
From Tal Brody to European Champions: Early Americanization and the “Golden Age” of Israeli Basketball, 1965-1979

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In the State of Israel, basketball follows only soccer as the country's most popular sport. It is played by amateurs of all ages and at all levels, as well as by highly skilled and very well-paid professionals. Thousands of people throughout the country crowd arenas to watch basketball games, while many others view basketball games on television. Yet, Israeli basketball is a unique case: it is located geographically in Asia, competes in Europe, and is dominated by imported American players.

At present more than 100 American-born basketball players—both men and women—now play in Israel's top two professional leagues. However, this has not always been the case. It was not until 1965, seventeen years after the establishment of the State of Israel, when American players began to take part in Israeli basketball. The first influx of American players, most of them Jewish, to the Israeli basketball league occurred from about the

mid 1960s to the mid 1970s.¹ The recruitment of Tal Brody, a Jewish player from the United States, by the Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team was the crucial event that completely changed Israeli basketball.²

Among other things, Brody's arrival in 1965 signified the beginning of an accelerated Americanization process that brought with it novel ideas, perceptions, and working norms that would change Israeli basketball substantially.³ American influences, no doubt, contributed to the so-called "golden age" of Israeli basketball during the 1970s, when Maccabi Tel Aviv won the European Champions Cup for the first time in 1977 and then two years later when the Israeli national team won the silver medal at the European national championships.

The early stages of Americanization—particularly the above-mentioned achievements of the late 1970s—turned basketball into Israel's "Number One Sport." Even though Israeli basketball has experienced many great triumphs since then,⁴ those two events have symbolized the completion of the early stages of its Americanization and left an indelible mark in the collective memory of the Israeli populace. The primary reason for this lasting impression was the social and historical impact created by Americanization and the two premier international victories that extend far beyond the relatively narrow confines of basketball. In keeping with the assumption of Eric Dunning and Norbert Elias⁵ that knowledge about a nation's sports is knowledge about that nation's society, we have analyzed the early stages of Americanization of Israeli basketball⁶ within the framework of significant events occurring within Israel from 1965 to 1979.

Sport in Israel, and basketball in particular, cannot be understood without taking into account the social and historical context of the country. Correspondingly, in order to have a better understanding of Israeli basketball, one must bear in mind the changing structure of Israeli society and the many interdependent and dynamic processes involved in the shaping of a particular sport. In analyzing these processes of change, we will follow in Eric Dunning and Ken Sheard's footsteps.⁷ Those authors, who used the term "social configuration" to refer to the structures and patterns formed by interdependent human beings, also stress the need to use terms ending in the suffix "-ization" to refer to the procedural aspect of these configurations and to emphasize that such configurations change over time. Similarly, the use here of terms such as "professionalization," "secularization," "urbanization," and "militarization" emphasizes the process through which basketball developed in Israel. For that reason, the Americanization of Israeli basketball, which forms the centerpiece of this paper, must be examined within the context of such processes that are interdependent upon one another rather than isolated from each other.

The Early State of Basketball: A Struggle for Dominance

From the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 until the 1980s, basketball in Israel was embedded in the political realm, as were most other sports. Sport in Israel was controlled by four competing nation-wide federations that were affiliated with political parties. The Hapoel federation, the largest one, was affiliated with the Histadrut (the Federation of Labor in Israel), and through the Histadrut to the center/left-wing dominant parties of that period. The Maccabi federation was affiliated with the General Zionist Party that drew its support from the middle class. The Beitar federation identified with

Herut, a right-wing political party, and the Elitzur federation was aligned with the Mafdas—the National Religious Party. Since 1962 the Israel Basketball Association (IBA) operated as an independent non-government organization,⁸ but in effect it was controlled by the federations. The presidency of the IBA, the directorate, and management, and other positions were decided upon and divided among the federations.

The federations competed among themselves in order to protect their institutional and political interests, although on certain issues,⁹ cooperation was also possible. They sometimes interfered with running the leagues in order to prevent the relegation of a favored team. In other instances, they interfered in order to ensure a spot for “their” players on the national team. All federations, especially in early years of Israeli statehood, advocated maintaining the amateur status of the game, opposed the involvement of private capital in managing the clubs, and prevented the mobility of players, insisting they remain amateurs rather than turn basketball into a professional sport. This agenda was congruent with the aims of different political parties that controlled the federations, and it also matched the economic situation and the hegemonic political-cultural atmosphere in Israel at that time.¹⁰

More specifically, during the 1950s and the early 1960s, Israel’s national identity was in a process of consolidation, which was highly politicized. Moreover, this was a period characterized by mass immigration, economic deprivation, and the state’s effort to ensure its hegemony. Accordingly, the political affiliation of sport in general, including basketball, was instrumental in accomplishing these tasks and completing these processes. Basketball clubs were affiliated with politically-oriented federations, with players, and even more with fans, being highly conscious of and even frequently supporting the political side of their favored team. Games between clubs reached far beyond basketball and more often became a clash between parties and ideologies. For example, a match between a club from the Hapoel federation (affiliated with the governing Mapai/Labor party) and a club from the Maccabi federation (affiliated with the General Zionist/Liberal opposition party) reflected a major political rift of that period. Thus, from its establishment, the Israeli basketball league, like most other sports in Israel, was characterized by power struggles for control of the game.

The Israeli basketball league was established in 1955, though attempts to establish such a league had been made before that but animosity between the two major sport organizations, Hapoel and Maccabi, frustrated those efforts. Their “crown jewel” basketball teams have engaged in a continuous struggle to overpower and out duel one another.¹¹ From 1955 to 1965 when Americans began to infiltrate Israeli basketball, Maccabi Tel Aviv dominated the twelve-team league, winning seven championships, coming in second twice, and finished third once. At the same time, Hapoel Tel Aviv won three championships, finished second five times, and placed third or fourth each once.¹²

The continuous struggle for dominance between Maccabi and Hapoel had major implications for Israeli basketball. As each club recruited talented players from around the country, the Hapoel-Maccabi rivalry forced the top players to choose sides, in effect preventing talented players on Hapoel from moving to Maccabi and vice versa. The rivalry also widened the existing gap between the elite players and the rest of league. However, upon entering the European Cup competition in the early 1960s, both Hapoel and Maccabi

Tel Aviv needed to expand their pools of talented players who would help them advance in the early rounds of the tournament or, at the very least, enable them to perform respectably. Within the context of this background and the desire to attract highly skilled players, the Americanization of Israeli basketball had begun.

The First Americans

According to Michael Karnon, a well-known basketball journalist of the 1960s and current spokesperson for Maccabi Tel-Aviv, Israeli teams were not the only ones to perform poorly in European Cup tournaments. During the early 1960s, the superiority of Eastern European teams, particularly those from the former Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, reduced the level of meaningful competition in the European arena.¹³ As a consequence, The FIBA (Fédération Internationale Basketball Association) general secretary, Dr. William Jones, summoned the FIBA general assembly to discuss the problem. The proposed solution was destined to change radically the face of European basketball because FIBA would now allow European teams to acquire players from outside the continent in order to make the game more competitive at Europe's top level. FIBA's decision was made after taking into consideration the changing nature of European sport in general and basketball in particular. The significance of sport was growing, especially sporting competitions between nations involved one way or another in the "Cold War." In this context Eric Dunning identifies the growing achievement in and social significance of sport as a trend occurring at all levels of participation but most conspicuously in top-level sport, such as European basketball. This trend has also involved a gradual shift from "amateur" attitudes, values, and structures toward "professional" ones.¹⁴ Dunning further argues that this trend reflected the transformation of sport from a marginal, lowly valued institution to one that is central and much more highly valued, becoming a central source of identification, meaning, and gratification in the lives of many people.

