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CANADIAN BASKETBALL TEAM GOES FOR GOLD AT MACCABI GAMES IN CHILE

 By [Sheri Shefa, Staff Reporter](#) - December 31, 2015 > 6885 > 0


Maccabi Canada basketball team FACEBOOK PHOTO

Although the [Maccabi Canada delegation](#) at this year's Pan American Maccabi Games is just a fraction of the size of the 2011 contingent, it made history last week.

For the first time in Maccabi Canada's history, the open men's basketball team beat the American team in its second game of the tournament in Santiago, Chile, which runs from Dec. 26 to Jan. 5.

Tali Dubrovsky, Maccabi Canada's national executive director, said the American basketball team traditionally dominates the competition, leaving the Canadians to compete for the silver or bronze, but with a win against the Americans early in the tournament, the Canadian team is setting its sights on the gold medal.

Ave Bross, a 22-year-old Thornhill native who played four years as point guard on McGill University's varsity team and is currently participating in his fifth Maccabi Games, is one of the team's star players.

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After a disappointing seventh-place finish at the Maccabiah Games in Israel in 2013, Bross said, "our expectation for this team is to get the gold. That's what we're here for.

"We had a tough start. We lost to Argentina in the first game by three, in a game that was difficult, and we definitely didn't play our best, but since then, we've been playing really well and really hungry, and we pulled off that win against the United States by seven," said Bross, who served as flag-bearer for the Canadian team during the opening ceremonies.

In their third game, Bross said they came out early with a 20-point lead and didn't look back, beating the Guatemalan team by 42 points.

Basketball is one of only two sports in these games that Canadians are competing in. The entire Maccabi delegation is made up of 20 athletes, compared to the 175 athletes who travelled to Brazil for the games in 2011.

Dubrovsky blamed the weak Canadian dollar for the last-minute cancellations that resulted in a smaller team.

In addition to the basketball team, Maccabi Canada is also represented by a masters tennis team, consisting of 44-year-old Anton Rabie and 40-year-old Lauren Liverman.

Following a win in his first set in the singles tournament to a Chilean player, and a loss to the gold medal-winner from the last Pan Am games in Sao Paulo, Rabie was eliminated from the tournament.

Liverman won her first two matches, which qualified her for the semi-finals in the singles tournament, and both Rabie and Liverman are gearing up to play in the mixed doubles tournament.

Rabie said that although the Maccabi Games are about competition, that's just one aspect of it.

"The magic of this trip has been bringing the kids to Chile and having them meet Jewish kids from around the world and having a magical, warm experience," said Rabie, who brought his wife and three daughters, aged nine to 12, to Chile with him.

"Santiago has a really warm Jewish community. It's like the Winnipeg Jewish community. It's about 15,000 people and there is so much warmth and so much spirit," he added.

"When you leave North America, the first thing you learn is the comfort you have with Jews around the world and you realize that you're all from the same place. The Maccabi Games really does deliver on what they say, which is exposing Jewish kids to Zionism around the world."

Maccabi Canada president Tommy Bacher explained that for the countries that host the Pan Am games, it's an opportunity for them to engage with other Jewish communities.

"It allows them to mobilize and involve their Jewish communities, which, oftentimes feel pretty isolated from the rest of the Jewish world, in something that is Zionist, and certainly spreads the message of Jewish solidarity throughout the world," Bacher said.

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"We have communities from Israel, Australia, Great Britain, South Africa, as well as the South American countries and the States and Canada. I think there are 21 countries represented here, and about 2,300 athletes."

For Bross, the Maccabi Games, in which he's participated since he was 14, have contributed positively to his Jewish identity.

"Judaism is important to me and sport is a passion of mine, and the fact that this is a combination of the two is unbelievable," he said.

"Seeing the South American Jewish community come out and support us – during the opening ceremonies, I didn't expect to see the stadium filled in Chile. You don't expect to see such a giant Jewish community, but it's meaningful when you walk in with the other athletes and see the community in the stands cheering and the president of Chile coming to give a speech – it's important to see that no matter what, we're a big giant community and we all have each other's backs."

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