

MWU תנועת מכבי

The History of Jewish Sport

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THE MACCABI MOVEMENT



THE HISTORY OF JEWISH SPORT



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MACCABI WORLD UNION
ההסתדרות העולמית מכבי

THE ORIGIN OF ORGANISED JEWISH GYMNAS TIC & SPORT MOVEMENTS

Jewish gymnasts and athletes have been known of for a long time. The natural impulse in any young man to develop his body combined with a natural trend to show off his physical abilities is not the prerogative of any race or religion. As far as Jews are concerned, these impulses were restrained and suppressed for many centuries because of strong views and rulings enforced by the Jewish communities and the general negative attitude of the outside world towards Jewry as such. The Jewish religion takes a very positive attitude towards the care of the human body and the development of physical abilities, and numerous are the directives and examples on these subjects to be found in the books of our Fathers, under the proviso that physical abilities achieved through physical education and training of the body be used only for self-defence, defence of the family, the home and the country. Any kind of exhibition of such abilities within the framework of games or competitions was prohibited. If one considers the conditions under which the Jewish communities lived for centuries, in small, over-crowded and confined ghettos, places without light and air, which as such should have made any kind of physical education or activity impossible, and if we add the definite negative stand taken against any kind of physical activity by the spiritual and religious leaders, the Rabbis, we can understand why under such circumstances not much hope was left for any physical development of the body.

However, where Jewish communities lived in a more liberal environment, which provided basic living conditions in comparative freedom and the possibility of developing freely, abilities in various fields of commerce, science, etc., we also find young Jews who, despite the displeasure shown by the spiritual and religious leaders, tried to adapt themselves to the way of life

of the non-Jew and to participate, as far as possible, in their cultural and sporting activities. For example; Jews participated in sports competitions in Weissenfeld (1368), in Augsburg (1470) and in Rome (1460), where an Annual Sports Festival Week was held with the Tuesday of that week reserved for Jewish athletes. In later years we must remember the Brothers Aby and Israel Belasco; Sam Elias, known as 'Dutch Sam' and, above all, Daniel Mendoza; the boxing pioneers in the first half of the 19th century.

The development era which followed the reign of Napoleon - especially in Central Europe - an era which with its liberal trends, brought German and Austro-Hungarian Jews into the ranks of the "Deutsche Turnerschaft", Germany's Gymnastic Movement, as well as other steadily developing sports. The beneficial influence on young Jews ready to participate in gymnastics and sports was proven by the excellent results achieved by the Brothers Alfred and Felix Flatow, who won golden laurels for their German team at the First Olympic Games in Athens (1896) and also Genserowski, who brought such high honour to his German team for his gymnastic performance at the Second Olympic Games in Paris (1900).

It is not our intention to analyse here the reasons and influence that led to the birth of the idea of building a National Home for Jews in Palestine. We must remember, however, that Dr. Herzl's ideals did not immediately appeal to most Jews. We must not forget that at the beginning of this century Jews were happy in the recently achieved equality and all that they dreamed and wanted was full integration and assimilation. This does not necessarily mean that Jews did not realise or were unaware of the plight of Russian Jewry and the heavy lot of Jews under the Sultans, but it was so much easier and more comfortable to ignore the facts and

pretend that as progress in Russia and Turkey was always much slower, eventually such problems would vanish and the plight of the Jews there, would also improve.

Against such a background Dr. Herzl presented his revolutionary ideals and at the 2nd World Zionist Congress in Basel (1898), Dr. Max Nordau made his famous appeal for a renaissance of "muscle Jews" and called for the establishment of Jewish Gymnastic Clubs where "Judenjungen" (an insulting expression frequently used by German anti-Semites) would be regenerated into "Junge Juden" (Young Jews), proud and able to stand and fight for their rights.



Founders of the First Jewish Gymnastic Club in Istanbul

The first all-Jewish Gymnastic Club was established in Constantinople (Istambul-Kushta) in 1895.