The first team to take advantage of FIBA's new dispensation was Real Madrid of Spain. The Spanish team was the first to "import" players from basketball's homeland, the United States, a move that enabled them to defeat CSKA Moscow in 1964 to claim the European title for the first time. It was generally accepted that the Spanish could not have done so without the help of American players. Soon, other European teams followed the example of the Spanish club and recruited American players. The Milanese basketball club, Zimmental, went one step farther. When former NBA player (and later U.S. senator) Bill Bradley accepted a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford University in England, Zimmental hired his services for their games around Europe and paid his expenses in addition to his salary.

The Israeli teams, primarily Maccabi and Hapoel Tel Aviv, did not lag far behind their European counterparts. The seventh "Maccabiah Games," (known as the "Jewish Olympic Games")¹⁵ was organized by the world Maccabi organization and held in Israel in 1965. It attracted the top Jewish athletes from around the world, one of whom was Tal Brody, a member of the American Jewish basketball team. Quickly, he became the target of Maccabi Tel Aviv administrators who persuaded him to stay in Israel after the games and join the Maccabi Tel Aviv team. Looking back on his basketball career, Brody recalled:

At the beginning of the 1960s I was ranked as one of the ten best players in the

United States. I was well known in the Jewish community and when they organized a team for the Maccabiah games in Israel, I was invited to join. I was born and raised in a Jewish family and it was a great opportunity to visit a country I had only heard about. I was sure that Israel was a primitive country and transportation meant horses and camels. Therefore I was surprised to find a civilized country with a fair standard of living. When Maccabi Tel Aviv administrators talked to me about being a pioneer I accepted the challenge and stayed in Israel after the games.¹⁶

At the same time, Hapoel Tel Aviv administrators asked Bill Wald, an American physical educator who came to teach in Israel, to join their team. Wald eventually joined Hapoel Tel Aviv, and he became the first ever American to play for the Israeli national team as a “new immigrant,” taking advantage of the “law of return.” This law made Israel a Zionist state (i.e., the state of the entire Jewish people), guaranteed all Jews the right to immigrate to Israel, and extended immediate Israeli citizenship to Jewish immigrants.

During the 1966-1967 season, American players began to participate regularly. Tal Brody of Maccabi proved to be the most dominant player in the league. Maccabi coach Joshua Rozin changed his team’s style of play in order to let Brody perform at peak efficiency. When questioned about the changes that Rozin installed to capitalize on his speed and quickness, Brody stated:

Joshua had to change the pace of the game. Up until that time Maccabi’s game was based on their tall man, Cohen-Mintz, and therefore was very slow. I introduced a whole new approach to the game. Maccabi’s game style changed from a slow game to a motion game based on “fast breaks.”¹⁷

Sparked by Brody’s play, Maccabi Tel Aviv did very well during that season, winning the Israeli league championship as well as battling the top European team for supremacy on the international level. When Maccabi Tel Aviv reached the finals of the European Cup, the popularity of basketball increased all over Israel. Moreover, basketball had become the most successful Israeli sport in terms of international competition.

Maccabi Tel Aviv’s success occurred in the same year as one of the major turning points in Israel’s history—its victory in the Six-Day War.¹⁸ Maccabi’s success in basketball added to Israel’s high and generally positive profile in Europe, and the team may have served as an unofficial ambassador of the country. This was important because Israel, as an emerging and peripheral nation at the time, not only had to protect its borders, but it also had to preserve its standing among the nations of the world. As noted by Elias and Dunning, a nation’s success in international sport can also help in the international political arena, serving as a status symbol of that nation, as well as a symbolic representative of a non-violent, non-military form of competition between states.¹⁹

To keep up with the developing popularity of the game, Israel built more and more indoor basketball courts as the game started to flourish. However, in 1967 Israel did more than keep pace with the growing demand for opportunities to play and watch basketball when it constructed the “Yad Eliahu” Basketball Stadium, one of the largest sports stadia in Europe and the Mideast at that time. According to the sociologist John Wilson, nations, especially those in the process of building an identity, quite often tend to divert national resources to large and highly visible projects, such as sports stadia and complexes, in order to gain prestige and accelerate the process of identity building.²⁰

The popularity of basketball grew in direct proportion to the success of Maccabi Tel Aviv in Europe. Thus, in the summer of 1967, when Brody announced that he was returning to the United States to fulfill his military obligations there, basketball administrators fretted over the impact of his departure. Even though Brody promised to return, Israeli officials thought his absence would devastate the Maccabi Tel Aviv team and lower the status of basketball in Israel. Tal Brody was much more than just a good basketball player, insisted Ralph Klein, Brody's long-time mentor and Israel's most successful basketball coach at the time:

Tal's contribution to the game was above and beyond the basketball court. His attitude towards the game, his seriousness and his commitment inspired everyone who played with him. He introduced a whole new perception and we just followed him. You have to understand that basketball, for us at that time, was a fun game but not more than that, a game. In just one year Tal changed that. Up until that time we only heard about the American perception of the game and Tal showed us that basketball is more than a game—it's a way of life.²¹

It did not take Maccabi Tel Aviv administrators long to respond to Brody's absence. Later that year, they traveled to the United States in search of a comparable replacement. At the same time, Hapoel Tel Aviv administrators, faced with a similar problem, promptly responded with the same solution. While Maccabi Tel Aviv administrators came back from America with two Jewish-American players, Hapoel brought four. These recruitment missions changed the dynamics of Israeli basketball. In assessing their impact, Naftali Goshen, Israel Basketball Association secretary, stated, "If one should put a finger on the beginning of the American massive influence on Israeli basketball, the 1968 season would probably be a good point to start looking."²²

Hapoel Tel Aviv, in attempting to challenge the dominance of Maccabi, brought back four Jewish Americans—Mark Torenshein, Larry Zolot, Allen Zuckerman, and Ivan Linshisky. Linshisky invited his American friend, Barry Leibovich, to visit him in Israel. Leibovich was added to the team after his stellar performances during practice sessions impressed the Hapoel coach. At the same time, Maccabi Tel Aviv signed Barry Eisenman and Bob Podhurst. The *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper billed the battle between the two Tel Aviv teams as "the best show in town."²³ Other league games could not equal the attractiveness of those in which the Americans played. Israeli basketball fans looked forward to the round of league play that pitted Hapoel and Maccabi Tel Aviv against each other in the derby game, an important match between local rivals.²⁴

While the two teams prepared for the big game to be played in the fourth round, Maccabi Tel Aviv administrators tried to win the game off the basketball court. Realizing that their team was no match for Hapoel with Barry Leibovich, Noah Kliger, Maccabi Tel Aviv chairman, appealed to FIBA, calling for the disqualification of Leibovich because of his past history as a professional player in the United States. Kliger argued that "it wouldn't be right for a professional player to take part in an amateur league."²⁵ FIBA disqualified Leibovich, giving notice of its decision just eight hours before the derby game. This was another blow in the ongoing off-court power struggle between the two rivals; Maccabi Tel Aviv won the first round. Yet on the basketball court itself, it was Hapoel Tel Aviv that won. Hapoel did not just defeat Maccabi Tel Aviv in that derby game, but it also won the league championship later that year.

