chairman. They chose Eli Take-moto as President of the JCCA Sunday Baseball League. The panel was also made up of Tats Yamamoto as Vice-President, Tad Kitagawa as Secretary-Treasurer, and Ted Otsu as Publicity, and Tumpy Hinada as Equipment Manager. They created a 3-team league that would play on Sundays. All players who were interested were encouraged to apply.

Cover Graphics - Cap jersey and jacket were donated to the Nikkei National Museum by George Oikawa. (NNM 2010-45-2) Photographed by Barb Darroch.

A committee was formed to create the team that would enter the Industrial Union League for the 1951 season. The following Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (JCCA) leaders were instrumental in organizing and forming the JCCA Nisei Baseball Team.

Mr. Seiji Homma,
President, Vancouver JCCA

Mr. Nobby Fujisawa,
General Manager,
Vancouver JCCA

Mr. Joe Miyazawa,
Business Manager,
JCCA Nisei Baseball Team

We believe the Vancouver JCCA helped fund the team with uniforms and equipment so the team could join the Industrial Union Baseball League to start the 1951 season. The Industrial Union League started in 1950 and ran to 1968. All of the games for this league were played at Oppenheimer Park on Powell Street (Powell Street Grounds) which was a dirt field.

The team had five managers over the 10 years they played.

Sandy Stein (1951 – 1952)

Terry Nakatsu (1953 – 1954)

Mush Uyesugi (1955)

John Inouye (1956)

George (Azu) Oikawa
(1957 – 1960)

The team also had three coaches over the years.

Sandy Stein (1953 – 1955)

Tad Ikeda (1953 – 1955)

John Inouye (1953 – 1955)

Vancouver Industrial Union League and the Nisei Team¹

In 1951 there were six teams and each team had a schedule of 9 games. The teams were the Boilermakers, Longshoreman, Western Bridge, Cliffords Grill, Pacific Tribune and the JCCA Nisei. Cliffords Grill won the league title that year and the JCCA Nisei team came in last in the standing.

In the 1952 season, the league increased the teams to eight, adding PT Clippers, North Vancouver Cubs, Lynn Athletics, and West Vancouver. The Cliffords Grill and Pacific Tribune teams dropped out. The Boilermakers won the league title. Starting in 1952, the league had a thirty game schedule.

In the **1953 season**, the league reduced the number of teams and it was made up of the JCCA Nisei, CYO, Western Bridge, Longshoremen, PT Clippers and Boilermakers. This is the season the JCCA Nisei team won the **League Play-Off Championship and the George Sparling Trophy**.

In the **1954 season**, the PT Clippers left the league, and the JCCA Nisei Team won the **League Title**.

In the **1955 season**, the league added the Firemen Team so it was back to six teams which remained stable until 1960 when the Firefighters left the League. In 1955, the JCCA Nisei Team won the **League Play-Off Championship and the George Sparling Trophy**.

It is worth noting that the Nisei Team's success, particularly during the years 1953 to 1955 were a very special time for this new team. Every team, whether it is at an ama-

teur or professional level, strives to bring home this type of success and to do so for three consecutive years is commendable.

In order to win a League Title or Championship, a team must have:

- Sound team organization and leadership from the team manager and coaches
- Experienced players who can lead by example
- A core of talented players
- A team that can play together and support each other

The Nisei team had all the above to rise to the level it did, and to achieve a great degree of success. It was after the 1955 and 1956 seasons, eight of the players who helped the team win the League Titles and Championship Play-Offs left the team for various reasons. Over time, more players left and new players joined as the Nisei Team worked to rebuild their strength. The more experienced players continued to demonstrate great leadership, the organization continued to be supportive, and there continued to be a lot of talent, heart and passion within the team. Although there were no further big league level wins, there continued to be many exciting games where the team played well and won many games. Overall, the Nisei team held a great record for being in existence 10 years.

In the later years, it was hard to attract enough dedicated players to continue and unfortunately the team folded at the end of the 1960 year. The Vancouver Industrial Union League continued until 1968.

¹www.attheplate.com by Jay-Dell Mah and baseball.wikipedia.com/wiki/Vancouver_Industrial_League

Ron Montgomery



Year of Birth: 1932

Age Started Playing Organized Baseball:

Twenty (20) Before this mostly un-organized... sandlot, high school and neighborhood

League and Teams I Played For:

Industrial League
Nisei 1952 - 1960

Industrial League
Longshoremen 1961 - 1965

Position: Pitcher (right handed)

First base - infrequently when Nisei team was short handed

What I Loved Most About the Nisei Team:

The camaraderie, sportsmanship, fair play and friendliness shown by everyone connected with the team and their supporters. Also I was accepted as a teammate and felt comfortable and welcome from day one. As a matter of fact on a trip to Lethbridge to play the

Alberta Nisei, myself and the other "import" (Merv Franks) were adopted by the team and our names changed to Minoru for Merv and Ryoichi for me.

Best Memories:

I was at Powell Street Grounds ballpark to try for a position (as an outfielder) with another team in the same league. They were slated to play a practice game that day against the Nisei. This other team had more than enough ballplayers – however the Nisei team were one or two players short. I knew Danny Okano from previous and he suggested I play (and pitch) for

the Nisei for this practice game. I said "sure" and Nisei quite easily won the game. Danny and Cuke Yamada approached me after the game and asked if I would like to join the Nisei team permanently. I jumped at the chance not realizing I would be a member of Nisei for nine great years.

After one of our first games I was approached by a scout (Mack Rodney) from the St. Louis Brown's (now the Milwaukee Brewers) organization asking if I would be interested in attending one of their baseball camps. It was sooooo tempting but after thinking about

it for a day or two I turned it down. It would have meant quitting a good job I'd only had for a short while. A baseball camp is only a gamble and a longshot. Sometimes I think back... and wonder?????

Playing a game at Nat Bailey Stadium (It was Capilano Stadium then – if I recall). A Japanese Navy sailing ship (Nippon Maru) crewed by a shipload of training cadets stopped in at Vancouver and it was arranged for the cadet ball team to play the Nisei Team in an exhibition game at Capilano Stadium. It was great. Good weather. Good crowd. Excellent playing field... and Nisei won... Nice experience!

Most Challenging Things:

Mush Uyesugi getting hit in the head at first base by a line drive from a batter. He dropped like a stone. Everyone was stunned. It was the worst I'd seen. He spent the night in hospital. Fortunately Mush recovered and was back with the team before long.

The extremely short right field at Powell Street Grounds made pitching to left handed batters a tough and tricky situation.

Language Barrier?

I wondered at first if this might be a problem. What if their signals were sometimes given in Japanese? I asked Azu (George) Oikawa about this and he just laughed and said "don't worry, I don't know any more Japanese than you do!"

Odds and Ends:

The Nisei team won the League Title in 1954 and the League Playoff Championship twice - in 1953 and 1955

In 1955 I was both fortunate and lucky to pitch a no hit-no run game against a CYO team (13-0)

This is a pitchers dream... but... it cannot be done without the assistance of eight team mates who played error less and smart ball. The Nisei performed perfectly. Thanks...

I want to express my utmost thanks and appreciation to everyone (team mates, supporters, JCCA, officials) and everyone who was in any way associated with the Nisei baseball club over the ten year life of the team. Too many to mention (or remember)! The years from 1952 til 1960 will remain one of the highlights of my life. My only regret is the number of team mates

who are no longer with us. I would loved to have seen them again.

Bottom of the ninth... one more thing. I would like to thank and appreciate the time and effort that three people put into this Nisei brochure. Elmer Mori and his daughter Geri Prior and son Keith have taken on a very complex endeavor. Putting together a tale of events that happened some sixty years ago is no easy matter.

Thank you so much. You've made one old ball player feel a little younger and brighter!

