

Spotlight: Late-bloomer Levin on track to become Israel’s first NHL player

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By SAMMY HUDES FEBRUARY 21, 2016 04:22

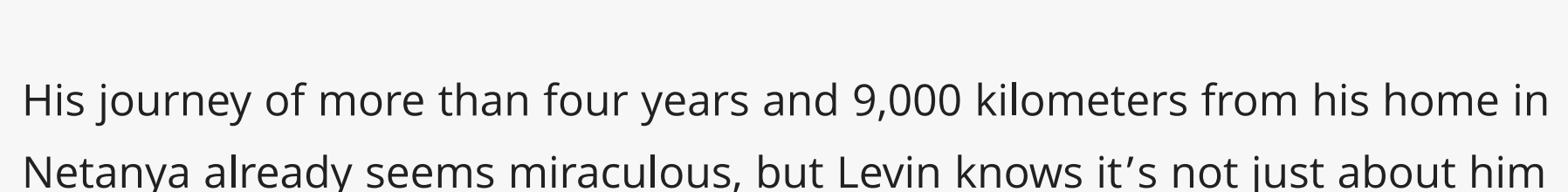
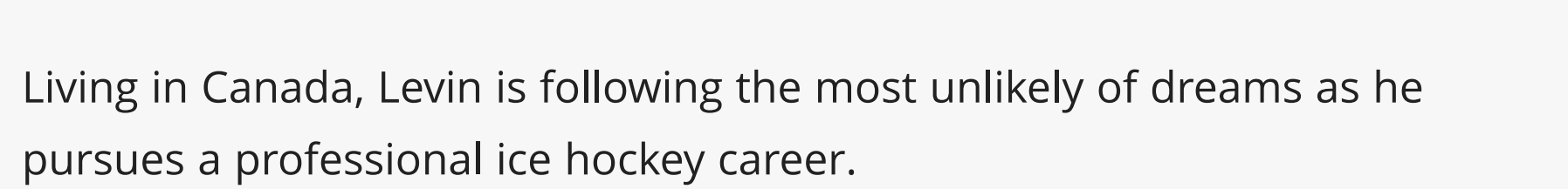
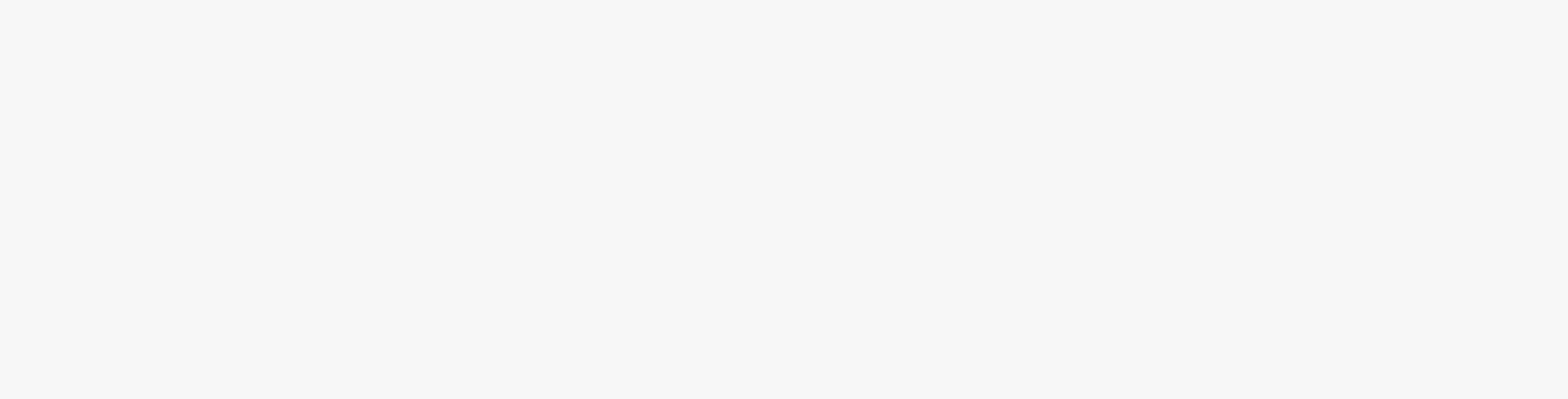


DESPITE GROWING up in Israel playing roller hockey and only learning to skate on ice as a teenager, 16-year-old David Levin was the top pick in Canada’s top development ice hockey league and is primed to be drafted to the NHL when he turns 18 in 2018.
(photo credit: TERRY WILSON/OHL IMAGES)



TORONTO – David Levin knows he is different.

It’s something the 16-yearold Israeli embraces.