The Leibovich affair raised the issue of amateurism which had never been considered previously in Israel. According to FIBA rules, basketball players should be amateurs. An examination of the Israel Basketball Association rule book, which was written when the IBA was established in 1962, proved beyond a doubt that the IBA followed the FIBA ruling on the amateur issue. Section 5 clearly states:

- A. Sport teams will be accepted to the IBA only if their players are amateurs.
- B. "Amateur" . . . is a sportsman that engages in sport only out of passion for the game without pay or remuneration of any kind except for payment for loss of working hours or days as will be decided by the IBA.²⁶

Notwithstanding this rule, it was clear that the notion of "amateur" as scholars²⁷ define it, namely "one who participates in sport because of love for the sport"²⁸ applied only partly to the case of Israeli basketball in the 1960s. While some teams at the beginning of the 1960s still held amateur status, others, particularly those that participated in the European cups (i.e., Maccabi and Hapoel Tel Aviv) could no longer be considered amateurs. As Stan Eitzen observes, societal forces had transformed sport from the amateur ideal into something unrecognizable with elite or top-level sport becoming corporate sport.²⁹ In the case of Israeli basketball, the "societal forces" were the increasing number of American players who came to Israel in the late 1960s.

Eitzen addressed another related issue that might also apply to Israeli basketball when he raised the question: "If sport is a microcosm of society, then is true amateurism possible in a capitalist society?"³⁰ The answer in the case of Israeli basketball in the 1960s is not simple. One may argue that the Israeli economic system at that time was not a "pure" capitalist system, at least not when compared to the American system, but it was definitely in the process of becoming more capitalistic. According to the sociologist Amir Ben-Porat, some important changes occurred in Israeli economics and politics during the 1960s. One of those important developments was a state-led program of industrialization, which created some significant changes in the labor market including a substantial increase in the number of engineers, technicians, and managers.³¹ Ben-Porat argues that these changes were accompanied by a growing imbalance of incomes among people in the labor force, with capitalists becoming less subjected to state control. Similarly, Eliezer Schweid explained that Israel was able to impede the effects of post-modernism that America represented until the Six-Day War, by applying social and economic policies dictated by the need to absorb masses of immigrants. According to Schweid, these barriers fell after the Six-Day War, and the influence of the political, social, and cultural conceptions of post-World War II American liberalism penetrated Israeli society with great momentum.³²

This ethos of individualism and competitiveness that permeates Israel's society has coincided, according to those (such as Schweid) who are concerned for Israel's "indigenous" culture, with the gradual dismantling of the Israeli welfare system and, some would say, the social cohesion that made Israel feel in many ways like one large family. However, in some parts of Israeli society, especially in the *kibbutzim*³³ and other rural settlements, the economic system was still very much a socialist one. Because teams from both rural and urban areas in Israel participated in the same basketball league, an increasing gap developed among the values of players representing different social backgrounds. For example, a 1970 report issued by members of the IBA presidency³⁴ referred to the issue urban teams

and admitted on the one hand that “the rule book no longer faces up to the test of reality, as far as amateurism is concerned. The IBA is no longer supervising the payments that are being given to athletes and the teams are paying their players whatever market conditions dictate.” On the other hand, however, teams from the “working settlements” (mostly the *kibbutzim*) were “acting according to the inter-kibbutz codes and not only did not pay their players but also had to release their players from 4 hours of work on the day of a contest”!³⁵

This conflict almost led to the disbanding of teams and the formation of separate amateur and professional leagues,³⁶ but eventually it did not. The influx of American players in the late 1960s and early 1970s forced the teams from the *kibbutzim* to unite in order to sign players from outside the *kibbutz* and to attract and pay imported players, particularly Americans. Amalgamation enabled *kibbutz* administrators to be represented in top-level basketball, a very important step in elevating their status. Although the population of *kibbutzim* represented only 4 percent of Israel’s entire population, the number of teams participating in the various basketball leagues (including women) reached 40 percent.

The American Influx and Jewish Nationality

The success of American players in the Israeli league, which in the 1960s consisted of twelve teams, encouraged team managers to sign more American players, in an attempt to maintain or improve their teams’ success. Consequently, the number of Americans playing in the Israeli basketball league rose dramatically, from two players in the 1966-1967 season, to eight in the 1968-1969 season, to ten in 1972-1973. By 1974-1975, twenty-four American players (40 percent of the “starting fives”) were playing basketball in the league. The large number of American players and their increasing dominance in the league caused the IBA to call a meeting to discuss the impact and consequences of the Americanization of Israeli basketball. In 1976 the IBA committee issued the following statement which is contained in its report:

If in the past, new Jewish Americans played basketball on a few teams and even on the National team, in the last five years we have been witnessing a phenomenon where American players are joining top basketball clubs and their primary target is to play basketball. These players—25 to date—came after being drafted in the U.S by Israeli team representatives. They do not have other jobs and their major source of income is basketball. When it comes to their civic duties as new citizens, only two of them have been drafted into the army. In the past, we [the IBA] tried to restrict the participation of American players by legislation that would postpone their eligibility to play to one year from their immigration to Israel. However, we met with strong opposition, especially from the Jewish Agency, which claimed that we might be violating these newcomers’ rights as far as “Law of Return” is concerned.³⁷

The perceived problem of American players was exacerbated when some team managers seemed ready to do almost anything to qualify their new players as new Jewish immigrants. This practice, entwined in the Americanization of Israeli basketball, prompted the question of “Who is a Jew?” That question has been of great relevance for the development of Israel as a nation, far beyond the development of Israeli sport in general and

basketball in particular.

The Problem of Defining a Jew and the Law of Return

The Law of Return, passed in 1950, guaranteed all Jews the right to immigrate to Israel. Along with the Nationality Law, passed in 1952, which granted Israeli citizenship to people (including non-Jews) who lived in the country prior to 1948, the Law of Return also extended to Jewish immigrants (unless they specifically deferred citizenship or renounced it) immediate Israeli citizenship. Non-Jewish immigrants could acquire citizenship through a slower process of naturalization.³⁸

The problem of what constituted Jewish “nationality” (*leom* in Hebrew) was essentially new. Before the modern era, one was a Jew (in the eyes of Jews and Gentiles alike) by religious criteria; to renounce the religion meant renouncing one’s membership in the community. In modern nation-states, membership (citizenship) and religion were formally and conceptually independent: one could be a British, French, or American citizen of “Jewish persuasion.” But the modern State of Israel presented special opportunities for Jews—the right to both settle in the country and to claim automatic Israeli citizenship. Thus, Israeli citizenship was therefore “inherent in being a Jew,” as once stated by Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion.³⁹ With these opportunities came both formal and conceptual problems about the definition of a person’s right to claim to be a Jew.

The still existing predominance of *halakhah* (the Jewish religious code) and religious courts in adjudicating matters of personal status dates back to the so-called “status quo” arrangements worked out between the Labor Zionists (headed by Ben-Gurion) and the Jewish Orthodox parties on the eve of statehood in 1947 in order to guarantee Jewish unity in the struggle for independence.⁴⁰ According to *halakhic*, a Jew is one born of a Jewish mother or who converts in line with *halakhic* law. Thus, the traditional criteria of being a Jew consist of biology (descent) and religion. In a sense, biology dominates religion because, according to *halakhah*, someone remains a Jew if born of a Jewish mother, even if he or she converts to another religion, although such a person is referred to as “one who has destroyed himself.”

