

A father and son's Maccabiah Games glory

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After spending two and a half weeks in Israel, my friends and family asked me how my Maccabiah Games experience was. I've looked into their eyes and tried to find the words to describe this life-changing event. Actually, the experience started November 9th, 2016. On that day, I received a phone call from a Maccabiah Games representative. He said that my son Cameron "Duke" was selected to be on Team Canada's Juniors U19 hockey team. He was going to represent Canada at the Maccabiah Games in Israel in July 2017. My family was ecstatic!

I love watching Duke play hockey. I was even more thrilled to be able to watch him play in Israel representing Canada. Talk about exciting news that vibrated throughout our family.

The winter months passed and I completed many forms, replied to many emails from the coaches and team administration, and group chats were constant. Everything was in preparation for the players and the hockey team. The super excitement started when the children received their Team Canada uniforms and travel bags. There was such a buzz of happiness in our home.

Then the unexpected happened. My husband was invited to play on the Masters Hockey team, also representing Canada! Holy Moly, he had to hit the gym and fast. Laurie had one month to get in hockey shape and gear! Now, my son and husband were both playing hockey in the 2017 Maccabiah Games. The preparation for the games started to get crazy in our home.

We were all packing up for what was going to be a thrilling experience for our family. The hockey schedule illustrated that both the Juniors and Masters teams were going to play at least 5 games — 5 times 2 equals 10 — within a 2 week period. That's a lot of hockey.

Arrival in Israel was met with people asking us which sport we were involved in. As soon as we said hockey, their eyes lit up. Hockey in Israel is an uncommon sport, but a sport which is warmly (coldly) welcomed. The taxi driver said, "Oh, you're here to play hockey. I love hockey, but I don't get to see much of it. I'll come watch. I don't understand it, but it's very good and fast."

The opening ceremonies of the 20th Maccabiah Games took our breath away. So many teams from so many different countries. Everyone smiling and cheering. Flags from 80 different countries waving in Jewish pride and belonging.

I watched the ceremonies in the stands with my daughter Allyn. Then... Team Canada came out and I saw my son and husband. We were beaming with pride and crying at the same time. At times I could barely see them as the tears were blurring my vision. They were proudly wearing Team Canada uniforms, draped in Canadian flags. My palms were sweating with excitement

Our eyes were glued to the huge screens as we watched all 80 teams parading in their uniforms and flags. Surreal was another word to best describe this event. It was hard to sleep the first night. Let the games begin!

During the first week of competition, my son travelled through Israel as part of his team's Israel experience while my husband's hockey team started their competition. Games 1 through 10 were held at the Pais Arena in Jerusalem. It was about 60 degrees inside the arena, and about 90+ outside. Sweatshirt on and sweatshirt off for about 2 weeks was my sport!

As the games for both teams were well into the second week of competition, my son Taylor joined us. During that time a new awareness came to me. Hockey is loved in Israel! Many people came to see the hockey games, especially children (what we in Canada affectionately call, Arena Rats). These children came to see the players, learn the game and hope for a souvenir or even an autograph. The Canadian hockey players were treated like celebrities.

Every time my son finished a game, there were children waiting for a souvenir like a puck, a stick, a pin, or even a Canada flag and sticker. The players loved giving whatever they could to the children.

Another awareness which came to me earlier during the games was that the participants and spectators enjoyed wearing their country's identification. I wore a Canada pin and knapsack throughout my stay in Israel. Other people wore their country's identification on hats, t-shirts, pants, bags, etc. Wherever I went, I met people from countries such as Mexico, Australia, Italy, South Africa, USA, England, France, etc.

Meeting people from all over the world felt as if the world wasn't so big and we aren't so different after all. As a family, we had so many unique experiences during the games. I smiled and cheered throughout each of the ten games. I met so many people and made many new friends from both Duke and Laurie's hockey teams. I loved walking in the Old City of Jerusalem and meeting people from every corner of the world. Just standing in an elevator and saying "Hi" to a tennis player from Italy or a hockey player from the Ukraine was fun!

Just before the closing ceremonies both my son and husband were privileged to receive silver medals. They were so proud to be part of a great team effort. Also, so proud to represent Canada and the Maccabiah Games.

There is so much beauty in the love of sport. There is also so much beauty in people coming together from all over the world to share this love in peace. So, when I'm asked by my family and friends, how my trip to Israel was...I am somewhat lost for words. I'm still in a delightful fog of Maccabiah Games Glory!

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