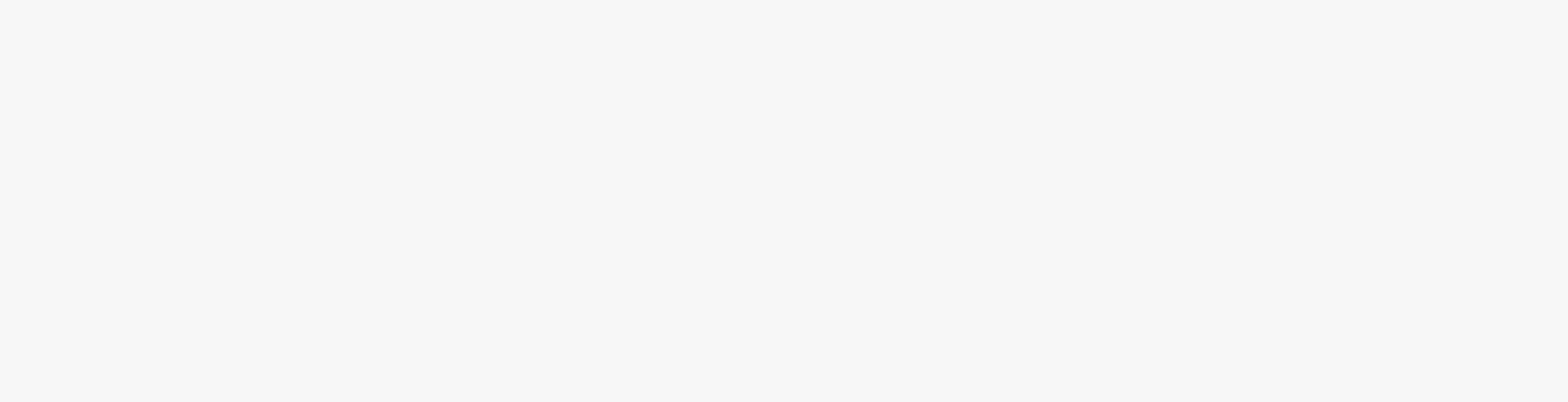
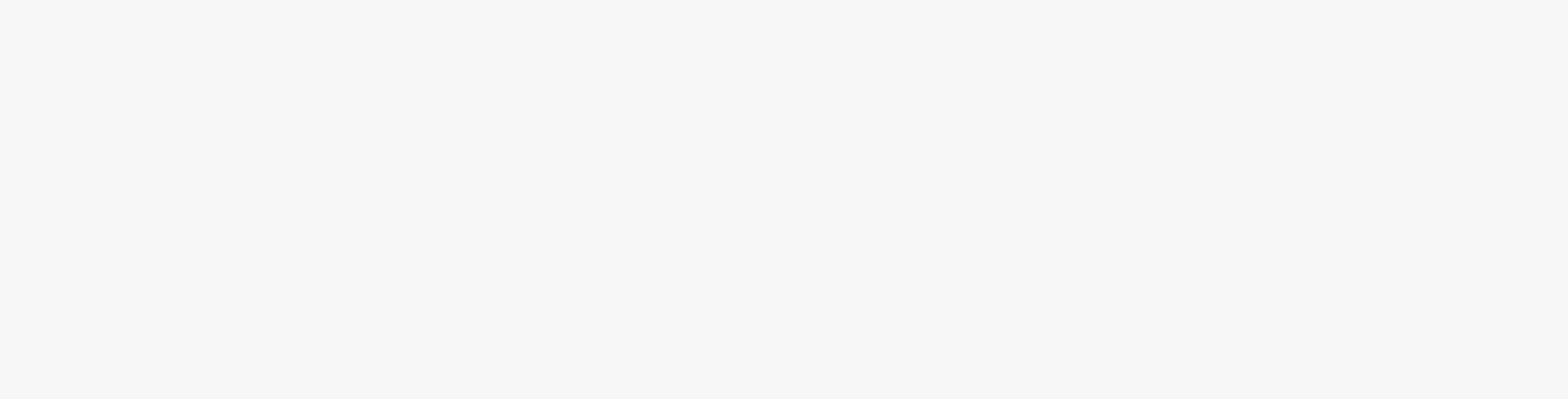
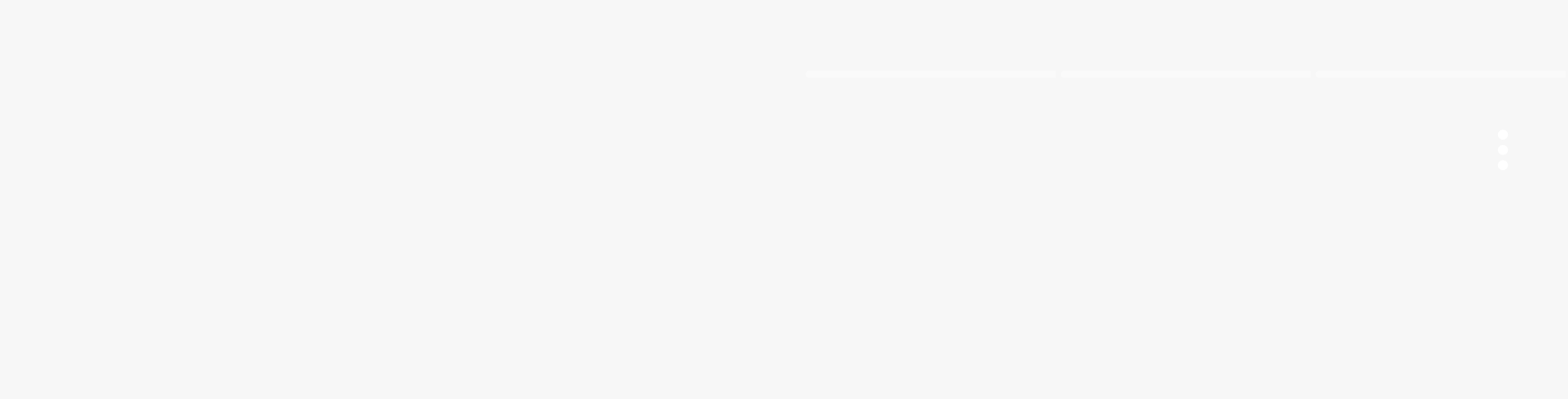
Living in Canada, Levin is following the most unlikely of dreams as he pursues a professional ice hockey career.