Young Jews from Austria and Germany living and working in Turkey, joined the German "Turnverein" (German Gymnastic Club). Extreme German national tendencies in this club made the membership of Jews impossible and it was decided therefore to establish a gymnastic club of their own, the "Israelitische Turnverien Konstantinopel", using the gymnastic clubs of the Deutsche Turnerschaft (Organisation of German Gymnasts) as a model for their activities and even adopting the German symbol as their club emblem. (The four letters, "F" standing for Frisch, Fromm, Froehlich and Frei). Here in Constantinople the anti-Jewish stand taken by the German gymnasts fundamentally influenced and created the all-Jewish Gymnastic Club.

In the same year the all-Jewish gymnastic club in Phillipople (Bulgaria) was established, although for different reasons. Jews in Bulgaria lived as equals and enjoyed full cultural freedom. It was therefore easier to maintain equal progress in all fields including physical education. It was natural therefore that when such a gymnastic club was established, it was based on the all-Slavic Movement, the "Sokol" (Falcon).

The reason for explaining in some detail the establishment of these first Jewish gymnastic clubs, is that in both cases, as well as in the other Jewish gymnastic clubs established soon after, we find the same basic elements:

- a. Awakening of Jewish National feelings.
- b. Modern and progressive ideas influencing the cultural and social life of the Jewish community drew attention to the importance of a sound and healthy physical education.
- c. The hostile attitude in a number of German gymnastic clubs or organisations (Kreise or Gaue - territorial organisations) towards Jewish club members led to the resignation of these members from the clubs and the establishment of their own, all-Jewish clubs.
- d. The example of the "Sokol" (Slavic Movement), which sponsored and fostered national sentiments through its well-organised and well-disciplined gymnastic clubs.



Bar Kochba Berlin

The first all-Jewish gymnastic club in Central Europe - a club destined to play a major part in the Jewish Gymnastic and Sport Movements in the future - was "Bar Kochba Berlin", established in 1898.

It is worth-while remembering that all the 47 founding members of this club were ardent supporters of Dr. Herzl's Zionist programme. It was agreed that there were insufficient reasons to set up their own Jewish gymnastic club but, at the moment of discussion of their Constitution, there were serious disagreements on ideological principles. One group wanted a pure Zionist organisation following the line of political Zionism, and a second group wanted to establish a neutral club open to all Jews irrespective of their political ideas and beliefs. Eventually the second group prevailed and the definition: "To foster physical education and a National Jewish mind" was accepted as their aim, this being based on the theory that Jewry as such had to be regarded as a community of common descent and history and definitely not only on religious grounds.

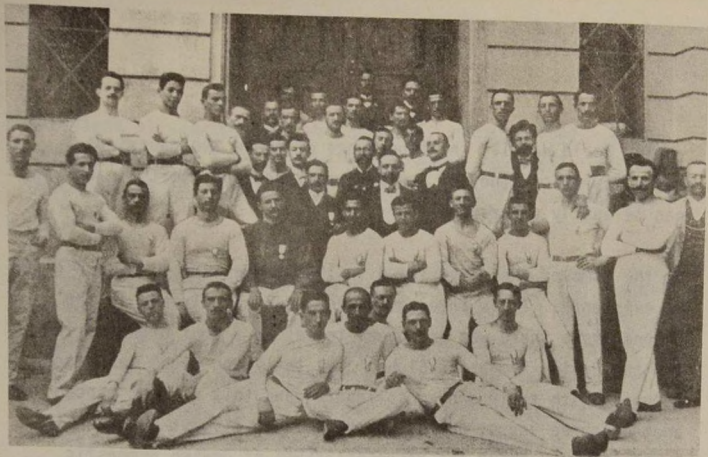
Bar Kochba Berlin was presented to the public at its first "Schauturnen" (Gymnastic Exhibition) in 1900, thus attracting young Jews to become active club members. Visibly encouraged by this success, it was decided to issue a regular paper, the "Juedische Turnzeitung", first edited in Berlin in May 1900. This remained the central paper of the "Juedische Turnerschaft" without serious interruption until 1921 when with the foundation of the Maccabi World Union it was replaced by "Der Makkabi", the official organ of the Maccabi Movement, which appeared in Berlin until 1938. As the central archives of the "Juedische Turnerschaft" and the Maccabi World Union were lost in an air-raid

during World War II, the importance of these two papers as a major source of study of Jewish gymnastics and sports in our day can be easily understood.