Thank You
Ron Montgomery



Ron Montgomery's 1954 Championship, 100% wool sweater. Ron has generously donated this artifact to the Nikkei National Museum where it will be archived with other JCCA Nisei Baseball Team Artifacts. Photographed by Keith Mori

1955
CHAMPIONSHIP WIN

Ron Montgomery pitched a sparkling one-hitter...

The acts were as thrilling as a circus Friday night, only it was Industrial League baseball and instead of the big top, the site was Powell Grounds... where Nisei sent a man to hospital, hit three home runs, had a player beamed and won the league championship. And all in 5 innings. Nisei scored a 11-2 victory in taking the final, winning the best-of-seven series, 4-3 from Western Bridge.¹

¹News paper clippings from Ron Montgomerys' album. Although sources and dates of articles are not known, it is believed these are from the Vancouver Sun.

William (Bill) Seichi Tahara

Year of Birth: 1928

I was born in Japantown, 143 Dunlevy St, Vancouver, BC. I grew up in the Fairview District of Vancouver, BC from 1930 to 1940, then moved to Ocean Falls which is a pulp and paper mill town in August 1940. When I was 8 to 11 years old, after attending Japanese School after our regular school I used to walk 3.5 miles or so to watch the Asahi's whenever they played at Powell Grounds... dreaming one day to be on the team.

In the spring of 1942, the family left Ocean Falls and in the summer the family was moved to Hasting Park complex, then sent to Tashme in September of the same year.

In April of 1944, I moved to an uncle's farm and orchard in South Vernon. Parents decided to farm on their own, and leased land and farmed for a few years. I worked for the Coldstream ranch in their orchards and during the winter, worked in the woods falling trees and clearing land. I also worked for a sawmill operation.

League and Team I Played For:

Industrial Union Baseball League, Nisei, Vancouver, 1952 – 1957

Position: pitcher/shortstop

Year I returned to Vancouver Area After the War: 1951

Parents bought a dry cleaning business on West Broadway by Alma Rd. in Vancouver. During 1952 to 1961 I worked at CPR repair maintenance yard, worked as a trainee for a ladies specialty store, and bought into a van and a parcel delivery contract business.

Never a dull moment with most sports. Early in life, I realized that

sports is a great equalizer. From grade school days I enjoyed participating and competing in team sports. Met and played with and against great guys over the years, fond memories. Thinking back, I feel lucky to have been able to play with the Nisei's for 6 seasons, 1952 to 1957. They were fun years.

In 1954, the Nisei's were pennant winners and in 1955 I was the captain of the Nisei's and the team won the League Playoff Championships. My final year in 1957 with the Nisei's was a disappointing season, Nisei's ended up in last place.

Personal highlights - I led the league in hitting with a .396 batting average in 1952 and in 1953 with a

.347 batting average. I was captain of the team in 1955. What made me feel so good is when one of the former coaches told me, "Seichi, you would have made the Asahi team." "My field of dreams!"

Information for this write-up is an excerpt and summary from documents Seichi Tahara wrote in July 2003 and November 2009, and donated to the Nikkei National Museum. He states that he played for six seasons, 1952 – 1957. However, in researching newspaper articles he is mentioned as playing for the Nisei team in a number of 1951 articles in The New Canadian, so he is recorded in the Player List as having a 7 year career from 1951 – 1957.

Tom Tasaka



Year of Birth: 1937

Where Our Family Lived

Before the War: Vancouver, BC
During the war, our family went to Seymour Arm, BC (Shuswap). My father returned to Vancouver in April 1949, and the family followed in August 1949.

Leagues and Teams I Played For:
Vancouver and District, Juvenile League, Connaught Park, 1950 – 1953

Kitsilano High School Baseball Team, 1954 – 1955

Industrial Union League, Nisei Team, 1955

Position Played for the Nisei Team: Outfield

Best Memories: I remember running from 3rd base to home, right into Bobo Sikorski (catcher) of the CYO Team, and scored a run by jarring the ball from his mitt. Bobo was a huge man and used to play for the BC Lions Football Team.

Bill Haraga



Year of Birth: 1940

Born in Pine Grove, BC

Before the war, we lived on a 40 acre farm in Abbotsford, BC which is now the Abbotsford Airport. My parents produced strawberries and raspberries and owned chickens. We had a family of 10 children (parents adopted 3 children). In the spring of 1942 my family and I were evacuated to the Greenwood Internment Camp. I still remember

Frank Kika

Year of Birth: 1928

Where I Lived Before the War:

Born in Haney, BC. Our family consisted of our parents, and had two boys and five girls.

During the war we went to New Denver BC, then we moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba around 1949. We returned to Vancouver around 1952.

riding the train to get there from the Ruskin Train Station. In approximately 1952, our family returned to the Vancouver area from Greenwood.

League and Teams I Played For:

Little League Baseball
(age 9-13 years) 1949 - 1953

Babe Ruth League
(age 14-15) - 1954 - 1955

Connie Mack League
(age 16-17) 1956 – 1957

Nisei Team (age 17) 1957

Position Played for the Nisei Team: 3rd base

I was playing in the Babe Ruth League, renamed the Connie Mack Baseball League at Connaught Park when I was approached by Nobby Fujisawa, who was connected with the Vancouver JCCA organization, to join the Nisei team. I believe he was a "scout" for the Nisei team.

Most Challenging Times:

Unfortunately, I did not play too many games for the team due to a freak accident, when I was hit in the eye by a pitched baseball.

I was taken to St. Paul's Hospital and fortunately I recovered fully. I never played baseball again. I still remember the pitcher's name, Bob Lasko, who played for the CYO team. He was a very strong "fast-ball" pitcher. Thinking back now, I was too young and inexperienced to jump from the Connie Mack League into playing Senior "A" baseball in the Industrial Union League. The level of play in the Senior "A" League was probably too much for a young player and I found it very challenging to play against some very good players in the league.

Odds and Ends:

It was bad enough for me to get injured but I found out later that I lost my glove and bat which was never returned to me.

What I loved most about the team:

I enjoyed playing on a Japanese Nisei team. There were many good and experienced players that I could learn from and I enjoyed their friendships. I wished that I could have played more games with the team as I was still too young to retire from the game that I loved.

Position Played for the Nisei Team: First base

What I Loved Most About the Nisei Team:

I enjoyed playing with the players on the team and I just loved playing baseball.

Best Memories: Winning the three titles and championship in 1953, 1954 and 1955. I also enjoyed playing with all the Nisei players who were all very skilled players.

Elmer (El) Mori



Year of Birth: 1933

I was born in Haney and my father died when I was about 3 years old. My mother remarried, and we moved to Nanoose Bay, BC where my step-father worked in a sawmill. This is where we were when the war started, and we came to Vancouver on a ferry.

We were first sent to Vancouver Hastings Park (PNE) for approximately six months. After Hastings Park, we were sent to Tashme, BC which was near Hope. We lived in Tashme from 1942 to 1945 when the war ended. During this time my

step-father helped build the Hope-Princeton Highway.

I really liked baseball and would go to watch the Sunday baseball games in Tashme. It was a 4 team league and I still remember at 9 years old that Frank Shiraishi, an ex-Asahi player, was playing for one team. I remember watching Sandy Stein playing for the same team. I always wondered why Sandy, who was Caucasian, was playing on a Japanese team. Dick, his son, explained his father loved baseball and knew a lot of Japanese people in Vancouver before the war. Sandy drove a logging truck during the week and would drop into Tashme on Sundays to play with his Japanese teammates.

After the war ended in September 1945 a group of approximately 10 Japanese families decide to move to a small village in Brookmere, BC. This was arranged by Mr. Gengo Nishimura (Jimmy Nishimura's father) who was contacted by a sawmill owner to try to get some Japanese men to work at his sawmill. After two years in Brookmere, the owner of the mill moved his operation to a town called Tulameen, BC. Most of the Japanese families moved to Tulameen so they could continue working at the sawmill. We stayed in Tulameen for 2 years, then our family moved to Penticton in 1949 because there was no high school in Tulameen.