Another related problem is that of defining “nationality.” Such an issue is of concern in a modern state and particularly to its minister of interior. Moreover, in a modern state interest is taken in the nationality question as part of the determination of citizenship with all its associated rights and duties. Orthodox Jews, however, are less concerned with nationality as a guide to citizenship but much more concerned with nationality as it determines “proper” marriage partners with the attendant legitimacy of children. This issue has been crucial for the existence and continuation of Jewish communities throughout Jewish history and therefore is considered critical by the Orthodox in Israel. Against this background, one can understand much of the “Who is a Jew?” question and the vigor with which the various positions have been taken over the years.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the “Who is a Jew?” debate arose time and again in various ways.⁴¹ For example, in 1960 an Orthodox minister of interior directed the Bureau of the Registration of Inhabitants to define a Jew by administrative fiat as “a person born of a Jewish mother who does not belong to another religion, or one who has converted in accordance with religious law.”⁴² This definition was not strictly *halakhic*, be-

cause an apostate is still a Jew according to *halakhab* but not according to this definition. In 1962 the Supreme Court upheld the ministry's definition. Orthodox Jews rose up in defiance; Prime Minister Golda Meir backed down, and in 1970, after fierce debate, the Knesset adopted an amendment to the Law of Return that validated and legalized the 1960 administrative directive; thus: a Jew is one "born to a Jewish mother, or who has become converted to Judaism, and who is not a member of another religion."⁴³ What the Orthodox did not win, however, was the proviso that the conversion to Judaism must have been carried out in conformance with *halakhab*. Thus the status of conversions carried out by reform or conservative rabbis in the Diaspora remained in question in the eyes of the religious minority in Israel. Similar debates have been carried out repeatedly with regard to the question of Jewishness of the Karaites (a schismatic Jewish sect of the eighth century that rejected the legitimacy of rabbinical law), the Bene Yisrael (Jews from near Bombay, India, who immigrated in large numbers in the 1950s), and from the 1970s onward, Jews from Ethiopia—the Falashas,⁴⁴ with the problem of defining a "Jew" still remains one of the most controversial issues in Israel today.⁴⁵

The growing importance of sport in general, and the increasing popularity of basketball in particular, led to a process in which many groups of people, among them basketball managers, tried to take advantage of this complex situation. For example, according to the rules established by the IBA, a "foreigner" (i.e., a player who is not Jewish and therefore cannot claim citizenship) had to wait 365 days before he or she could register to play in the Israeli league. With such conflicts and disputes among the different religious groups, various teams attempted to take advantage of the situation and tried in every possible way to qualify Americans as Jewish in order to play in the Israeli basketball league as Israeli citizens. The pressure to qualify Americans along with the increasing competitiveness of European Cup play forced the IBA in the late 1970s to allow one foreign player for each team, but that player was ineligible to play in local leagues. The new rule allowed Maccabi and Hapoel Tel Aviv, the only teams competing at the European level at that time, to import foreign players to play only in the European tournaments. As a result of these developments, "Maccabi Tel Aviv scrimmages were more interesting than the league games."⁴⁶

Israeli Basketball's "Golden Age"

Israeli basketball's "golden age" coincided with one of the most difficult periods in the history of the state. Many of the processes unfolding in the mid and late 1970s, the third decade of Israeli statehood, were very much interdependent with those experienced by Israeli basketball. These processes—the struggle for existence, maneuverings as part of the "Cold War" between the United States and the Soviet Union, political upheavals resulting from post-war trauma, and class struggles—constituted the setting for what became Israel's most glorious era in European basketball.

According to Ralph Klein, coach of Maccabi Tel Aviv and the Israeli national team in the mid 1970s, the "golden age" of Israeli basketball in general and of Maccabi Tel Aviv in particular, began in 1972 at Zadar, a town in the former Yugoslavia.⁴⁷ Zadar hosted the European youth basketball championship and the Israeli team, consisting of almost entirely of Maccabi Tel Aviv players, finished second. The performance of Miki Berkowitz,

Israel's most talented player in the tournament, was so impressive that an American basketball scout offered him a scholarship to the University of Nevada at Las Vegas (UNLV). The offer, however, had to be postponed because Berkowitz, like every other eighteen-year-old Israeli (no matter how talented an athlete), was scheduled to be drafted into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).⁴⁸ He would have to wait until he completed his military service at the age of twenty-one. The Yom Kippur War broke out while Berkowitz was serving in the army. It involved Israel and two of its surrounding neighbors directly, and the United States and the Soviet Union indirectly. The two superpowers played a major role in the Yom Kippur War, not only as suppliers of equipment and ammunition to opposing armies, but also as catalysts in the negotiating process for a truce and settlement.

On Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, October 6, 1973, Syria and Egypt launched a surprise attack against Israel. In the first few days of the war, Israel lost significant territories; its counterattacks failed, and the IDF suffered hundreds of casualties and lost nearly 150 planes. However, on October 10 the tide of the war turned; the Syrians were driven out of all territories they conquered at the beginning of the war, and on the following day Israeli forces advanced into Syria proper, moving to within twenty kilometers of Damascus. In response, the Soviet Union provided massive airlifts to Damascus and Cairo, which were immediately matched by equally large United States airlifts to Israel. In the south, Israel repelled an Egyptian offensive in the Sinai, and Israeli forces led by General Ariel Sharon crossed the Suez Canal (which was the border before the war) to surround the Egyptian Third Army.

At the urgent request of the Soviet Union, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger went to Moscow to negotiate a cease-fire arrangement. This arrangement found expression in U.N. Security Council Resolution 338.⁴⁹ The resolution called for a cease-fire within twelve hours. However, upon Kissinger's return to Washington, the Soviets announced that Israel had broken the terms of the cease-fire and was threatening to destroy the besieged Egyptian Third Army. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev informed U.S. President Richard Nixon that if the siege were not lifted, the Soviet Union would take unilateral steps. The United States pressured Israel to hold its fire, and the final cease-fire took effect on October 25. On March 5, 1974, Israeli forces withdrew, granting the Egyptian army control over the Suez Canal. Syria and Israel signed a disengagement agreement on May 31, 1974, and the U.N. Disengagement and Observer Force (UNDOF) was established as a peacekeeping force in the Golan Heights between the two armies.

The October 1973 war (Yom Kippur War) had a devastating effect on Israel. More than 6,000 troops were killed or wounded in eighteen days of fighting. The loss of equipment and the decline in production and exports as a consequence of mobilization came to nearly seven billion U.S. dollars, the equivalent of Israel's gross national product for an entire year. Most important, the image of an invincible Israel that had prevailed since the Six-Day War in June of 1967 was destroyed. Whereas the June 1967 War had given Israel in general and the declining Labor Party in particular a badly needed morale boost, the events of October 1973 shook the self-confidence of the country's populace and cast a shadow over the competence of the Labor elite.⁵⁰

Israel's vulnerability during and after the war led to an increasing dependence on military, economic, and diplomatic aid from the U.S. The war set off a spiraling regional

arms race in which Israel was hard pressed to match the Arab states, enjoying the benefits of escalating world oil prices. The vastly improved Arab arsenals forced Israel to spend increasingly on defense, straining its already strapped economy. The emergence of Arab oil—and oil prices—as a political weapon during and after the war further isolated Israel in the world community and dramatized its growing dependence on the United States. This, then, was the background of the developing relationships between European and Israeli basketball, which was accompanied by an increasing Americanization (i.e., a growing dependence of the IBA on American basketball players).

The career of Miki Berkowitz is a good example of these processes. Following his release from the IDF in 1975, he began his studies at UNLV, making him the first Israeli ever to play college basketball in the United States. A year later, at the beginning of the 1976-1977 season, Maccabi Tel Aviv's team included five American players, who were eligible to play for the club on various grounds: Tal Brody, who had returned to Israel in 1971; Bob Griffin and Lou Silver, two Jewish Americans who claimed Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return; Jim Boatright, a Christian American who took advantage of the opportunity given by Israeli law and converted to Judaism in 1975, thus becoming an Israeli citizen; and Aulcie Perry, an African-American "foreigner" who played only in the European Cup. Four of these Americans were always included in the "starting five"; the fifth player, namely Miki Berkowitz, had just returned from the United States and joined the team of his youth, to play a major role in its future success.

