

MACCABI MOMENT



1998 JCC Maccabi Games athlete profile: Erin Goldstein

By Della Breen

At the Sarasota Maccabi games last summer, Erin Goldstein took home four gold and two silver medals. But she doesn't consider them her greatest victory, and breaking her record isn't why she's busy practicing for this coming year's Games in Charlotte.

"What means the most to me is the chance to be with hundreds of other Jewish kids from around the world," says Erin, 15, who competed on Charlotte's bowling team. "It's the thought of so many of us getting together and meeting each other. Winning medals is fun, but they aren't what motivates me."

Indeed not. Erin, a 10th grader at Northwest High School, has never considered herself particularly athletic, says her mother, Ellen, City Director of BBYO. "The Jewish Community Center has always been a big focal point for our family," says Ellen. "When Erin was younger, the J didn't have girls' soccer or basketball teams. Erin never was very interested in joining sports teams with other youth groups, and we never pushed her."

But when signups began last spring for the Sarasota Maccabi Games, Erin jumped at the chance. "I chose bowling because I figured I'd do it as well as anything else," she smiles. "It might sound strange, but I wound up being a little surprised at how focused the Games are on sports. I thought the social and religious aspects would be emphasized more."

But perhaps that's because social and religious aspects are so important to Erin, who got into the tradition of trading sports gear with new friends from other countries, especially in Erin's case, Mexico. And, she says, one of the most "amazing experiences" in Sarasota was seeing athletes from other countries practice Judaism and praying together. "I mean, here are kids from all over the world, and most of us don't speak

each other's language. But when we prayed, we were all saying the same Hebrew words. I really felt bonded with everyone else, as though I was a part of something bigger."

Like her father, Shelton, a member of the board of the Charlotte Jewish Federation, and younger brother Craig, Erin was born in Charlotte. "We moved to Charlotte 19 years ago from Columbia, SC," says Ellen, originally from Atlanta. "That probably makes us old-timers here." It certainly gives the family a unique perspective on Charlotte's being chosen as a host city for 1998. "Charlotte is a great choice," says Erin. "Its size is perfect for the Games — big enough to be exciting but not too big. And our facilities are excellent."

"The Jewish community here is very strong," agrees Ellen. "People are here to help any way they can. And hosting the Games is a great opportunity for all of us, a really important time for our community to come together to house and feed hundreds of Jewish children from all over. It'll be a great way to show off our southern hospitality."

Meanwhile, Erin, who plans to study Judaism or social work in college, has inspired her younger brother Craig, 12, to sign up for basketball competitions in next year's Games. How would she talk other kids into participating? "I'd show them pictures of the Games in Sarasota," says the girl whose medals hang from her bedroom wall. "I'd show them what a wonderful experience it was just



Erin Goldstein takes a break from the athletic competition at the Sarasota Maccabi games to talk to kids during the "Day of Sharing, Day of Caring."

being there with so many other Jewish kids." She pauses. "After all, we're going to be the Jewish

leaders of tomorrow. It's important that we know each other and stay together." ✧

The JCC Maccabi Games: gold medals and tikkun olam

by Diana Ades

What do Olympic Gold Medalists Mark Spitz, Mitch Gaylord and Israel all have in common? They, along with renowned tennis players Brad Gilbert and Dick Savitt, participated in the Maccabiah Games in Israel.

The Maccabi Movement began in 1895 when the first all-Jewish sports club was formed in Constantinople. In 1932, the first Maccabiah Games were held in Israel and have been held there every four years since. This two week international competition has attracted the best of Jewish athletes including the above mentioned and famous basketball players Ernie Grunfeld and Danny Schayes.

JCCs around the country have had swim teams, basketball

leagues and various other competitive and recreational sports for youth for over 100 years. In fact, Baseball Hall of Famer, Sandy Koufax and outstanding women's basketball player Nancy Lieberman were both active competitors at their JCC.

Inevitably, it became apparent that there needed to be a new version of the games, geared specifically for the Jewish youth in North America. In 1982, Memphis, Tennessee hosted the first ever JCC Maccabi Youth Games. The Games were started not just to provide Olympic-style athletic events, but to provide Jewish youth with an enriching experience in Jewish values and practices. During the first games, over 300 participants gathered to compete in athletics as well as

exchange cultural ideals.

Now, in 1997, the JCC Maccabi Games (the name was officially changed in 1997) have grown in both size and sophistication. They are now held annually in the United States, as an international event. The Games in 1998 will consist of over 4000 athletes and 1000 coaches from more than 90 US cities, Canada, Mexico, Israel, Great Britain, Australia and South America.

Between August 9 and August 14, Charlotte will have the distinct pleasure of being the smallest community ever chosen to host this prestigious event. We will welcome over 600 young Jewish adults between the ages of 13 and 16 to our city to meet, compete and participate in many activities including the "Day of Caring, Day

of Sharing."

This new addition the JCC Maccabi Games is an opportunity for all athletes to enhance their participation by engaging in community volunteer services including: cleaning up parks, visiting local children's hospitals and nursing homes and serving meals at a homeless shelter. This basic American value is closely related to the Jewish concept of tikkun olam (repairing the world) which urges us to make a difference in the lives of others who may be less fortunate than ourselves.

The JCC Maccabi Games are a terrific way to educate today's Jewish youth culturally, religiously and socially. Wouldn't you like to get more involved? There are many opportunities, but housing is the most important item at the moment. For more information or to volunteer yourself or your home, please call Barry Schumer (Games Director - ext. 236) or Amy London (Assistant Games Director - ext. 253) at the JCC (704/366-5007). ✧

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