I started playing organized ball in Penticton at age 17. Until that time, I was not exposed to any organized leagues or baseball teams. I really enjoyed the game and the Penticton teams were very strong so I learned a lot from the managers, coaches and other players.

Leagues and Teams I Played For:

Okanagan Junior Baseball League, Penticton Pirates, Penticton, BC, 1950 – 1951

Okanagan Mainline Baseball (Senior A, semi-pro), Penticton Athletics, Penticton, BC, 1952 – 1955. We won three titles in 1952, 1953 and 1954.

Industrial Union League (Senior A), Nisei Team, Vancouver, BC, 1956 - 1960

I played mostly centre and left outfield for the Nisei's.

My brother David was going to become a teacher and needed to go to UBC so we moved to Vancouver in 1955. My parents purchased a retail dry-cleaning business in Vancouver on East Hastings and we lived right behind the cleaners. It was a pretty hot environment, especially in the summer months. After two years my parents sold the business and my father started working for Tom Nishi's Dad in the landscaping business, and I worked there for approximately one year as well.

What I loved most about the team:

I enjoyed the skill level of the players and the friendships established between the players. I got to know my teammates and became friends with George (Azu) Oikawa and Seichi Tahara. I also had a lot of respect for Mush Uyesugi who was an excellent player and while quiet, was one of our strong leaders who always led by example. They were all so passionate about playing baseball for the Nisei Team and their enthusiasm transferred to the rest of our team. We were fortunate to have such great leaders on our team.

Best Memories:

I did not know any Nisei players on the team when I came to Vancouver. I wanted to start playing for the team in the 1956 season. Fortunately, my friend Jimmy Nishimura knew players and he talked to George (Azu) Oikawa. George told Jimmy to have me come to see him. George introduced me to the team manager, John Inouye, and told him that I had played four years in the Okanagan Mainland Baseball Team for the Penticton Athletics in the Senior "A" League. Both John and George asked me to join the Nisei Team to start the season. I was very happy that I could continue playing baseball as I was only 23 years of age.

Some personal highlights included being one of the top 10 hitters in the league in 1959 and over the years, a few of us were also selected a few times to participate on the Industrial League All Star team. I remember Ron Montgomery was also chosen. Ron was always

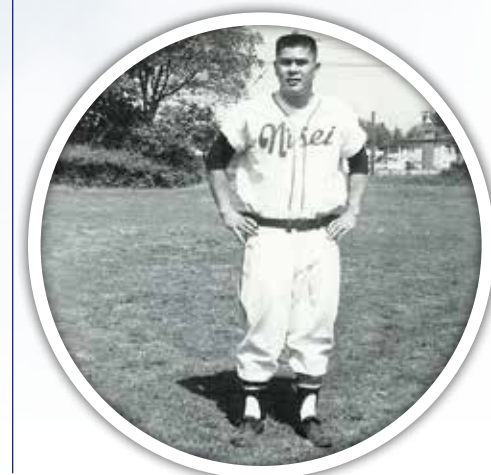
one of the best pitchers in the league and was selected as the Most Valuable Player of the entire league one year. He was certainly the strength of our pitching staff. We played these All-Star games at Capilano Stadium (later named Nat Bailey Stadium). This was a real thrill to play where the Triple A Vancouver Mounties played their games.

Most Challenging Things I Remember About Being on This Team:

In my five years on the team, I regret I could not help our team win another league title or a play-off championship. We had many talented players with a lot of heart, and we certainly all did our best. I'll always remember that we were very supportive of each other no matter what the outcome.

In addition, it took lots of dedication from all of those who had jobs. I remember the games started at 6 pm, and they wanted us there to

warm up at 5:30 pm. I was working on the British properties doing landscaping, and also worked at the Canadian Fish Cannery. I remember a lot of us rushing into the locker room to get changed just in time for the game, and our attendance was good because of the dedication of the players on the team. I can remember not even getting to eat before the games. Everyone who knows me, knows how much I like to eat, so this was a sacrifice I made regularly to play.



From the Dugout...

There is a whole article written about the Powell Street Grounds which acknowledged it was probably one of the oddest places to play baseball since it was located on Skid Road. The article went on to say it was a good thing there was a police station a few blocks away, because the police could be called if a drunk started to act up and delay the game.



Atsushi (Azu) "George" Oikawa

This write-up has been contributed to by his son, Joey Oikawa and some of the players.

Year of Birth: 1935.

Where I Lived Before the War:
New Westminster, B.C.

League and Team I Played On:
Vancouver Industrial League, Nisei, Vancouver, 1951 - 1960

Written by Joey Oikawa:

During the internment, George and his family were in Kaslo. After the war, George and his family returned to New Westminster. I believe that my dad had an opportunity to complete his high school education so that is why he went back to New Westminster.

Best Memories by His Teammates:

In the 1951 first season George hit .333 batting average playing 9 games for the Nisei team. In the 1955 season, George Oikawa was runner up to our leading Nisei team leader with a .400 batting average. In 1956 George was hired by the Triple A Vancouver Mounties Team as their "bull-pen" catcher. His job was to warm-up the various pitchers coming into the game for each day.

1956-1960 George was the commissioned baseball scout for the Minnesota Twins, major league organization, for the greater Vancouver area. George worked with Dick Hager, Pacific Northwest Scout for the Minnesota baseball organization. George's job was to keep an eye on youngsters playing baseball in the local Senior Amateur Teams, Connie Mack League players, and the local high school leagues.



Photo shows George pursuing his other love, fishing. Notice he is sporting his "lucky" Nisei cap!

George was a good player and was a student of the game. He was a good example for the younger players on the Nisei team. He loved baseball and assisted the team by

helping coach the younger players coming onto the team.

George was considered one of the better hitters in the Industrial League and was probably the fastest runner on our team and in the league. I believe that George wanted eventually to be the "Team Manager" and was elevated to this position by our organization from 1957-1960.

Elmer Mori remembers George Oikawa from 1956-1960: When I arrived from Penticton to play with the Nisei team, George and I became good friends and I remember whenever we got together, George's favourite topic was baseball. We would talk for hours about the game that he loved.

Bobby Miyagishima remembers seeing George Oikawa play hockey for a New Westminster High School at a Penticton Hockey Tournament one year. Bobby played for the Greenwood Nisei team. He remembers George being a very "tenacious" player and could skate very fast.



Nisei Cap donated to the Nikkei National Museum by George Oikawa. (NNM 2010-45-2) Photographed by Barb Darroch.

Mas Kitagawa



My Dad came to Canada in 1920. He owned a general store in Steveston, BC. The business was called Omiya Shoten. I was born in 1938. Our family of eight was evacuated in 1942 to Bridge River, BC, a self supporting community. I was 3 years old. In 1945 our family moved to Vernon BC. In Vernon, my Mom and Dad worked in the orchards to support our family. Our family moved to Vancouver in November 1949.

My brother Tad decided he would like to start a sporting goods store. Tad's Sporting Goods started in business in 1950 in Marpole. I joined Tad in 1957. We were able to keep the store within the family for 57 years. Tad retired in 2000 and I stayed on till 2007. During those years we met a lot of people and made many new friends.

During my school years I played soccer and baseball. I enjoyed playing baseball. Growing up I participated in Little League, Babe Ruth and Connie Mack divisions. I

enjoyed my time in Connie Mack division. We were able to travel to different cities in BC. I particularly remember playing in Port Alberni BC. I was billeted by a Japanese family, Kimoto. There were 2 boys on the team who were really good players. I was able to return the favor when the team came to Vancouver to play.