Berkowitz returned from the United States to find a changing country. The Labor Party, in power since the establishment of the state in 1948, was hampered by internal dissension, persistent allegations of corruption, ambiguities and contradictions in its political platform, and by the disaffection of Israelis of African or Asian origin.⁵¹ Labor's perceived failure to prepare the country for the Yom Kippur War further alienated a large segment of the electorate. The post-1973 Labor Party's estrangement from the Israeli public intensified throughout 1976 as the party was hit with a barrage of corruption charges that struck at the highest echelons. For example, the minister of housing, Avraham Ofer, was under investigation for alleged abuses during his term in a previous senior office and subsequently committed suicide in January of 1977. At the same time, the governor of the Bank of Israel, Asher Yadlin, who had been nominated by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was sentenced to jail for taking bribes and evading taxes. Finally, Rabin's wife Leah was charged with illegally keeping money in a bank account in the United States.⁵² These examples of corruption, along with a worsening economic situation (caused also by Israel's growing defense expenses and rising world oil prices) led to an increasing alienation within the Asian- and African-Jewish communities that was primarily directed toward the ruling Labor Party.⁵³

In spite of Israel's turbulent political problems, basketball continued to flourish there. The composition of Maccabi Tel Aviv's team in the mid 1970s, which contained five dominant Americans, had a major impact on Israeli basketball. Steve Kaplan, a Jewish-American player who came to Israel at the beginning of the 1970s and made the national team, explained how this composition of Maccabi Tel Aviv's team affected basketball in Israel at that time:

The first impact that the Americans had on basketball in Israel was in the work

ethic. When I came to Israel teams would practice three times a week and play one game a week. No one would put in extra practice time, and working out with weights was almost unheard of. The Americans, for the most part, came over with work habits, which they had learned in college, and this filtered through the system. The best example of this would be Miki Berkowitz, who was a star from his teen years, but only when he went to play at UNLV and saw what was going on, i.e. investment of time and effort, and self discipline, he returned a different player in terms of self improvement. Gradually, other Israeli players, on an individual basis, also began copying Miki in the mid '70's. Up until this time the only Americans playing in the leagues were Jewish Americans, and their impact was as mentioned above.⁵⁴

Maccabi Tel Aviv dominated the Israeli league in 1976-1977 without any real challenge, but more importantly, it reached the final tournament of the European Champions Cup together with the champions of Italy, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Each champion had to face each other twice, one in its own country ("home") and the other in the opponent's country ("away"). Maccabi Tel Aviv did very well in the early stages of the tournament, beating the Italian team, Sinudine Bologna, 103-77, in January of 1977. Due to the political machinations of the Cold War, both the Czechoslovakian team, Zabriobraska Berno, and the Soviet team, CSKA Moscow, refused to play Maccabi Tel Aviv in Israel or grant visas to the Israeli players and host Maccabi Tel Aviv in their respective countries. Maccabi Tel Aviv's chairman, Shimon Mizrachi, petitioned FIBA to award Maccabi automatic victories on technical grounds. Mizrachi also offered to host both teams in Tel Aviv or play them wherever they wished. FIBA ruled in favor of Maccabi Tel Aviv, awarding it two technical victories for the games it should have hosted (one over the Soviets and the other over the Czechoslovakians) and moved to neutral sites the two games Eastern bloc teams were scheduled to host. On February 15, 1977, Maccabi Tel Aviv faced Zabriobzka Berno in Wilbord, a small Belgian town, and defeated the Czechoslovakian team for the first time, 97-67.

Two days later, Maccabi Tel Aviv faced CSKA Moscow. This game, however, was much more than just another basketball game. CSKA was in fact a Soviet army team and during the Cold War was perceived as representing the entire Soviet bloc. It should be noted that Communist sport systems have usually been dominated by clubs of the security forces and the army, with most sports heroes being soldiers or police officers—guardians of public order—and thus significant role models for a disciplined, obedient, and patriotic Communist citizenry.⁵⁵ Without question, the connection between sports and the army had a special role in the life of the Communist state because sport (or rather, "physical culture") carried a particular social and political significance in the development of communist societies. According to James Riordan, eminent authority on sport in the Soviet Union, sport had been quite central in Communist social systems and its connection with the army was also functional in order for the state to control and direct it more effectively.⁵⁶

The game between CSKA Moscow and Maccabi Tel Aviv also had particular significance for the Israelis as media build-up reached a peak on the day of the game. Headlines in all daily papers were all about the battle between the East and the West (*Yediot Aharonot*) or "the fight between David and Goliath (*Maariv*).⁵⁷ After all in the eyes of Israelis, it was

a unique occurrence for a small country of Israel's size with its four million inhabitants to represent the entire Western world against the USSR, a multinational federation of over 290 million people containing more than a hundred nationalities. Moreover, Americans playing for the Israeli team added to the charged atmosphere because it was well known that the Soviets used sport not only to accelerate nation-building and foster national integration but also to glorify the Communist system over the capitalist one.⁵⁸ This East-West conflict, however, had a much greater significance for Israelis, because of the dire situation of Jews—especially Zionists—in the USSR. For example, it was reported that the Maccabi Tel Aviv coach, Ralph Klein, told his players prior to the game that “we are fighting for our country as well as for thousands of Jews who can not immigrate to Israel because of Soviet policy. Let's beat the Soviet bear.”⁵⁹ According to Lou Silver, an American-born Jew and a key Maccabi Tel Aviv player at that time, Klein did not have to say any more. “We were all [the Americans on Maccabi Tel Aviv] raised in the United States,” he said, “where fighting the ‘Reds’ [Communists] was something you didn't have to explain at all.”⁶⁰

Six hundred and fifty people crowded into a sport stadium with an official capacity of 500, in Virton, another small Belgian town, to watch the historic match between CSKA Moscow and Maccabi Tel Aviv—Reds versus Blue and White, East versus West. Both newspapers, the *Maariv* and *Yediot* (February 18, 1977), reported that most of Israel's population, even those who knew nothing about basketball, watched the game on Israel's only television channel broadcasting at that time.⁶¹ Maccabi Tel Aviv's starting five consisted of four players who were born in the United States, but apparently they had listened carefully to Klein's speech (“Do it for the country”). Maccabi Tel Aviv defeated the Soviet team, 91-79, in a game that has become recognized, and remains to this day in the collective memory of the Israeli people, a key event that goes way beyond the game itself to the state's sport history, national identity, and international reputation. Eyal Na'aman, correspondent for *Maariv*, captured the meaning of this victory twenty years later for a special edition of his newspaper:

Up until 17 February 1977, Israeli sport in general and basketball in particular was still innocent. Then it became a winner. Every child wanted to be Berkowitz, every mother wanted to raise one. Tel Aviv's mayor prepared a celebration the likes of which no one had ever seen before. Five bands were specially invited to celebrate with the crowd who gathered in the city center. The last minutes of the game were repeatedly broadcast in schools around the state on the next day. The pool in the city center filled with people splashing in water and champagne. Maccabi Tel Aviv stayed in London for a few more days after the game. The assistant coach, Arie Davidesko, went to the Soviet hotel and asked the Soviet players to sign the ball used in the game as a souvenir. The team knew that the whole country was in ecstasy. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the leader of the opposition, Menachem Begin, sent their greetings and the players' wives, who had stayed in Israel, read the newspaper headlines to their partners that said “Maccabi Tel Aviv did it!” (“Haaretz”, 18 February 1977), “it is really a dream” (“Maariv,” 18 February 1977), and “the night when all of Israel danced in front of the unbelievable vision” (“Yediot Aharonot,” 18 February 1977). El Al pilots fought among themselves for the right to fly Maccabi Tel Aviv back to Israel and the senior pilots won the honour. Other pilots worked as flight

attendants just to be on Maccabi Tel Aviv plane returning from London. At Ben-Gurion airport, workers worked double shifts to join 15,000 people who waited for Maccabi Tel Aviv's players. 500 police officers could not stop the celebrating crowd that kidnapped the players to celebrate in the center of Tel Aviv, where 100,000 people waited with signs welcoming the "hunters of the Russian bear."⁶²

Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory over the Soviets guaranteed them a place in the finals against the Italian champions, Mobilgirgi Varese. For the first time, an Israeli team reached the final of a championship in Europe, not just in basketball but in any sport. The date of April 7, 1977, proved to be one of the most memorable in Israel's history, not only because of Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory over the Italians (78-77) and the team becoming European champions but also because on the very same day, two hours after Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin resigned, ending twenty-nine years of Labor rule in Israel.

