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The Son Also Rises - Jeff Horowitz, A Second Generation Basketball Player Goes to Israel

By Steve Goldberg, special to The Charlotte Jewish News

Upon signing with Israeli first division basketball team Hapoel Holon, Jeff Horowitz became the first second generation Jewish American to play professionally in Israel.

His father, Larry Horowitz, a Charlotte financial planner and JCC softball fixture, played for Hapoel Tel Aviv during the 1976-77 season until a knee injury ended his basketball career.

As a high school player coming into his own, an optimistic young Horowitz told a family friend about his plans to make it to the NBA. A South Mecklenburg High School graduate, Horowitz played college ball at the College of Charleston and UNC-Wilmington, where he graduated with a degree in communication studies.

Whether Jeff is even the best athlete in the family is arguable. Horowitz's younger sister Betsy led South Mecklenburg to a state basketball title and is now playing volleyball on scholarship at Virginia Tech. Older sister Jenny played basketball and volleyball at Myers Park before graduating with a theatre degree from UNC. His mother Carol has just recently started her soccer career.

Fundamentally strong with excellent passing and rebounding skills, the undisciplined style at Charleston was a poor fit and a coaching change at UNCW made his college career less than anticipated. Fortunately, his solid play for USA teams competing in Maccabiah Games in Israel, Australia and Italy let people know that he was able to compete at the professional level.

Whether it's the chance to play professionally or the opportunity to do it in Israel that's most satisfying, it's hard to tell. As he's matured, following his father's path is also something that has become more important to him.

A California native who came east to play for Davidson from 1971-75, Larry Horowitz also played one season (75-76) in Germany for ADB Koblenz and represented the USA in the 1973 Maccabiah Games where he was a teammate of Washington Wizards president Ernie Grunfeld and former Duke star Bob Fleischer. Horowitz and Grunfeld, a New Yorker who played at Tennessee, were co-recipients of the Maccabi



Jeff Horowitz, Senator Joseph Lieberman, and Jeff's agent, Marc Simon.

Athlete of the Year award in 1974.

"I didn't care so much when I was younger that he had played in Israel, just that he had played professional basketball was really cool," says Jeff. "As I got older the Israel factor became more important for me."

Thirty-two years after his father, Jeff played for the 2005 USA Maccabiah basketball team in Israel.

"I've always been very proud of being Jewish and of the state of Israel," says Horowitz who celebrated his bar mitzvah at the Western Wall in 1998, "and now I'm backing it up by actually living here."

Not just playing there, Horowitz has gone through the aliyah process and will have dual citizenship. He says that is something that is perhaps more important to Holon locals than it is to himself.

"Now when I see an Israeli and they ask if I play basketball and I tell them yes but that also I've made aliyah, you see them change from not only a look of awe about the basketball but to almost a look of appreciation. Their faces just brighten up so much when you tell them you've made aliyah because they really feel that they are in their own little corner of the world and nobody cares about them. When they see any American or international who has made aliyah, it really makes them feel good. For me, that's great."

Horowitz says that while he won't ever give up his American roots, he hopes to make life in Israel a permanent part of his future. "I would love to have a house here in Israel as I love being here. It's a beautiful area and the people and the culture are incredible."

As an Israeli citizen, Horowitz will have to do military duty. Too tall to fly a fighter jet as he would like to do, he expects that he will get a fitness instructor assignment as many professional athletes are given. He will also start studying Hebrew soon at an ulpan, a Hebrew language institute.

Holon, just south of Tel Aviv, is the home of the 2007 Leumit (second division) Champions, which gained them advancement to the top level called the Super League. Coached by team owner Micky Dorsman, former brother-in-law of Miami Heat owner Micky Arison, the team has revamped the roster as it looks to compete in the top flight.

"Jeff is a much better player than I was," says his father. "I hope he gets the chance to show what he can do on the court."

At 6'9", Horowitz is competing for time at center with Chris Watson, an eight year veteran who played in Belgium last season and Ryan Lexer, a nine year veteran. Both are naturalized Israeli citizens now as is Horowitz who has gone through the aliyah process.

Also new at Holon is forward P.J. Tucker from Raleigh who played briefly with the Toronto Raptors last year. The team has also been actively searching for another big man, preferably with NBA experience.

Along with chasing perennial favorite Maccabi Tel Aviv, Horowitz expects the major competition to come from Hapoel Jerusalem. He's excited about the team's prospects and the Holon fans are as well.

"The way they are here is the way they are at Cameron Indoor (Duke University's gym) every game. They stand up the whole game; they are singing the Holon song - which is in Hebrew so don't ask me what it says - the whole game.

"They have the drums going, the chants going, to the point that they forget that when we're shooting free throws they should probably not be banging the drums and singing. But they're having a good time, so ..."

He didn't make it to the NBA as he once dreamed, at least not yet, but for now life is just fine as he begins his first professional season.

"We're not NBA players but they treat us like we are," he says with a laugh. "For the first couple



Jeff Horowitz shows his stuff during a game for UNC-Wilmington.

of days, they knew we were basketball players but now it's 'Hey Jeff Horowitz, how are you?' They recognize me in restaurants and that's pretty cool."

Steve Goldberg is a Charlotte-based journalist, marketing and media consultant. His work has been published by Time, USA Today, and Charlotte Magazine among others. ☆

Lake Norman Jewish Congregation to Host Interfaith Holocaust Event in Mooresville

Lake Norman Jewish Congregation is hosting an inter-faith Holocaust awareness event titled "Defeating the Four 'I's': Ignorance, Injustice, Intolerance and Indifference," on Saturday, November 10, from 5-8 PM at The Charles Mack Citizen Center Auditorium in Mooresville. There will be a catered dinner by Mia Famiglia Ristorante in the banquet facilities immediately following the presentation. The event, sponsored by the L. Kerry Vickar Charitable Foundation, will feature keynote speaker and Holocaust survivor, Charlene Schiff. Schiff survived three winters in the forests of Eastern Poland after losing her father, mother, and only sister, during the German invasion of Horochow, Poland.



Charlene Perlmutter Schiff, Holocaust survivor and keynote speaker on Saturday, November 10, in Mooresville.

The Jewish population of Horochow was 5,000 prior to the 1941 invasion; only two Jews survived, Charlene being one of

the two.

Charlene travels to numerous colleges and civic groups annually speaking on behalf of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Speaker's Bureau in Washington, D.C. Other speakers will include local Pastors and Ministers, featuring Reverend John Dawson of Lakeside Presbyterian Church ARP in Mooresville.

Tickets and Corporate VIP tables are limited, and the event is expected to sell-out quickly. Tickets are \$54 each, and proceeds will benefit various funds established by LNJJC, including the LNJJC Education Fund. Stacey Simms, of WBT Talk Radio, is the Honorary Emcee. For more information, or to reserve tickets, call 704-987-9980. ☆