During my school years, I enjoyed going to Powell Grounds to watch the Nisei Ball Team play in the

Industrial League. My brother Tad played for the Nisei Team for 6 years (1951 – 1956). They were a fun team to watch. Lots of hustle and great sportsmanship. I was fortunate enough to play in the outfield a few seasons with the team (1958 – 1960).

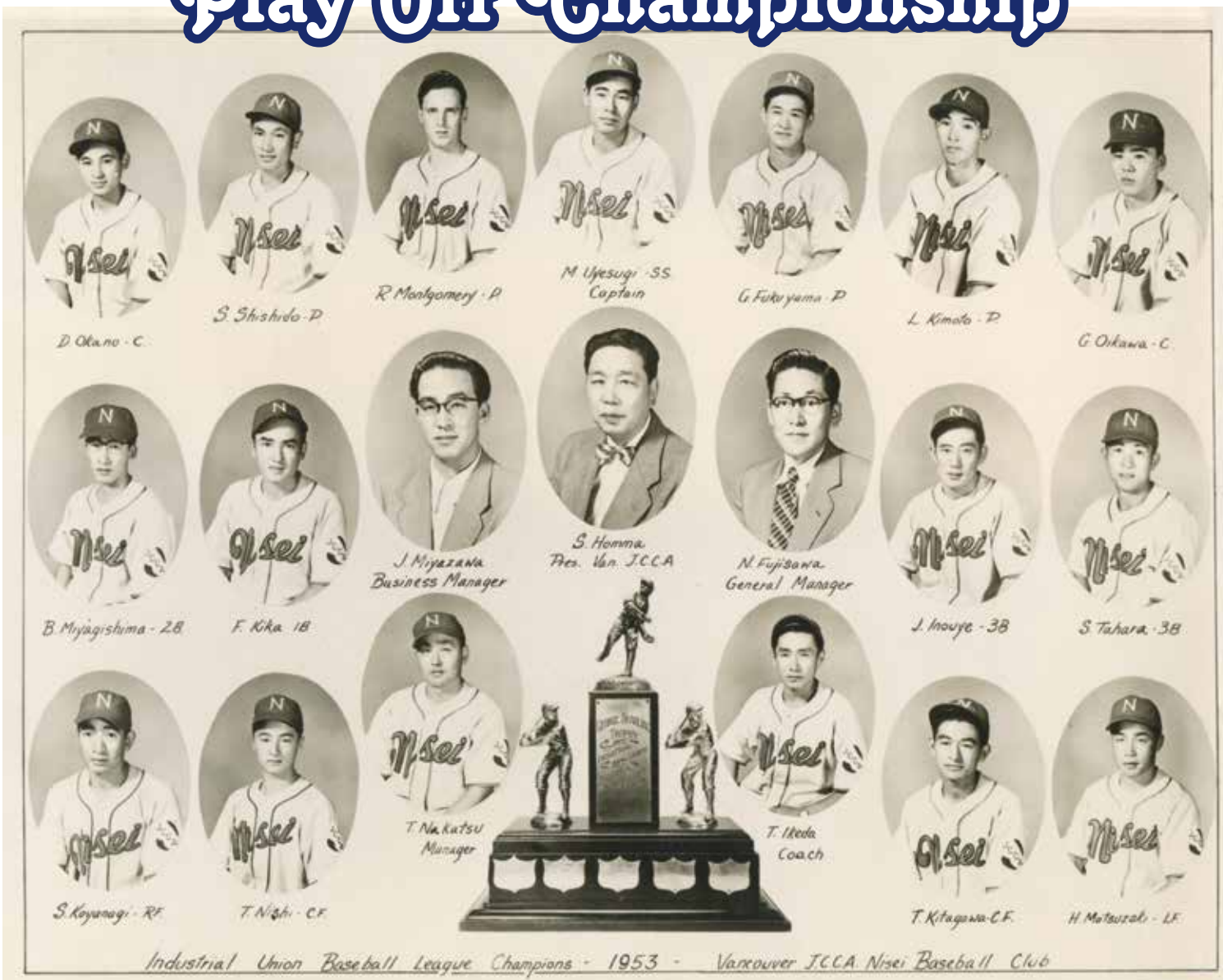
I would like to thank Elmer Mori his daughter Geri and son Keith for helping us put this project together.

Mas Kitagawa

From the Dugout...

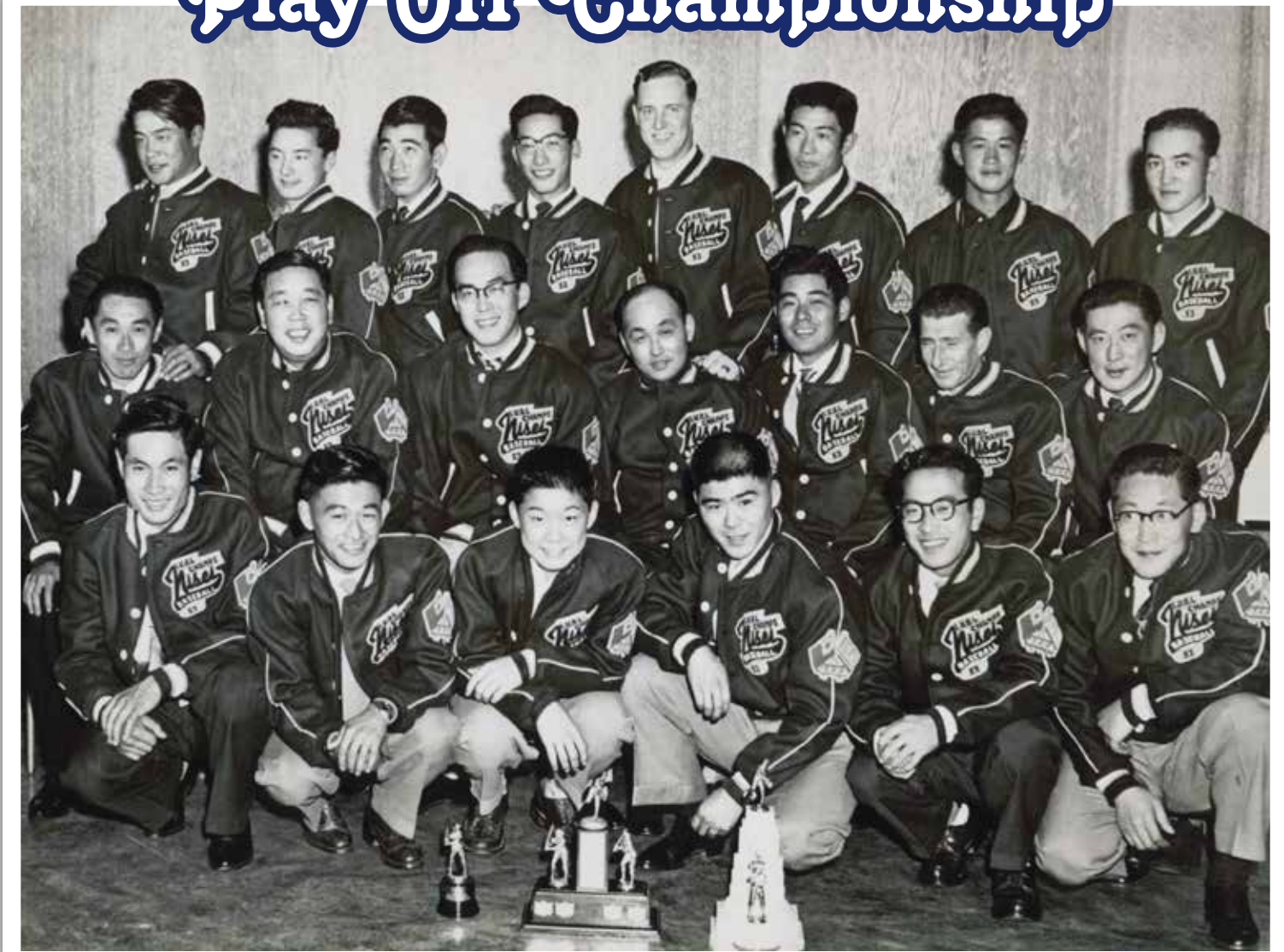
The admission in those days was 15 cents, and Allen Jones 10, the ball shagger, got paid four bits (50¢) a night, and admitted he didn't have to chase very many (balls), because they were almost always thrown back.

