



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
THUNDERBIRD STADIUM
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

DRAFT 23 February 2016

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE THUNDERBIRD STADIUM

INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Significance has been drafted following archival research, interviews with people familiar with the building's beginnings and long history, site analysis and direct observation of the building.

This statement of significance will assist in the weighing of options for its future.

Background

The stadium was completed in 1967 in response to the need for more athletic field space. It was a University Board of Governors initiative with the funding support of the grad class of 1967.

The stadium is recognizable for its dramatic cable-suspended cantilevered roof floating over raked seating on the slope formed to transition between entry ground level and playing field sunk into the landscape. The tower/cable-suspension system features twelve 80-foot high leaning precast concrete support towers that are in a fanned configuration geometrically related to the (now removed) track. Each tower is capped with a precast concrete sculpture: a stylized rendition of the Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw thunderbird. These sculptural pieces are now part of the campus public art tour collection.

The stadium's ground floor plan displays an efficient and dramatic sequence of spaces from the parking lot past various team and sport support spaces to the stands overlooking the field. The geometry of the stands and field, and fire access route between the two, lead to the viewer in the stands feeling somewhat distant from the action on the field.

While access was seemingly less an issue in the car-oriented world of the 1960s and 1970s, the stadium's location at the far south end of the cleared campus lands make it a challenging venue as a central cultural space for the University community. As the campus



Top: View of stadium from playing field
Bottom: Stadium from north



has developed southward, Thunderbird Stadium has become a more present University institution.

Thunderbird Stadium architect was Vladimir Plavsic, a Vancouver architect who represented the influx of immigrants who left Europe after the World War II or defected from Eastern bloc countries during the Cold War and enriched the design community of the West Coast. Locally known for his buildings featuring an expressive use of technically innovative structure, Plavsic's most recognizable innovations are the great 1960s gullwing-formed laminated wood roof structures for Canada Safeway.

The distinctive structural design is by Bogue Babicki, another post-WWII Eastern European immigrant to Canada who greatly influenced the Vancouver design community with his innovative structural design and aesthetically collaborative approach.



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Description

Thunderbird Stadium is a sports venue at the south end of West Mall at The University of British Columbia Vancouver Campus. The building is set on a slope at the playing field's eastern edge, and features seating that is covered by a cantilevered roof hung from twelve prominent leaning concrete towers.

Heritage Value

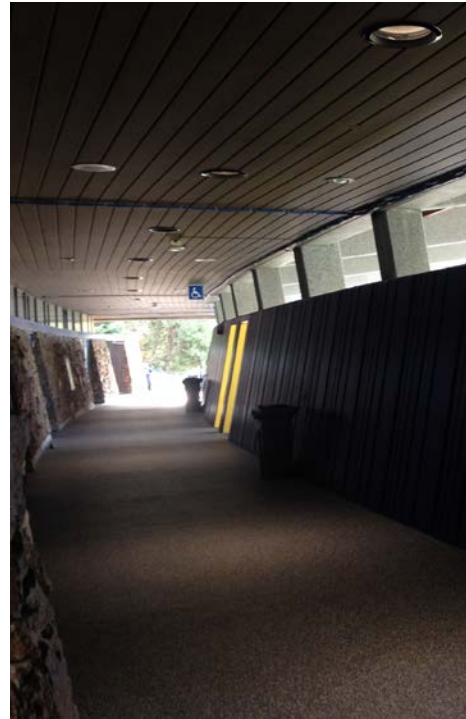
Built in 1967, Thunderbird Stadium is principally important for its setting, its structural expression and its integration of building, site and use. It is also valued for its long history as a campus and regional sport and cultural venue.

Thunderbird Stadium is an important example of the expression of function in form that is a hallmark of Modernist design. Its crescent-shaped plan and raked seating are a response to the geometries of viewing track and field events as well as field games, and the logistics of audience access and egress. Ground floor planning sets up an efficient and dramatic sequence of spaces from the parking lot and entry, past ancillary rooms for team sports, to the stands overlooking the field.

The stadium is important for its Modernist integration of building and site, which features a ground plane manipulated to produce a low-silhouette building with a large covered seating area, and raked stadium seating flanked by mass plantings of low shrubbery.

Thunderbird Stadium is also important for displaying many characteristics of institutional building materials and details that are typical of its time, such as precast concrete, the cable-suspended cantilevered roof, and strip windows separating stone-faced walls and the roof structure that imparts a floating quality to the roof.

The stadium is an important expression of the cooperation of the University and the Kwakwaka'wakw community, who in 1948 with Musqueam permission formally authorized the use of the title and imagery of the thunderbird – an important cultural feature of the



Top: Passage leading to stands from entrance
Bottom: View of field from passage to stands



Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw people – for the name of UBC athletic teams, an evolution from University's 1930s culturally inappropriate mis-appropriation of the name.

Thunderbird Stadium is important for its association with the evolution of the University's relationship with the Musqueam, who participated in the 1948 ceremony and its renewal in 2005, and because the use of the thunderbird by UBC teams is (uniquely for a university) a symbol of the University's relationship with Indigenous people.

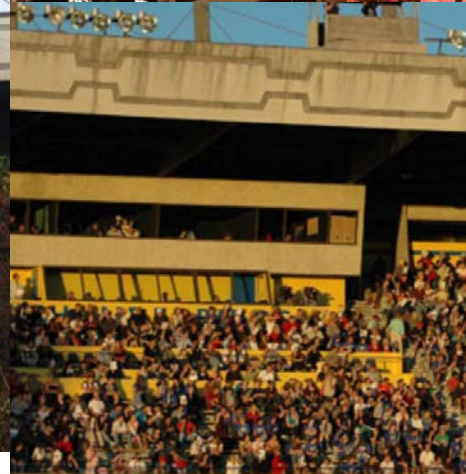
The stadium is important as one centre of campus life, and for its history of the University's Thunderbird team athletic and entertainment events. It is also valued as a regional sporting facility, used by professional soccer teams and regional recreational leagues, helping the University function as a region-wide facility.

The stadium is culturally and socially important as a University institution that attracts alumni support and funding for facility improvement and program development.

Character-defining Elements

- Setting open to the forest and sky to the south and west
- Planted banks forming a bowl
- Cable-suspended cantilevered roof structure:
 - Precast support towers
 - Cables fanning from each support tower
 - Cantilevered roof canopy with wood board soffit
- Stylized thunderbird precast concrete tower caps
- Battered walls facing parking lot using Squamish stone
- Strip windows separating battered walls from roof
- Precast concrete fascia panels with decorative work edging the roof structure
- Raked covered seating, with top of seating at parking lot level
- Battered retaining wall flanking covered stadium seating
- Playing field
- Blue and yellow Thunderbird team colouring of some building elements
- History of ceremonies, games and events held in the stadium

THUNDERBIRD STADIUM



- Left Top: Structure under construction (UBC Archives)
 Bottom: View of stadium from south
- Middle Top: Stadium seating
 Top Middle: Music concert at stadium
 Bottom Middle: Game time view of stands
 Bottom: Team posing on field with western forest and sky in background
- Right Battered stone-faced wall at entry



THUNDERBIRD STADIUM





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| Left | Top: | View of stadium from playing field |
| | Middle: | View of stadium (UBC Archives) |
| | Bottom: | Athletic event seen from stands |
| Middle | Top: | Stadium seen from parking lot |
| | Middle: | Stadium as backdrop for team picture |
| | Bottom: | Glass block wall, change room areas |
| Right | Bottom: | Stadium under construction (UBC Archives) |





IS FOOTBALL

