



# TORONTO BASKETBALLER MAKES IT TO THE BIG LEAGUES IN ISRAEL

By **Alex Rose** - August 12, 2018 > 5925 > 0



Sage Usher plays basketball for the University of Toronto (Photo Credit: Seyran Mammadov)

After four years of starring for the University of Toronto Varsity Blues men’s basketball team, Sage Usher, 23, is going pro. The Toronto native will begin next season with Maccabi Raanana, a team in Israel’s National League that’s based in Ra’anana, which is about a 20 minute drive north of Tel Aviv.

Over his four years at U of T, Usher started all but four games. He mainly played point guard, leading the team in assists for all four years and in steals for three out of the four. Usher also improved as a scorer over that time – averaging 13 points per game in his final year, the second-highest scorer on the team and more than double his scoring average in his first season.



Sage Usher plays basketball for the University of Toronto. (Photo Credit: Seyran Mammadov)

With his improved skillset, Usher said he expects to play shooting guard, as well as point guard, for Raanana. That means he won’t always have the ball in his hands as much as he did at U of T, but the coach of Raanana told Usher that he’ll still get a chance to show what he can do.

“The coach said they’re bringing me over to play. He said, ‘Listen, I don’t know how much at this moment, but we’re not gonna bring you over not to play. We’re expecting good things from you,’ ”

said Usher.

John Campbell, Usher’s coach at U of T, believes he will have a successful career in Israel.

“Because he learns so quickly, hopefully he’ll be able to figure out what his coaches want from him, and then, over time, really be able

to deliver that,” said Campbell. “Because I think that’s sort of what he proved here, if there’s something he maybe can’t do right off the bat, he works hard and he finds a way to be successful.”

That willingness and ability to become better was evident in the improvement in Usher’s scoring stats while he was at U of T, but there are other ways he made his presence felt, as well.

“He led by example. Certainly put in his time, working on his game and being a team-first player, which I think sort of spins off to the other players,” said Campbell. “As he became more confident, he was able to become a vocal leader and really did a nice job of trying to be sort of that coach on the floor.”

Daniel Johansson, Usher’s teammate for the past three years, agrees with Campbell’s assessment of Usher’s game. Both of them said that Usher’s basketball IQ and court vision were strengths of his. They also made sure to point out that Usher is very competitive and will do whatever it takes to triumph.

“For a teammate, you want someone that really wants to win and wants to do his best always,” said Johansson. “He’s a competitor not only in games, but also in practice and even in lifts. Anything around the game, he just makes sure he’s always ready to go and get the best out of himself.”

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Usher grew up playing lots of sports, but has been focusing on basketball competitively since Grade 8. Last summer, he represented Canada at the 20th Maccabiah Games in Jerusalem. It was his second time in Israel, the other being a tour he did with his family.

Usher said that when he first started at U of T, playing professionally in Israel wasn’t something he envisioned for himself. But as his career continued and he had to decide whether to keep playing basketball professionally, Israel made a lot of sense. He could get a passport because he is Jewish and he enjoyed playing there last summer.

“It definitely opened my eyes to the people there, the way of life there,” he said. “I definitely thought about it before, but being over there ... it definitely showed me how serious they are about basketball as a country.”

Usher will be leaving for Israel on Aug. 27. His season starts Oct. 9.