1953 Industrial Union League Play Off Championship



Photograph supplied by Hubbo Matsuzaki.

1953 Industrial Union League Play Off Championship

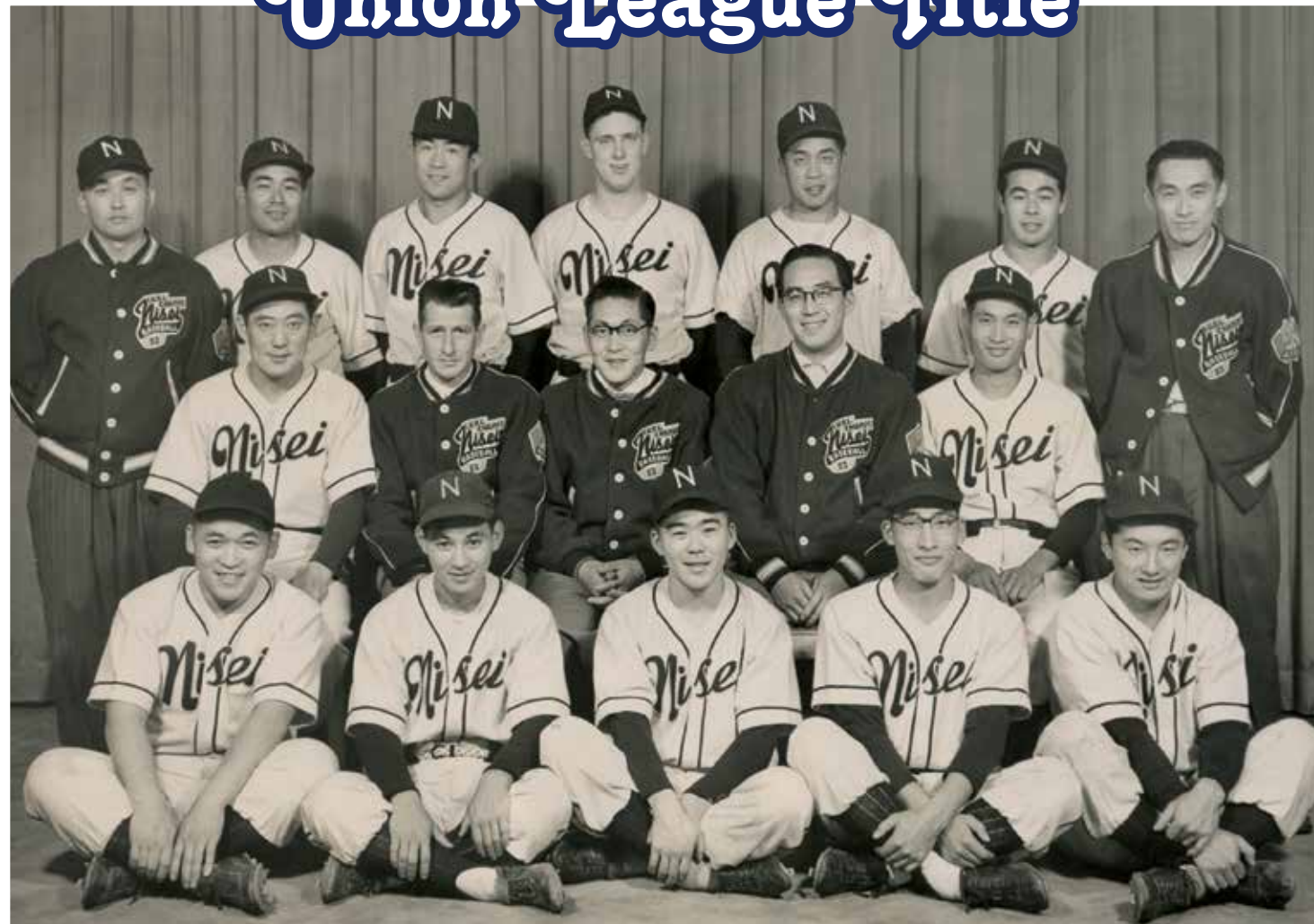


Back Row - Hubbo Matsuzaki, Tom Nishi, Sub Koyanagi, Bob Miyagishima, Ron Montgomery, Seichi Tahara, George Fukuyama, Frank Kika • **Middle Row** - Tad Ikeda, Seiji Homma, Joe Miyazawa, Terry Nakatsu, Mush Uyesugi, Sandy Stein, Joe Inouye • **Front Row** - Sam Shishido, Tad Kitagawa, Patrick Nishi - bat boy, George Oikawa, Mammy Yabe, Nobby Fujisawa. **Missing**: Danny Okano, Tad Koyanagi, Gordy Nagano, Joe Eng, Tumpy Hinada, Cuke Yamada, Eugene Fujisawa, Lefty Kimoto, Segihi. - Photograph supplied by Mas Kitagawa.

The original 1953 Championship Baseball with all the team member's signatures. Thank you to **Chiyo Yasui**, daughter of Seiji Homma who was the first president, for supplying this artifact. Photographs by Geri Prior



1954 Industrial Union League Title



Back Row - Terry Nakatsu - Manager, Mush Uyesugi, Seichi Tahara, Ron Montgomery, Hubbo Matsuzaki, Gordon Nagano, Tad Ikeda - Coach • **Middle Row** - Joe Inouye, Sandy Stein, Nobby Fujisawa, Joe Miyazawa, Sam Shishido • **Front Row** - Eugene Fujisawa, Danny Okano, George Oikawa, Bob Miyagishima, Tom Nishi
Missing: Tad Koyanagi, George Fukuyama, Tad Kitagawa, Merv Franks, Frank Kika, Sub Koyanagi, Joe Eng, Litzen. - Photograph supplied by Mike Stein.



1954 Pennant photographed from the Nikkei National Museum archives. Donated by George Oikawa. (NNM 2010-45-1) Photographed by Barb Darroch

1955 Industrial Union League Play Off Championship



Back Row: Bob Miyagishima, George Fukuyama, Seichi Tahara, Sam Shishido, Mush Uyesugi, Terry Nakatsu, Hubbo Matsuzaki, Ron Montgomery • **Front Row:** Tad Kitagawa, Frank Kika, George Oikawa, Tad Ikeda, Sub Koyanagi. **Missing:** Danny Okano, Tad Koyanagi, Kenny Homma, Merv Franks, Gordy Nagano, Tom Nishi, John Inouye, Johnny Nakata, Ken Paialunga, Tom Tasaka. - Photo supplied by the Nikkei National Museum archives. (NNM 2010-45-3-1-5)

From the Dugout...

Pop Armstrong, 65, who handled the gate complained about the few paying fans in the bleachers when there were hundreds of non-paying on the sidewalks. He also showed off the machine he had invented. It was built with an electric motor with three rubber erasers on the shaft, which he used to clean balls. He explained that baseballs were expensive, costing more than two dollars a piece. He believed the machine he made was unique and kept the costs down.

Thomas Toru Nishi



Year of Birth: 1934

Where I Lived Before the War:
Richmond

**Age I Started Playing
Organized Baseball:** 16

League and Team I Played For:
**High School - Vancouver Tech
Vancouver - 1950 - 1952**

**Positions Played
on the Nisei Team:**
Left field and 2nd Base

During the war, my family and I were sent to (internment camp):
Lemon Creek to Regina

**Year I Returned to Vancouver
Area After the War:** 1950

**What I loved Most
About The Nisei Team:**
Won Industrial League Title

Best Memories:
1955 Industrial League Playoff Title. My best memory was in 1956 when we travelled to Lethbridge Alberta. In the second inning I hit the ball to the short stop and he was throwing the ball to the second baseman for an attempted double

play. But, I hit the second baseman with a football block and broke up the play. Unfortunately he did not come back to play. We ended up winning the game. Best trip ever!

