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Maccabi Canada ups the game in Calgary

Maccabi Canada held its first ever sports day in the city at the Calgary Jewish Academy on April 24 with the participation of nearly 40 young athletes.

Jordan Balaban, who coordinated the event here, was ecstatic with the turnout and believes the sports day program will provide a significant and long-term boost for Jewish participation in athletics.

Balaban was joined by several other elite athletes in the city to put the group of 12 to 14-year-olds through a day of skills training and to try and impart the wider message of the Maccabi sports movement.

Helping out were Marty Krell, who coached volleyball; Josh Inhaber, a highly ranked middle distance runner; Matt Greenberg, a skilled basketball coach; and Jordan Balaban himself, a nationally ranked collegiate basketball player.

Besides being skilled athletes, the Calgary coaches are all committed to the ideals of the Maccabi movement and have competed in various international Maccabi games, includ-

ing the prestigious Maccabiah held every four years in Israel.

The Maccabiah is often referred to as the Jewish Olympics. In terms of participation it is the third largest athletic event of its kind in the world, with thousands of Jewish athletes from around the world gathering in Israel every four years for friendly competition in team and individual sports.

Jordan Balaban and some of his friends have experienced this amazing atmosphere so they wanted to share that excitement with the next generation of Calgary youth through this special sports camp.

"One of the things we try to do with the sports day program is to provide the kids with a quality athletic experience. We wanted to show them some of the tools of sport like advance techniques, the need for training and discipline, and above all to live a healthy life style.

"The other part of it is to open a part of the Jewish world to these kids that they may not know exists. All of us who have participated in

the Maccabi program, culminating in the Maccabiah games in Israel, are inspired to learn that there are Jewish youth around the world who know the same prayers you do, who have the same pas-

to establish and ultimately defend a Jewish state, Jews needed places to train, build up their physiques and their self-confidence. Since Jews were not allowed into many training clubs at the time,



Coaches and aspiring athletes gathered at the Calgary Jewish Academy on April 24 for the first Maccabi Canada Sports Day, a program to encourage youth to take up the healthy lifestyle of sports and broaden their Jewish identity and connections with Israel.

sion for Israel as you have. "The Maccabi movement's roots are very Zionist. In the early 20th century the Maccabi movement identified that in order

Maccabi gym clubs were established across Europe with the purpose of training Israel's future foot soldiers." The sports day at CJA is part of a national effort by

Maccabi Canada to get more kids interested in pursuing healthy athletic activities while instilling Jewish pride and developing strong links with Israel. The participants in Calgary were put through several challenging sport-specific training stations appropriate to their age level.

Jordan Balaban said he was very impressed with the enthusiasm of the young athletes.

"I think everyone had a very enjoyable day. We put them through some tough drills and they gained some useful skills.

"For us as coaches it also helps identify the next generation of potential elite athletes and to develop more advanced training opportunities for them."

Balaban said the deeper message also got through.

"I think these youth were very excited to see some of us experienced athletes in our Maccabi uniforms and to catch the dream that it could be them one day competing in the Maccabiah in Israel.

"In the Maccabiah games in 2013 there were 9,000 athletes from well over 60

different countries. But only 10 came from Alberta. I want to build that into 50 by raising awareness of the games and by facilitating athletic development.

"We're certainly going to repeat sports day next year and we would like to expand it from CJA to include Alkiva Academy if possible."

For the experienced Maccabi athletes like Jordan Balaban and his fellow coaches, there is great pleasure in seeing young people develop their own prowess. But they also see it as a community building enterprise.

"It's important for young Jewish athletes to take an interest in sport at a young age as it teaches us about dedication, determination and responsibility - all the traits that make for future successful leaders in our own community and in the Jewish world.

"Maccabi Canada is giving back to the community and if looking for partners for our young athletes to become more involved in sport, and through that to become more involved with Israel and the Jewish world."