

Making Memories Through Maccabi



By Jacob Lapidus

Baltimore Maccabi participant

I first heard about Maccabi in middle school when a few of my friends planned on trying out for the boys 13-14 basketball team. Making the team offered a chance to travel to Denver, Colorado. This opportunity seemed unreal to me at the time – a measly six-foot, one-inch, seventh grader – but I mustered up my confidence and went to try outs. Most of the other kids seemed so much older, taller, stronger and more skilled than I could hope to become within the three week span of player evaluations.

I became increasingly nervous in the following weeks about my chances, which I assumed were slim to none. However, one night during dinner, I received a call from my coach, Josh Schmerling, congratulating me on making the 2010 Maccabi team. I ecstatically called my good friend and found out he had made had made it too. My parents remember that night distinctly as the one in which we screamed like girls over the phone in our excitement.

Once we arrived in Denver, I was amazed by the caliber of competition of basketball among Jewish youth at this international level, and I grew as a player, thanks to my team's talent and my coaches' mentorship. I also had the opportunity to travel halfway across the country (without my parents) and stay with my friend, and two soccer players from Mexico, in a host family's home.

Because I am also an avid musician, I applied and interviewed for a spot in Maccabi Artsfest as well. I auditioned for bass guitar and was accepted. Since Artsfest was taking place in Baltimore that year, Paul Lurie allowed me to partake in both. My two-week Maccabi experience of my first summer was an incredible one, filled with wins, losses, music, fun and amazing memories. I still maintain connections with those I met to this day.

My first year of Maccabi was an incredible experience, but during my second year I began to involve myself in the true culture of Maccabi. I joined the Maccabi Club, a planning committee that designs the Baltimore

Delegation's uniforms, warm ups, color scheme, pins and bags. We also plan several social events leading up to the week of Maccabi itself. It was amazing to have the opportunity to interact with a group of people who also shared my passion and appreciation for the Maccabi Experience. I maintained my position in the Maccabi Club for my remaining two years.

During my second year, I stuck with basketball, rather than music, because I really enjoyed the team aspect and mentality. One might not think much of Springfield, Massachusetts as an exciting destination for Maccabi, but for my sport, basketball, the experience was unbelievable. We toured the Basketball Hall of Fame, and my host family made the entire week fun and enjoyable.

My third year, however, was a bit of a disappointment, because I became very sick shortly before the trip and was unable to join my team in Houston, Texas. I was incredibly distraught over missing out on such an opportunity, but my team kept me updated about all their games. The ability of my team and coaches to take one of the worst possible situations and turn it around into a positive experience stands as a testament to the phenomenal support of the coaching staff and the strong connection and unity that our Maccabi teams have formed over the years.

After so many unforgettable memories formed in my first three years, my fourth and final year of Maccabi stands out as the most exciting and memorable. We traveled to Orange County, California, where every one's host family was fantastic, and we enjoyed many trips to In-N-Out Burger and late night swims. Athletically, we played against a highly competitive field of teams from around the country and certain parts of the world. Our team competed very well and we finally found ourselves in the bronze medal game. Down by one point with only eight seconds left, my friend, who made the team with me that first year and played with me for all four, hit two free throws to put Baltimore up by one point and seal our victory. I have never felt more pride or unity in a single team and would not trade my memories and achievements with the Squad for anything.

My core senses of athletic, social and Jewish identity were formed throughout the four years of my participation in Maccabi. This yearly ritual has played such an important role in shaping my life through my early teenage years. I will miss my annual springtime practices and summer trips with my best friends and teammates. Come August, I will think of all the fortunate Maccabi kids who will participate and represent the Baltimore delegation as I cheer from afar.

To learn more about participating in the 2014 Maccabi games, visit jcc.org/maccabi or contact Paul Lurie at 410-559-3546 or plurie@jcc.org.

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