Most Challenging Thing I Remember About Being on This Team:

My eyesight began to change and I couldn't get use to my glasses. Had to quit the team.

Odds and Ends:

A daughter's (Tracy) point of view...

My dad has always been athletic and loves the game of sport! He taught me what it takes to be on a team and the responsibilities that come with it. He referred to the Nisei team frequently and how important camaraderie was during that difficult time. When I was young I thought the Nisei team was some wondrous blessing that brought joy to so many people. When I grew older... it was my surprise to realize it was a baseball team!

Every time I drive by Oppenheimer Park, instead of the dread existing now... I envision the happy faces

and the cheering crowd that gathered for the Nisei team.

My dad can't remember a lot but I know the Nisei team and what it represented at that time was important to him. Because of him, I instil that same passion to my own daughter.

Thank you for gathering this historical information. I will look forward to sharing the finished piece with our family!



Mush Uyesugi's jersey. On the back, is #13. Photograph supplied by the Uyesugi family.

Yukio Bill (Mush) Uyesugi

Yukio Bill (Mush) Uyesugi was born in Vancouver in 1924 and lived in what many people use to call Japan Town (Main Street & Powell Street area) and attended Vancouver Tech High School where he played baseball and basketball.

His son, Don Uyesugi recalls the following about his dad.

He gave me his school green and gold wool basketball shorts when I played in a house league.

Many people queried about his nick name Mush. When he was a young teen he contacted mumps and the only thing he could eat was porridge, hence Mush Uyesugi.

During the war our family including my grandparents were interned in Taber, Alberta all working on a sugar beet farm. To make extra needed money my father would go alone in the fall by train to White River, Ontario to work in a logging camp. When I was 4 yrs. old I remember my dad owned a small cafe in Coaldale, Alberta and



Team photo taken in Parksville shows Mush Uyesugi, bottom row, third from left. Photos on this page courtesy of the Uyesugi family.

he did the cooking too, making hot-cakes and eggs every weekend for me and my younger brother Alan.

He told me that he played for a local baseball team called the Coaldale Bluebirds but I can't remember any more details.

Our family returned to Vancouver in 1952 to re-establish our roots. Dad worked for Roy Kobayashi at Koby's General Store located on Hastings just west of Jackson Street which sold a variety of Japanese food products like rice, dry goods, vegetables, etc. catered by most Japanese families.

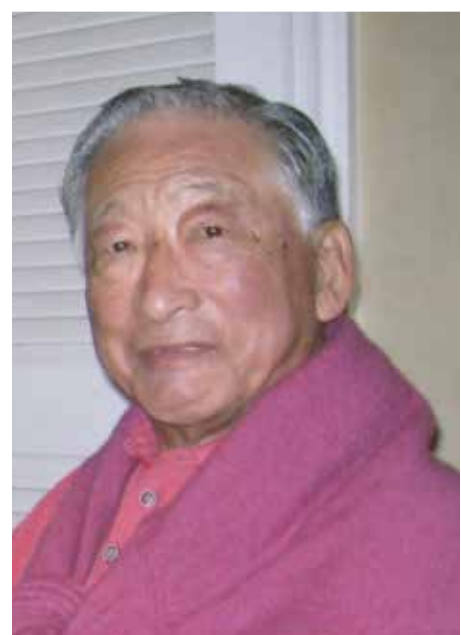
Later he joined Roy Yamada, Kobayashi's brother-in-law and a 3 way partnership was formed as they purchased S. Nishizawa Import & Export Ltd. This is now known as Toyo Imports Ltd.

My dad was a very good all round player, always playing shortstop. I remember that he was captain of the team and even managed the team one year but memory has failed to remember which years. He played for the Vancouver Nisei's for a few years but being the father of 5 children at the time meant the family came first. He was a great father as our family grew to 8 children with me being the oldest as I am now 70 years of age. My dad passed away at the age of 81 on August 20, 2005.



Photo shows Mush Uyesugi on the right with Terry Nakatsu during their trip to Parksville.

Robert Toshio Miyagishima



When we arrived, my father was interned into Hastings Park. There was a camp there where the PNE is now. My mother, two sisters, and I lived behind a cleaner's in Powell Street in Vancouver and my mother used to do clothing alterations for work. We lived there for approximately a year and half and subsequently we were all, my father included, evacuated to Greenwood for the duration of the war.

During my stay in Greenwood, I was taught by the nuns in a Catholic school because we weren't allowed into the public school system in BC. During my stay in Greenwood, I played hockey, basketball, and baseball. This was not organized baseball, but rather a Japanese baseball team. We were allowed to play teams from Midway, Grand Forks, and other teams from different towns nearby. It's in Greenwood that I honed my skills in baseball. Although there was no official coaching, I just learned from more senior players.

The war ended in 1945, but my family decided to remain in Greenwood because we were not allowed to return back to the coast. In 1949 the restrictions on returning back to the coast were lifted and my family decided to move back to Vancouver so my older sisters and I could continue our education. I enrolled into Kitsilano High School in grade 11 and after one year I applied to enter UBC.

In 1951 I started to play organized baseball for the Nisei Baseball Team and continued to play for the team from 1951 – 1960. When I first started to play baseball for the Nisei team I played as short stop, but because my arm was not strong, I was moved to second



base. I played second base for 10 years. I went to university from 1952 to 1956, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, then entered medicine. I graduated in medicine in 1960. During that period, I continued to play for the Nisei Baseball Team.

What I loved and appreciated about the Nisei Baseball team was its organization, the management, and the coaching staff because I had never had any coaching before. When I started I was the youngest player on the team (16 or 17 years old) and I looked up to the older players for guidance and advice. The Nisei team was a very cohesive team and I looked up to the older players and it felt like we were in a family. Being the youngest on the team was a blessing because I felt that I had to be one of the better players to remain on the team and so I tried harder and I worked hard to hone my skills. I watched and paid attention to older players as well as the professional teams. I

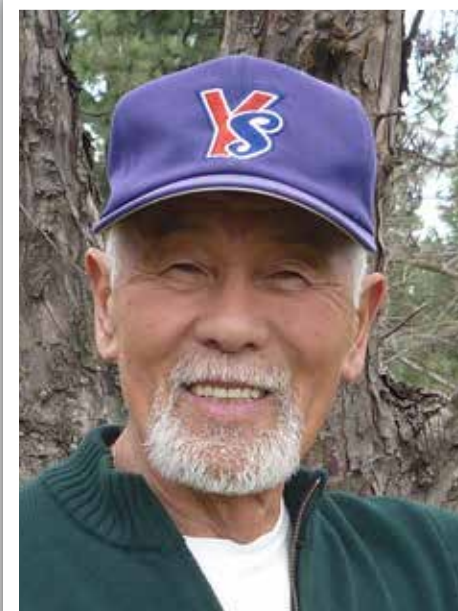
was able to improve on my skills during this period. I played for the Nisei team for 10 years and during that time I was able to travel with the team to play exhibition games to other places in BC and even to Alberta to play a Japanese team. One of the highlights of my playing years was playing a Japanese team from Japan at the Capilano stadium, where professional baseball was played in Vancouver. I can't remember if we won or not, but it was a good team we played against. It was in 1953, when we really had an excellent baseball team and that particular year we won the play-off championship.

I played until the summer of 1960. That year I graduated from medical school and I went to Toronto for my internship and to specialize in surgery and so I stopped playing organized baseball. Unfortunately, in 1960, because of the lack of players, the Nisei team was not able to field a complete team and that was the year that the team folded from the Industrial League. I felt that that was really a shame because with their coaching and encouragement I feel that there could have been enough Japanese Canadian youth that could easily have had a team representing the Japanese community.