On April 8, 1977, the *Haaretz* editorial described Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory: The achievement of the Israeli champion played a major role not just on the sport stage but in the political arena as well. Millions who saw Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory on television all over Europe could not deny what we wanted to prove: we belong to the elite group in sport as well.⁶³

The *Haaretz* editorial was actually a follow-up of Tal Brody's statement upon receiving the European Cup from FIBA's secretary general, Bora Stankovich, when he declared with the cup in his hands, "We are on the map—not just in sport, but in everything!"

As noted by the sociologist Grant Jarvie, international sport and the success of international athletes have often been among the most important symbols of integration for many emerging nations (e.g., in Africa). Victorious athletes not only tended to legitimize their nation within the international arena, but also they incarnate a positive image of that nation.⁶⁴ The underlying assumption behind Jarvie's argument has been that cultural heroes/heroines (along with political leaders) helped to bridge the gap between national and global recognition, with citizens often feeling an affection for the athlete and the nation. Pursuing this very line, it can be argued that Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory in the European Champions Cup incarnated the positive image of Israel. However, and probably even more importantly, it contributed to the legitimacy badly needed by Israel in the international arena at that time.

The victory of Maccabi Tel Aviv in 1977 had another important implication as far as Israel's national identity was concerned. It has often been observed that the importance of sporting achievements takes on an added resonance in countries like Israel that embody large numbers of immigrants from many different parts of the world. For example, the sport sociologist John Wilson suggests that the function of sport as a national identifier is especially important in countries faced with acute problems of assimilating waves of immigrants into a single "melting pot" (e.g., the United States, Australia, or New Zealand), and/or in countries that, through their pattern of settlement or the way in which national boundaries were drawn by colonial powers, embrace regions or peoples with quite different cultures (e.g., Canada and many African countries).⁶⁵ The role of basketball as a national identifier would be further strengthened in about two years time (that is, in 1979), when the Israeli national basketball team was about to achieve another one of the

greatest successes ever in Israeli history.

Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory had also some very strong political implications for the Israeli public. For example, *Maariv* drew attention to the fact that "thousands of people gathered in the city center and after cheering for Maccabi Tel Aviv, started shouting: 'Begin, Begin . . . ' in response to both Maccabi's victory and Prime Minister Rabin's resignation, which occurred on the very same evening.⁶⁶ It is important to note that from the founding of Israel in 1948 until the elections of May of 1977, Israel was ruled by a coalition government led by the Labor alignment or its constituent parties. In the 1977 elections, the Likud Bloc, headed by Menachem Begin, came to power for the first time and formed a coalition mainly with the major religious parties. The Maccabi Federation was affiliated with the General Zionist Party ("Liberals"), which was an integral part of the Likud Bloc and thereby of the new coalition. Thus, Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory was perceived as another symbol of the rising Likud Bloc ("Begin, Begin") and the falling Labor Party (Rabin's resignation). The Likud Bloc's rise to power following Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory was an significant occurrence. Maccabi Tel Aviv adopted the practice of having Moshe Dayan, a former Israeli general and the foreign minister in Begin's government, shake hands with the players prior to every contest in the European Cup games hosted in Tel Aviv.⁶⁷ One can therefore bond the processes that Israeli society underwent toward the end of the 1970s to the success of Maccabi Tel Aviv. Furthermore, the fall of the Hapoel teams, especially Hapoel Tel Aviv, can be strongly linked to the sinking fortunes of their political benefactors,⁶⁸ the Labor party, which lost its electoral seats and financial power within the government.

Toward the end of the 1970s, basketball became much more than just a game, it became a source of national pride and a symbol of the ability of Israeli sports to compete at levels previously unknown. The fact that these victories were mostly achieved with the help of players not born as Israelis did not seem to bother Israeli sport fans at all. In the late 1970s, the Israeli national basketball team seemed to follow the success of Maccabi Tel Aviv in the European arena. In 1977, three months after Maccabi Tel Aviv won the European Champions Cup, the Israeli national team equaled its greatest achievement in the European arena when it finished fifth (just like in Moscow in 1953) in the European national championship in Leis, Belgium. Of course, the Israeli squad included five American new immigrants and naturalized players, who had to wait, according to FIBA rules, three years to be eligible to play on the national team. However, their greatest achievement was yet to come.

Two years later, in June of 1979, the Israeli national team traveled to Italy to prepare for the European national championship held there. Prior to the games, Israel coach, Ralph Klein, remembers saying: "Fifth place (like in 1977) is quite an accomplishment. I can not see us ranking the same this time. Yet, I trust my players."⁶⁹ However, the European championship in Italy in 1979 proved to be the peak of the Israeli team's sport performance thus far. In the qualifying round, Israel's national team beat the Polish squad and lost to France. In the next game, Israel had to face Yugoslavia, the basketball world champions at that time. Under the conditions governed by tournament rules, beating the Yugoslavians would have elevated the Israeli team to competing in the top 1-4 group (that is, the most successful teams), while losing would have sent Israel to play in the 9-12

bracket (that is, the least successful teams in the twelve-team tournament). In a sense, then, it was an “all or nothing” situation. According to Coach Klein, no basketball expert at the entire championships expected the Israeli team to even come close to competing with the reigning world champions from Yugoslavia.⁷⁰ Israel Paz, a journalist covering the European championship for one of Israeli’s sport magazines, remembered preparing an article discussing the chances of the Israeli team in the 9-12 group.⁷¹ Paz was not alone in believing that the Israeli team could not win the game. Three Italian newspapers, *Stadio* of Bologna, *Coriera De La Sport* of Rome, and *TotoSport* of Torino, had drawn the same conclusion. They did not wait for the end of the game that happened to be running late that night but rather published a false outcome of the game, declaring Yugoslavia the winner. The next day, however, these three Italian papers received harsh criticism from media around the world. The *Gazette De La Sport* remained the only Italian paper to report the huge upset—Israel’s surprising 77-76 victory over Yugoslavia. Israel then met the Soviet Union in the finals, losing 98-76. But even in defeat Israel celebrated. Finishing second and winning the silver medal was considered by most Israelis to be the greatest achievement ever of Israeli sports and a one of the most important events in the state’s entire history. The day after the championships, Israeli newspapers carried Coach Klein’s prophetic remark: “Even in 30 years an Israeli team will never repeat such a success.”⁷²

