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MACCABI CANADA HOSTS RECEPTION FOR PAN AM JEWISH ATHLETES

By Shlomo Kapustin - July 20, 2015 > 4746 > 0

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VIEW



TORONTO — For weeks, ambivalent Torontonians braced themselves for the Pan Am Games and their long-predicted disruptions, but for Canadian high-level athletes and their supporters – including the Jewish athletic community – these games represent a return home.

“We’re so used to being the guest,” Tali Dubrovsky, national executive director of Maccabi Canada, said July 15 at a private event in Toronto for the group’s volunteers, supporters, alumni coaches and athletes.

“When we go to Israel, we’re the guest. Next week we’re going to Berlin with a small [16-member] delegation to the European Maccabi games – we’re going to be the guest. In December we’re going to Santiago, Chile, with a Canadian delegation – again we’re going to be the guest. We’re always relying on the local organization, the local community, to support us.”

In addition to being the largest event in Toronto sports history, the Pan Am Games have also allowed Maccabi Canada to celebrate the bonds between its athletes, the group’s grassroots and the next generation of elite Jewish athletes.

“Maccabi stands for excellence in sports,” said Tommy Bacher, Maccabi Canada’s president since 2010, “and we try to promote Jewish heritage and connection to our Jewish roots, and a love of Israel. That’s really what we stand for, and we do it through sport.”

Not so long ago, Josh Binstock was one of those young dreamers, combating the myth of Jewish athletic ineptitude.

“You grow up as a Jewish child thinking that you can’t be successful on the real world stage,” he said, “so the fact that we’re together proving that wrong – that

means a lot for the Jewish community.”

Now 34, the Olympian continues to build on career-best results in beach volleyball. After the last Maccabiah Games in 2013, when he was the flag-bearer for the Canadian delegation, he teamed with fellow Richmond Hill native Sam Schachter. Ranked seventh in the world, the duo was selected to represent Canada in the Pan Am Games.

Four other athletes at these games could not attend the Maccabi reception, citing training conflicts. One, track and field athlete Sasha Gollish, was also part of the 2013 Maccabiah delegation.

Three other Jewish athletes round out this month’s Canadian roster: Daniel Gaysinsky, in karate, and identical twins Anjelika and Victoria Reznik, rhythmic gymnasts. Tennis player Sharon Fichman, who trains in Vancouver, was forced to withdraw from the Pan Am Games with an ankle injury.

A veteran of three Maccabiah Games, which take place every four years in Israel, Binstock has assumed a leadership role with the group. Attending events like last week’s reception is part of the Maccabi package, he said.

“Tali and Tommy have been so supportive of me, and Maccabi is so great,” he said. “It’s important to me to continue this relationship going forward.”

Maccabi has also introduced him to sponsors: as he chases a podium finish with Schachter at next year’s Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, he has mostly deferred his chiropractic career.

The additional role of being a motivating force adds a responsibility that can sometimes be taxing, Binstock said.

“I sometimes don’t want that spotlight,” he acknowledged. “But then I say to myself, ‘Grow up,’ and I realize what I’m contributing... When I’m around kids, I kind of sense that they look to me as a role model, and I like being in that role. They get all fired up.”

Schachter, 25, represents the next crop of Maccabi Canada athletes.

“I’d like to see myself assume the same kind of role that Josh takes in terms of being a role model not only in the Jewish community but in sports,” he said.

“Those are some big shoes to fill, so hopefully I can do as good a job as him. He’s a great public speaker and it’s a skill I’m working on as well.”

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