Down 8-1 going into the last half of the sixth inning, Nisei thrilled an overflow crowd of 2000 at Powell Street in an Industrial Baseball League game... to win 9 - 8 over Longshoremen amid wild scenes of enthusiasm.²

²News paper clipping from Ron Montgomery's album. Although sources and dates of articles are not known, it is believed to be from the Vancouver Sun.

Roy K. Wakabayashi



Year of Birth: 1934

I was born in Duncan, BC on Vancouver Island. My father worked at Hillcrest Lumber Co. Ltd., just outside of Duncan. There were some other Japanese families that lived there and also worked in this sawmill.

Our family was sent to Hastings Park (PNE) holding area for a few months before they sent our family

to Lemon Creek, BC, which was one of the internment camps. After the war ended in 1945, our family moved to Kelowna, BC where I completed my junior and senior high school.

Our family moved to Vancouver around 1952. My dad was offered a millwright position in a local sawmill by a very old friend.

When I was around 14 years old, I started playing organized junior baseball in Kelowna.

Okanagan Junior "A" League, Kelowna Chiefs, 1947 – 1949

Okanagan Senior "A" League, Kelowna Red Sox, 1950 – 1952

Industrial League, Senior "A" League, Vancouver Nisei, 1952 and 1959

Pacific Northwest (Semi-Pro) League, South Burnaby Athletics, 1952 – 1959

I was a pitcher for the Nisei Team. I enjoyed the camaraderie and team attitude and talent on the team.

My best memories were that we had a common goal – team motto, and our never give up attitude which I enjoyed. I wished that I could have played many more years and games with the Nisei Team.

I presently live in Christina Lake, BC and have been there for the past 20 years.



Eddie (Ed) Hayashi



Year of Birth: 1937

Where I Lived Before the War:
Steveston, BC

**Age I Started Playing
Organized Baseball:** 19

League and Teams I Played For:

West Vancouver, 1954 - 1955

**Vancouver Industrial League, Nisei
Team, Vancouver, 1956 - 1960**

Positions: Catcher and outfielder

During the war, my family was sent to Taber, Alberta in 1942. They worked on sugar beets and did mixed farming (corn, cucumber, onions, and carrots).

My family returned in 1950 and stayed in West Vancouver in the Great Northern Cannery. My father was a fisherman and he wanted a better life for his family.

**What I Loved Most
About the Nisei Team:**

I loved playing baseball and making new friends. Kenny Homma invited me to play for the Nisei team.

**Most Challenging Thing
I Remember About Being
on This Team:**

Being one of the youngest players and the fact that I worked full time everyday in construction, then came to play baseball.

Danny Okano

Year of Birth: 1933

Before the war, I lived in Steveston, BC. During the war my mother, three sisters and I were sent to Greenwood BC. My dad was sent to Lillooet to work for a few months before joining us in Greenwood. Our family returned to Vancouver in 1949 and my father found work as a boat carpenter and fisherman. I graduated from Britannia High School.

I started playing organized baseball when I was 12.

Leagues and Teams I Played For:

**Greenwood League,
Greenwood, BC, 1945 - 1948**

**Industrial Union League,
Nisei Team, 1951 - 1960**

Positions: Catcher and outfield

I was asked to play for the Nisei Team by Sandy Stein. He was the Nisei Team Manager the first year.

*Danny Okano reflecting
on the Nisei golden years.
Photo by son, Kevin Okano*

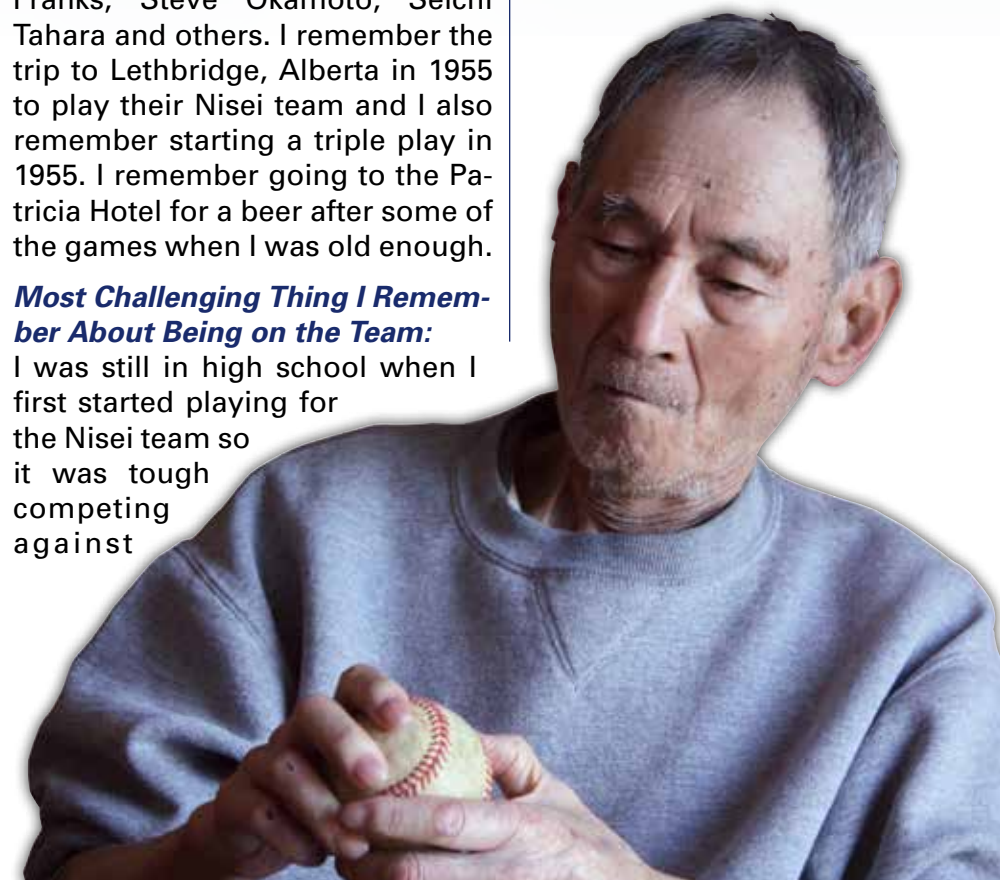
Best Memories:

I felt fortunate I got to catch for some of the best pitchers on our team like Ron Montgomery, Merv Franks, Steve Okamoto, Seichi Tahara and others. I remember the trip to Lethbridge, Alberta in 1955 to play their Nisei team and I also remember starting a triple play in 1955. I remember going to the Patricia Hotel for a beer after some of the games when I was old enough.

**Most Challenging Thing I Remember
About Being on the Team:**

I was still in high school when I first started playing for the Nisei team so it was tough competing against

older, more experienced players. We as a team had a tough time the first couple of years.



Richard (Dick) Stein

Year of Birth: 1942

I started playing baseball at 11 years old.

Leagues and Teams I Played For:

**Renfrew Heights Little League,
Campbell Cartage, Renfrew Park
Vancouver, 1953 - 1954**

**Inter-City Babe-Ruth League,
Vancouver Optimists, Clinton
Park Vancouver, 1955 - 1957**

**Inter-City Connie Mack,
Vancouver Optimists, Clinton
Park Vancouver, 1958 - 1960**

**Industrial League, Vancouver
Nisei, Powell Grounds,
Vancouver, 1960.**

Position Played

For the Nisei Team: Pitcher

I was born during the war. My father, Alexander (Sandy) Stein, was born in Scotland (1912). My mother, Norma Sakaye Yamabe was born in Vancouver (1914). My mother's parents and siblings



were sent to Taber, Alberta. I have the faintest memory of going to my grandfather's funeral in Taber as a child. After the war, my grandmother, 2 uncles and 1 aunt resettled in Rutland, BC in the early 1950's.