At the time of the first issue in 1900 there were 11 Jewish clubs in existence. It is interesting to note that already in the second issue there was an appeal to set up a roof organisation for the Jewish Gymnastic Clubs. But the young clubs were much occupied with their own consolidation and this did not happen for another three years, during the Vith World Zionist Congress in Basel (1903). There the representatives of Jewish Gymnastic Clubs at the "Erster Juedischer Turntag" (First Jewish Gymnastic Day), ruled on the following important constitutional paragraph of the newly founded "Juedische Turnerschaft" (Organisation of Jewish Gymnasts): "Membership in the Juedische Turnerschaft will be open to every Jewish Gymnastic Club which accepts the following constitutional definition: The aim of the Juedische Turnerschaft is to foster gymnastics as a medium to build up physical fitness as part of the Jewish National idea".



Jewish Gymnasts - Prag - Praha (Prague) - 1906



Foundation of the Juedische Turnerschaft in Basel (1903)

(By accepting the original concept of Bar Kochba Berlin, the Juedische Turnerschaft declared itself to be a Jewish National Gymnastic Movement, whose members believed in the Jewish heritage and the Jewish Nation, but was not itself involved in political Zionism - thereby establishing firm ground for further non-political development of the gymnastic idea).

The first years of the Juedische Turnerschaft were not easy. Not all the existing Jewish clubs accepted the invitation to join the organisation - some for political reasons as they identified themselves with the aims of Zionism, others because they did not want to become involved in the arguments regarding the question of the ideological principles of the Juedische Turnerschaft. In spite of all the difficulties and teething troubles it had to undergo, the Juedische Turnerschaft soon became an established fact and was the subject of much comment in the Jewish press - benevolent or hostile according to the general outlook represented by the specific paper. But the discussion did not stop in the Jewish

press; it crossed the borderline of Jewish community life and became a matter of public interest. For instance, there was a lively but objective discussion in the influential German paper "Koelner Zeitung", which enabled the leadership of the young organisation to explain to the broader masses of the German public the aims and objects of the Jewish Gymnastic Movement.

The attitude of the "Deutsche Turnerschaft" towards the Juedische Turnerschaft is interesting and many of its distinguished leaders were openly sympathetic. The Deutsche Turnerschaft did not exclude from membership those organisations and clubs which insisted in including in their Constitutions the "Arier" paragraph (the exclusion of not pure national German elements) in spite of having voted down the inclusion of this paragraph in their own Constitution. This naturally strengthened the will and resolve to develop and foster the Juedische Turnerschaft as the representative of the Jewish gymnastic idea, and progress can best be judged by the increasing number of active gymnasts and the growing number of clubs participating in the events of the Annual Gymnastic Day - in 1903, 12 clubs with some 2,000 members; and in 1913, 29 clubs with some 4,500 active members.

In those days of less-developed communication media, the bringing together of clubs was by no means an easy task. It was found that the most opportune time for a get-together and for the holding of conventions was at the time of the World Zionist Congresses, where the cream of Jewry was assembled. At these Congresses the Juedische Turnerschaft presented mass displays called "Geturnter Rechenschaftsbericht" (a report, through gymnastics, of work done and progress achieved since the previous Congress). These displays, though attracting much interest and deeply impressing all Congress participants, did not

result in any positive step being taken by the Zionist Congress or the Zionist Organisation towards the further development of gymnastics and sports among young Jews.

One event of major importance which took place in these years was the first organised visit of the Juedische Turnerschaft to Palestine in 1912 for the Rehovot Spring Festival. The personal contact established there with local 'Maccabi Clubs' led to the affiliation of these clubs to the Juedische Turnerschaft.

The first Jewish gymnastic club in Palestine, "Rishon L'Zion" in Jaffa, to-day known as "Maccabi Tel-Aviv", was established at the end of 1906. At the time of affiliation of Maccabi Clubs in Palestine to the Juedische Turnerschaft, there were 12 local clubs and Maccabi Beirut, Lebanon.