Conclusions

The Americanization of Israeli basketball during the late 1970s led to Israel’s greatest triumph in sport—winning the silver medal at the European Basketball Championships. This period was characterized by an influx of mostly Jewish-American players to the Israeli basketball league. The achievement in 1979 can be considered the end of this era, because at the beginning of the 1980s, the caliber of American players, as well as their motives for coming to Israel, began to change.⁷³ But in retrospect, this “glorious” era of Israeli basketball signified the completion of the Americanization process, which was a part of the broader influences of American ideas and practices upon Israeli culture and society. And these processes were significant, not just for the development of basketball in Israel, but even more so for the recognition of Israel as a sovereign state among the nations of the world. Symbolically, perhaps, was the fact that Tal Brody, who in 1965 began this era and retired from basketball toward its end, was awarded the “Israel Prize” in 1979 for his unique contribution to Israeli society. Brody was the first sportsperson ever to be awarded the nation’s highest honor. The Israel Prize Committee that made the decision to bestow this honor upon Brody offered the following commendation: “The prize is being awarded to an excellent athlete who set an outstanding example to immigrants and absorption in our society.”⁷⁴

Hence sport and nationalism were closely linked in Israel during the 1960s and 1970s. As an emerging nation, Israel used basketball to facilitate national unity and integration.⁷⁵ The success of Maccabi Tel Aviv over the years helped to reinforce national consciousness and cultural nationalism. Moreover, it helped the new state, via success on the basketball court, gain international recognition, and at the same time it contributed to the quest for socio-cultural identity on the local level.⁷⁶ The role of American basketball players in this process cannot be overestimated. Israeli basketball teams, however, were also heavily en-

gaged in popular nationalist struggles among sport organizations, mainly Hapoel and Maccabi, which were closely aligned with the nationalist movement and party politics.

The Americanization process produced a complex blend of intended and unintended practices. It was not simply interdependent relations, but rather interrelated, multi-faceted configurations. The processes of professionalization, commodification, secularization, urbanization, and militarization are also part of a very complex society and also need analysis. Though this paper focused on Israeli basketball, one dimension of Israeli society that underwent a significant shift toward Americanization, it has also argued that this shift was not entirely different in dimension and scope than similar processes in other areas in Israeli society.

By the 1980s, Israeli basketball with its nationalistic leanings and its relationship to internal politics began to change dramatically due to growing commercialization.⁷⁷ The transformation of Israeli basketball, complete by the late 1970s, was closely related to broader socio-economic influences that moved Israel toward an American-Western capitalist-orientated society.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, within collective memory of the Israeli citizenry, the roots of the transformation will forever be remembered and symbolized by the course basketball took in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, from Tal Brody to European champions.

¹Yair Galily and Ken Sheard, "Cultural Imperialism: The Americanization of Israeli Basketball," *Culture, Sport, Society* 5 (2002): 55-78.

²Ralph Klein, interview by Yair Galily, 10 July 1999, Wingate Institute, Israel, notes in possession of authors. Many of the sources used to gather information for this paper includes interviews as well as investigation of literature and papers written originally in Hebrew. They have been translated for use in the text, though not always verbatim; nevertheless, the attempt has been made to ensure that the translations accurately reflect the original intent of the Hebrew authors or sources.

³There is much debate in the literature about the relationship between Americanization and globalization. It is not our intention here to get embroiled in that debate. Rather, we intend to use the example of Israeli basketball to suggest that, in this instance, the term Americanization is more suitable for explaining developments in that sport than the more general term "globalization." See Galily and Sheard, "Cultural Imperialism."

⁴See, for a review, Galily and Sheard, "Cultural Imperialism."

⁵Eric Dunning, ed., *The Sociology of Sport: A Selection of Reading* (London: Frank Cass, 1971); Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

⁶While this paper concentrates on men's basketball, women's basketball, to some extent, existed in Israel as early as the 1950s, but a professional league has emerged during the second half of the 1990s. Since 1997 some league matches have been transmitted by Channel 5, the thematic sport cable channel in Israel. See Alina Bernstein, "'There is Basketball in Israel, Women's Basketball': Media Coverage of Women's Basketball in Israel," in *Sexual Sports Rhetoric*, ed. Linda Fuller (forthcoming).

⁷Eric Dunning and Ken Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979).

⁸Uriel Simri, Gershon Tenenbaum, and Miki Bar-Eli, "The Governmental Sports Policy of the State of Israel," in *National Sports Policies: An International Handbook*, ed. Lawrence Chalip (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 241-252.

⁹In 1951 two National Olympic Committees (NOCs), one backed by Maccabi and the other by Hapoel, requested recognition from the International Olympic Committee. Both NOCs were refused

recognition, and the possibility that Israel would not be allowed to participate at the Helsinki Olympics of 1952 became imminent. At the urging of Hapoel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened, and Maccabi and Hapoel managed to work out a new agreement. According to this agreement, all sports bodies in the state would be run on a parity basis, each side represented by 50 percent of the members. That agreement held for about a dozen years. See Haim Kaufman and Miki Bar-Eli, "Processes That Shaped Sports in Israel during the 20th Century," *Sport History Review* 36 (2005): 185.

¹⁰Iddo Nevo, "Sport Institutions and Ideology in Israel," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24 (2000): 334-344; Simri, Tenenbaum, and Bar-Eli, "Governmental Sports Policy."

¹¹Yair Galily, "Playing Hoops in Palestine: The Early Development of Basketball in the Land of Israel (1935-1956)," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 20 (2003): 143-151.

¹²It should be noted that in 1956, no league was held because of the Sinai campaign. Therefore, only ten championships were held between 1955 and 1965.

¹³Mike Karnon, "The High-Price of Americanization in Israeli Basketball," *Basketball*, September 1982, pp. 6-8.

¹⁴Eric Dunning, "The Sociology of Sport in Europe and the United States: Critical Observations from an 'Eliasiian' Perspective," in *Sport and Social Theory*, eds. Roger Rees and Andrew W. Miracle (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1986), 29-65.

¹⁵Michael Bar-Eli and Adara Spiegel, "Israeli Women in the Olympic and Maccabiah Games, 1932-1992: Patterns of Stability and Change," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 31 (1996): 385-406.

¹⁶Tal Brody, interview by Yair Galily, 18 June 1999, Herzliyya, Israel, notes in possession of the authors.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸After tension had developed between Syria and Israel in May of 1967, Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser moved armaments and about 80,000 troops into the Sinai and ordered a withdrawal of United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) troops from the armistice line and Sharm El Sheikh. Nasser then closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli ships, blockading the Israeli port of Eilat at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. On May 30, Jordan and Egypt signed a mutual defense treaty. In response to these events, Israeli forces struck targets in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria on June 5. After six days of fighting, and by the time all parties had accepted the cease-fire called for by U.N. Security Council Resolutions 235 and 236, Israel controlled the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the formerly Jordanian-controlled West Bank of the Jordan River (since referred to by many as "the occupied territories"), including East Jerusalem. On November 22, 1967, the Security Council adopted Resolution 242, the "land for peace" formula, which called for the establishment of a just and lasting peace based on Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967, in return for the end of all states of belligerency, respect for the sovereignty of all states in the area, and the right to live in peace within secure, recognized boundaries. See also Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Israel—A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1988).

¹⁹Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*, pp. ???.

²⁰John Wilson, "Cleaning up the Game: Perspectives on the Evolution of Professional Sports," in *Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, eds. Eric Dunning and Chris Rojek (London: Macmillan, 1992).

²¹Ralph Klein, interview by Yair Galily, 11 November 1998, Wingate Institute, Israel, notes in possession of authors.

²²Naftali Goshen, personal conversation with author, 19 November 1998, Tel-Aviv, Israel.