His journey of more than four years and 9,000 kilometers from his home in Netanya already seems miraculous, but Levin knows it’s not just about him anymore. When he’s on the ice, he’s skating for Israel.

Levin was eight years old when he first caught a glimpse of North American ice hockey.

His father had the television fixed on a game in the National Hockey League, the 30-team league that boasts the best players in the sport from across the world.

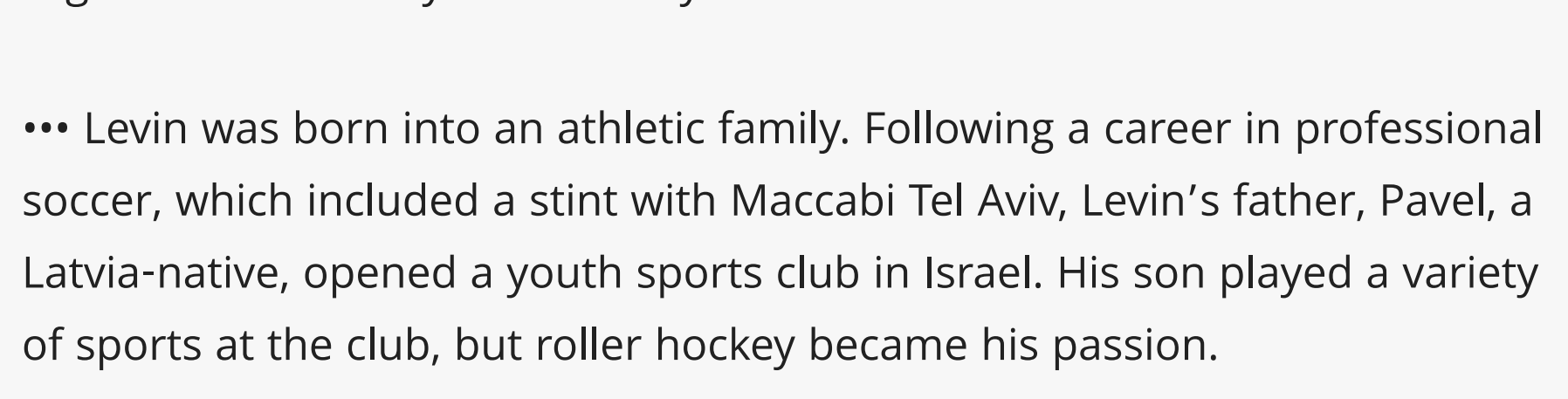
“I asked him what he’s watching. He told me that’s the best league in the world, so I told him that’s my dream now,” Levin recalled.



Fast-forward seven years to April 2015, when Levin was selected first overall in the Ontario Hockey League draft by the Sudbury Wolves.

The OHL is one of Canada’s three top development leagues for junior players between the ages of 16 and 20. At 18, players are draft-eligible for the NHL. Last year, 14 percent of NHL-drafted players came from the OHL.

To be picked by the Wolves ahead of every local kid his age is impressive enough, but even more so when you consider that Levin hadn’t even played organized ice hockey until three years earlier.



“I didn’t even believe that he was going to do something because it’s hard,” said Alla.

“Too many people are playing hockey in Canada and few kids are getting even where David is now.”

At 13, Levin enrolled at an independent private high school geared toward high-performance student-athletes.

The first time he went skating on the ice, Levin crashed into the sideboards of the rink because he didn’t know how to stop.

“Guys here, they’re on skates when they were three years old and working everyday on the ice. I didn’t have it, so when I came here, my first couple of days were really hard for me,” said Levin.

If that wasn’t discouraging enough, Levin’s bigger fear was adapting culturally.

“I was more scared of my language, because I didn’t really know how to speak English,” he said. “It was really hard for me, but I went to school and I was reading books.”

When Levin wasn’t in class, he was either on the ice or in the gym. His persistence paid off, and earned him a spot on the Don Mills Flyers, a local team in the highest youth hockey division.

That Levin had such limited experience in organized hockey when drafted first overall by the Wolves speaks volumes of his raw talent, said Sudbury coach David Matsos.

“I think he’s surprised a lot of people including myself and he’s been a wonderful kid to coach, a wonderful teammate.

I’m excited to see how far this kid can really take it,” said Matsos.

“We don’t even know how far he can go. It’s exciting.”

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