Leaders of "Maccabi Rishon L'Zion" of Jaffa (1913)

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN OUR HISTORY



Rehovot Spring Festival - Israel (1908)

Maccabi Lithuania (1928)





Maccabi Moravia "Gymnastics Day" - Bruenn (1912)

Foundation Congress Maccabi World Union - Karlsbad, CSR (1921)

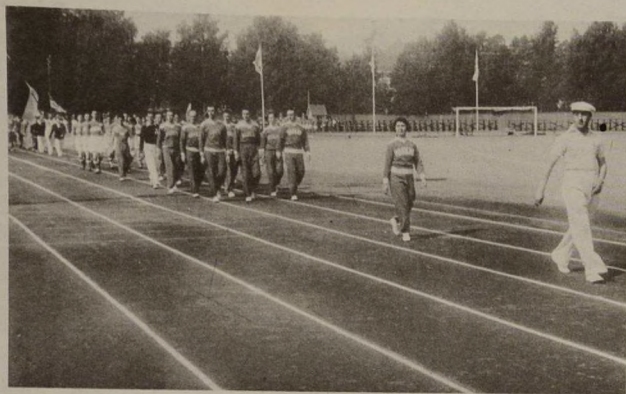




Bar Kochba Berlin (1926)

Maccabi Germany - Frankfurt/M (1936)





Maccabi Finland at the Baltic Maccabi Games (1938)



The call for the inclusion of other sports in addition to gymnastics grew very insistent and it became impossible to ignore the ever-increasing number of all-round Jewish sports clubs which were very active and successful, outside the framework of the Juedische Turnerschaft. After prolonged and very stormy discussions as to whether or not to include other sports, a decision was taken at the fifth "Gymnastic Day" in Berlin, calling for the development of all sports under the roof of the Juedische Turnerschaft. This brought clubs such as Hakoah Wien; Hagibor Prague and Maccabi Warsaw; to name but a few, into the field of national and international sport. With this decision in 1913, the first development period of the young Juedische Turnerschaft may be regarded as ended.

When the decision to organise affiliated clubs within the framework of "Landeskreise" (territorial organisations) was taken, firm directives were issued for a co-ordinated activity in the field of sport, cultural and educational work, and a new Constitution was drawn up in 1913 which again stressed the fact that Juedische Turnerschaft did not pursue political aims.



Maccabi Alexandria (Egypt) - 1914

World War I (1914 - 1918), limited the activities but did not completely end them. Members serving in the German or Austro-Hungarian forces brought the Juedische Turnerschaft idea into occupied territories of Belgium and France and into Poland and other areas formerly belonging to the Russian Empire. The German occupation authorities even supported and fostered the foundation of Jewish clubs, for instance, in Warsaw, where a Jewish gymnastic club had operated clandestinely for years, the German Military Government immediately permitted full and open activities. With the end of the Czarist regime in Russia, Maccabi quickly developed and became a powerful force. But there, as in the Baltic countries and various parts of Poland, the trend was towards Zionism and for full involvement in the project of creating a Jewish Homeland in Palestine.



Hakoah Wien - visit to Egypt (1922)

MACCABI WORLD UNION - FROM 1921 TO TO-DAY, 1979

At the end of World War I (1914-1918), the whole world was faced with a new reality - with the fall of the Kaiser's Government in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, small nations gained their independence and in these new countries Jews enjoyed full rights. In Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic States, Yugoslavia and, from 1917 to 1923, in Soviet Russia too, the Jewish Physical and Educational Movement grew and hundreds of new clubs were founded. By this time the Balfour Declaration in 1917 had opened the possibility of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine (Eretz Yisrael), stimulated optimism amongst those Jews who believed in the ideals of Herzl - the creation of a Jewish State.



Maccabi Czernauti - 1930



March past in Mahrish Ostrau (CSR) - 1929

The geo-political division of Europe, Asia and Africa as a result of the creation of independent countries, together with the Balfour Declaration, faced the Jewish world with a new reality and to be a Zionist was no longer the prerogative of a special and secluded group of dreamers. Jewry had learnt its lesson from the War and had realised that nations who fought for freedom could achieve it. The leadership of the Juedische Turnerschaft, which since 1903 had been the roof organisation of Jewish Gymnastic and Sport Clubs in Europe and Asia, could no longer cope with the situation and, at the time of the 13th Zionist Congress in Carlsbad (1921), the delegates of the Juedische Turnerschaft decided to set up a new central organisation, the Maccabi World Union.