²³"The Best Show in Town," *Yediot Aharonot*, 22 September 1968, sec. B, p. 1. (Hebrew).

²⁴Israel Paz and Samuel Jacobson, *Basketball: All You Ever Wanted to Know about the Game* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Masada, 1982).

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Israel Basketball Association (IBA), *Israeli Basketball Rule Book* (Tel-Aviv: IBA, 1962).

²⁷See, for example, Stan Eitzen, "The Educational Experience of Intercollegiate Student Athletes," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 11 (1988): 15-30; and John Sewart, "The Commodification of Sport," *International Review for Sociology of Sport* 22 (1987): 171-192.

²⁸Eitzen, "Educational Experience," 17.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid, 19.

³¹Amir Ben-Porat, "The Commodification of Football in Israel," *International Review of Sociology of Sport* 33 (1998): 269-276.

³²Eliezer Schewid, *The Goals of Zionism Today* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999).

³³A unique social and economic framework based on egalitarian and communal principles, the *kibbutz* grew out of the country's pioneering society of the early twentieth century and developed into a permanent rural way of life. Over the years, it established a prosperous economy, at first primarily agricultural, later augmented by industrial and service enterprises, and it distinguished itself through its members' contributions to the establishment and building of the state.

³⁴In the Israeli basketball presidency there are usually six senior members headed by the Israel Basketball Association (IBA) chairman.

³⁵Israel Basketball Association, *Committee Report* (Tel-Aviv: IBA, 1970).

³⁶This was a process similar to what happened in the case of British rugby. See Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*.

³⁷Israel Basketball Association, *Committee Report* (Tel-Aviv: IBA, 1976). The Jewish Agency is the highest representative body of the Zionist movement.

³⁸Richard Nyrop, ed., *Israel—A Country Study*. (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1978).

³⁹Shabtai Tevet, *The Life of David Ben-Gurion* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1981).

⁴⁰That is, in 1948; for more details, see Metz, *Israel*; and Nyrop, *Israel*.

⁴¹For reviews, see Metz, *Israel*; and Nyrop, *Israel*.

⁴²Nyrop. *Israel*, 127.

⁴³Ibid, 129.

⁴⁴Falashas are Jews of Ethiopia who refer to themselves as *Beta Israel* (House of Israel). Long isolated from mainstream Judaism, they practice a form of the religion based on the Jewish Scriptures and certain apocryphal books. See Wolf Leslau, *Falasha Anthology* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁴⁵For reviews, see Metz, *Israel*; and Nyrop, *Israel*.

⁴⁶Klein interview, 11 November 1998.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸As explained before, Israel's ground, air, and naval forces, known as the Israel Defense Force (IDF), fall under the command of a single general staff. Conscription is obligatory for Jewish men (three years) and women (two years) over the age of eighteen, although exemptions may be made on religious grounds (as part of the "status quo" agreement mentioned earlier). The Druze, members of a small Islamic sect living in Israel's mountains, also serve in the IDF. Arab-Israelis, with very few exceptions, do not serve.

⁴⁹On October 22, 1973, the Security Council resolution (#338) called upon: 1) all parties presently fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than twelve hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy; 2) all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts; and 3) all parties decide that immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

⁵⁰Metz, *Israel*.

⁵¹MFA—*Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (1996; 1997; 1998): "Israel at 50," <<http://www.mfa.gov.il>>

[20 February 2000].

⁵²Dan Kurzman, in a biography of Rabin, claims that Rabin's problems with his bank account apparently stemmed from his lack of concern with money. His wife, Leah, was in charge of family funds and paying the bills. He knew of the account but thought she had closed it when his tour as ambassador to the United States was up. When he was ambassador, Rabin would accept payment for speeches, a highly unusual practice Kurzman says, but only to have money to help his wife keep up with her wealthy Washington-area friends. See his *Soldier of Peace: The Life of Yitzhak Rabin* (Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1994).

⁵³Myron Aronoff, "The Decline of the Israeli Labor Party: Causes and Significance," in *Israel at the Polls*, ed. Howard Penniman (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1987), 115-147. See also *MFA--Israel*.

⁵⁴Steve Kaplan, interview by Yair Galily via electronic mail, 13 November 1998.

⁵⁵James Riordan, "Communist Sport Policy: The End of an Era," in *National Sports Policies: An International Handbook*, ed. Lawrence Chalip (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986), 89-115.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷*Yediot Aharonot* and *Maariv* have been by far the two most popular daily newspapers in Israel for many years. Another important Israeli daily newspaper is *Haaretz*, which will be mentioned later.

⁵⁸Riordan, "Communist Sport Policy."

⁵⁹Eyal Na'aman, "20 Years After," *Maariv*, 17 February 1997, pp. 21-23.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹"It is Really a Dream," *Maariv*, 18 February 1977, sec. C, p. 2 (Hebrew); "The Unbelievable Vision," *Yediot Aharonot*, 18 February 1977, sec. C, p. 1 (Hebrew).

⁶²Eyal Na'aman, "20 Years After."

⁶³"The Elite Group," *Haaretz*, 8 April 1977, sec. D, p. 1 (Hebrew).

⁶⁴Grant Jarvie, "Sport, Nationalism and Cultural Identity," *Centre for Research into Sport and Society. Leicester University, UK Module 3 Unit 4* 1995, pp. 281-302.

⁶⁵John Wilson, *Playing by the Rules: Sport, Society and the State* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1994). The term "melting pot" was first used by Rabbi Samuel Schulman, who spoke of America as "the melting pot of nationalities" in a 1907 Passover sermon at his New York temple. Nevertheless, some question that the U.S. is melting pot. Eastern European Jews in late nineteenth-century New York City are a good example of immigrants who assimilated but remained in ethnic neighborhoods. For further discussion, see Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1963).

⁶⁶"Begin, Begin . . .," *Maariv*, 8 April 1977, sec. C, p. 2 (Hebrew).

⁶⁷In fact, Moshe Dayan was a defector from the Labor Party, in which he served for many years as defense minister. After the 1977 elections, one of the Labor Party's leaders, Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, said that "the people are wrong," meaning that the Israeli people "defected" from the Labor Party to the Likud Bloc. Probably, Moshe Dayan's political defection was just another symbol of this phenomenon, including his strengthening bond and identification with Maccabi Tel Aviv Basketball Club in these years. In fact, Shimon Mizrahi, Maccabi's chairman, used to call Dayan in public "the friend of the club," an expression which became quite famous in Israel at that time (and of course, everybody knew that Dayan was THE friend, and Macabi was THE club).

⁶⁸Hapoel organization, especially Hapoel Tel Aviv, suffered considerably. Tied to the Labor movement, it was prone to the same damage as its patron party. Even more so, the policy of the federation to fund and support varied fields of sport and to establish as many clubs as possible did not survive under the new conditions of the political map. See Nevo, "Sports Institutions."

⁶⁹Klein interview, 10 July 1999.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Israel Paz, interview by Yair Galily, 26 October 1998, Wingate Institute, Israel, notes in possession of authors.

⁷²Na'aman, "20 Years After."

⁷³Galily and Sheard, "Cultural Imperialism."

⁷⁴The Israel Prize committee accounts, 1979, Library, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

⁷⁵Jarvie, "Nationalism and Cultural Identity."

⁷⁶Grant Jarvie, "Sport, Nationalisms and Their Futures," in *Sociology of Sport in Practice*, eds. Kathleen Armour and Robyn Jones (Essex, U.K.: Addison-Wesley, 2000), 83-96.

⁷⁷Galily and Sheard, "Cultural Imperialism."

⁷⁸Amir Ben-Porat, *The State and Capitalism in Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993).