With the Nisei, I had a very short stint as a player; but as a youth going to the games with my father, I felt the team displayed a certain energy - which was hard to explain - there was a passion to prove they were the best team on the field! Nowadays you would say the team had great "chemistry."

My memories evolve around that patch of dirt called Powell Grounds. There was that "crazy-woman" heckler in the stands along with the fans "sleeping-it-off" in left field. I remember the umpires, Abe Mortimer & Carl Hannisack adding color to the games. The team banquets at the Sun Peking Restaurant were memorable.

I was playing with the "Big-Boys" now. The challenge for me was to stay focused and aggressive at the same time.

I knew in my heart that next to my mother, my father loved the Nisei Baseball Team and all the people involved with Nisei baseball.

Hubbo Matsuzaki

Year of Birth: 1929

Our family lived in Steveston, BC. and our father worked as a fish collector. My parents had 8 children so we were a family of 10. During the war, our family was sent to Kaslo, BC where I graduated from high school. Our family returned to Richmond around 1950.

Leagues and Teams I Played For:

Nisei team in Kaslo (late teens)

**Industrial Union Baseball League,
Vancouver JCCA Nisei Team
1951 - 1956**

Position: Catcher and Outfielder

My brother-in-law Joe Miyazawa was married to my sister Toyo

and in 1951 he was the Nisei Team Business Manager, and asked me to join the team.

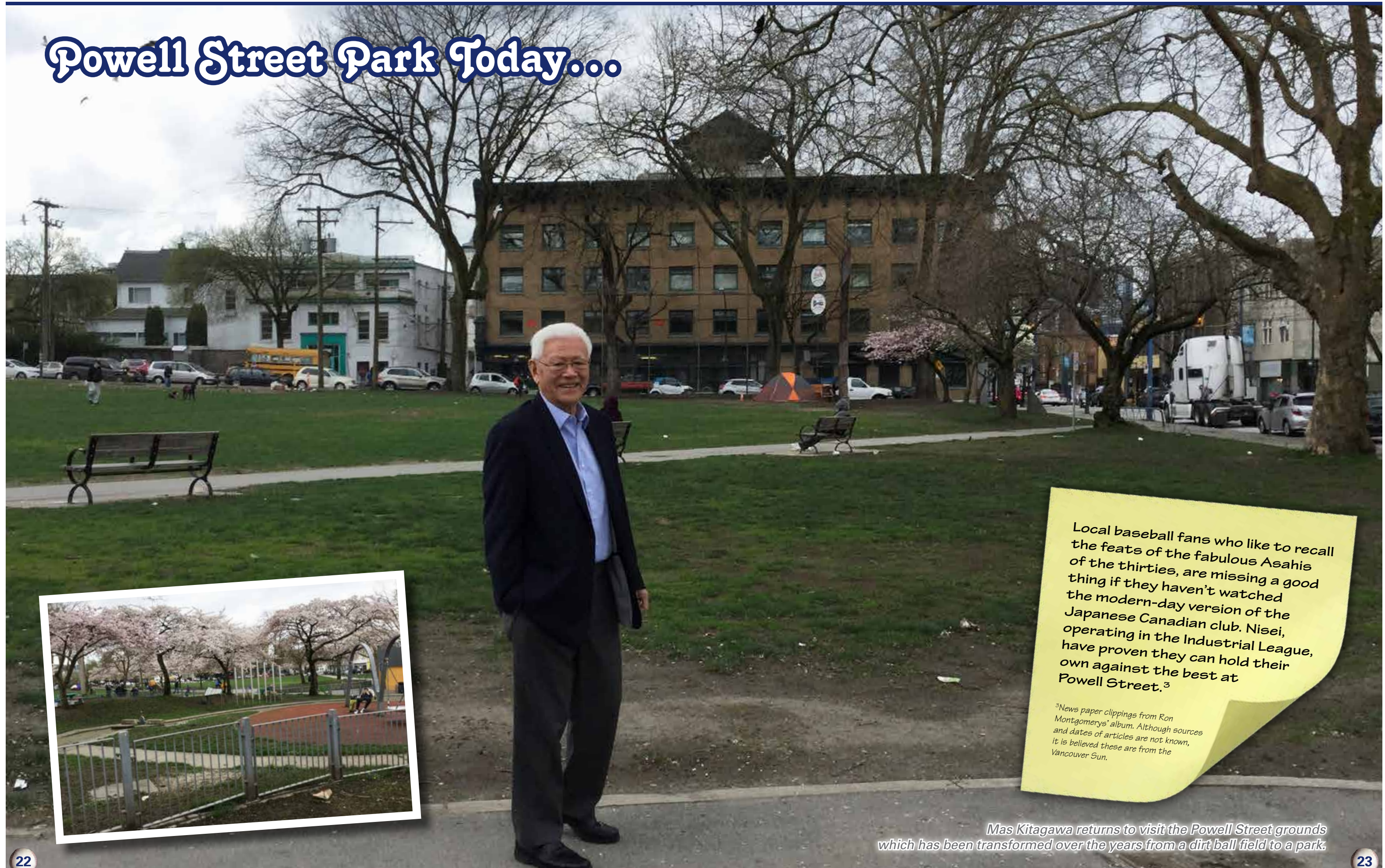


From the Dugout...

"With the Nisei's trailing 4-3 in the nightcap, Hubbo Matsuzaki hit a pinch-hit grand slam homer to give the JCCA nine a stronghold on second place. Matsuzaki's wallop sailed 400 feet into Jackson Street."

Aug 13, 1955 The New Canadian

Powell Street Park Today...



Local baseball fans who like to recall the feats of the fabulous Asahis of the thirties, are missing a good thing if they haven't watched the modern-day version of the Japanese Canadian club. Nisei, operating in the Industrial League, have proven they can hold their own against the best at Powell Street.³

³News paper clippings from Ron Montgomery's album. Although sources and dates of articles are not known, it is believed these are from the Vancouver Sun.

Mas Kitagawa returns to visit the Powell Street grounds which has been transformed over the years from a dirt ball field to a park.

Nisei

1951-1960



Some members got together several times between February and April 2017 to work on their Nisei Baseball memories booklet. Left to Right: Mas Kitagawa, Ron Montgomery, Eddie Hayashi, Elmer Mori, Bill Haraga and Bob Miyagishima.

From the Dugout...

VANCOUVER NISEI'S LAUDED FOR GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

The Nisei's, the Japanese Canadian baseball team which played a double-header in Parksville over the weekend set a splendid example of real sportsmanship. On and off the field, the visitors conducted themselves in a manner which was a pleasure to observe.

July 25, 1953 The New Canadian

A special thank you to the following people who made this project possible:

- **Mas Kitagawa** who spent a lot of hours driving around the lower mainland collecting information and pictures for this project.
- **Elmer (El) Mori** for initiating the research, organizing meetings, and helping coordinate this project.
- **Linda Kawamoto Reid**, Research Archivist at Nikkei National Museum who helped research information, shared artifacts about the team, and allowed us to visit the Museum and take our own photos of some artifacts.
- **Geri Prior** for the researching, crosschecking and keying of all the data, writing the introduction pages and helping coordinate players' submissions.
- **Keith Mori**, for graphic design, layout and scanning of original pictures. Arranged with the Nikkei Museum to access original artifacts so that a photo session could be scheduled for the uniform, cap and pennant.
- **Western Imperial Magnetics Ltd.** for printing this project at cost for each family who contributed.
- **Barb Darroch**, who photographed original artifacts at the Nikkei Museum.

We would also like to thank **Melissa Franks** who while not related to the team, has generously given of her time to help us research and track down some players, simply because she likes to research.

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