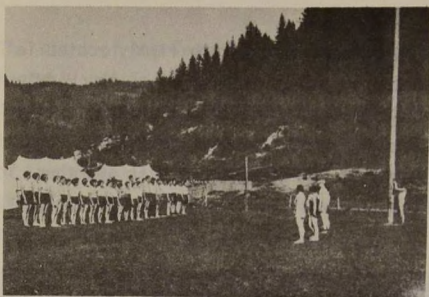
In the Constitution of this new central organisation, the Maccabi World Union, its aims were clearly defined:

"To foster physical education, the belief in the Jewish heritage and the Jewish Nation and to work actively for the rebuilding of our own country and for the preservation of our People".

These were clear-cut intentions of a Zionist Sports and Youth Movement which refused to be involved in party tendencies and political activities.



Maccabi Kaunas - 1926



Sports Teachers Course - Maccabi Poland - 1931

During the period between the two World Wars (1918 - 1939), Maccabi, particularly in Europe, reached its zenith development. Achievements reached by its athletes and teams were impressive and many of its sportsmen and sportswomen, as well as Maccabi Club teams, belonged to the elite in their countries and represented their nations in international events and at the Olympic Games. European Maccabi Games with achievements on an international level, were held regularly (Berlin, Vienna, Prague and Amsterdam, etc.).



Elias Katz of Maccabi Finland - Olympic Champion
Paris - 1924

At the same time, the Maccabi idea became firmly rooted in many Latin-American countries, in the Far East, the Middle East, Australia and in Africa. This was to a large extent due to Jewish emigration from Eastern and Central Europe, now under the influence of Communism and Nazism and thus Maccabi and the Maccabi ideals were brought to these countries.

In this period too, there were two outstanding events, namely the holding, in mandated Palestine (Eretz Yisrael), the First Maccabiah Games in 1932 and the Second Maccabiah Games in 1935. These Games were the greatest manifestation of international Jewish sport in pre-war days (sometimes called the 'Jewish Olympic Games') and a demonstration of the strong ties and identification of world Jewry with the Land and the People of Eretz Yisrael.



First Maccabiah Games - Eretz Yisrael - 1932

The start of the Second World War in 1939 put an end to Maccabi activities in nearly all the European countries, but in Asia, Africa, Australia and Latin America, these activities steadily developed. However, as a natural consequence of the establishment of the State of Israel, Maccabi terminated its work in most of the Asian and African countries - except for South Africa.



Maccabi Eretz Yisrael at International Women's Games
London 1934

The Maccabi World Union held its first post-war Maccabiah Games (the Third Maccabiah) in the State of Israel (1950), thereby demonstrating its power of survival and its strength to the whole world.

Since then, the Maccabiah Games are held quadrennially in Israel and the last one, the Tenth Maccabiah Games, took place in July 1977.

Maccabi activities in the various continents are highlighted in regular nation-wide events; "The Pan-American Maccabi Games", "The Maccabiada Latino Americana", "The

European Maccabi Games" and the "Sports Carnivals" in Australia and South Africa - all of which, like the Maccabiah Games, closely combine sports competitions with social and cultural events.



Maccabi Lebanon and Syria Youth Leaders Course in Israel
- 1942

The Juedische Turnerschaft and, after 1921, the Maccabi World Union, were very conscious of the fact that gymnastics and sports must be regarded as a means of achieving higher aims, of building up a strong and healthy Jewish Youth. Although sport will always remain one of the most important aspects of the programme of various activities of the Maccabi Movement, the educational and cultural programmes is becoming more and more predominant.



Centro Deportivo Israelita Mexico



Hanukkah Torch Lighting Ceremony at Modiin

Only after the proclamation of the "Jerusalem Programme" which offered full membership in the World Zionist Organisation to politically non-affiliated Jewish World Organisations and bodies, did the Maccabi World Union accept membership in 1973 and is now a full member of the World Zionist Organisation.



View of the Pierre Gildesgame Maccabi Museum



Kfar Hamaccabiah - Headquarters of the Maccabi World Union