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Yair Galily

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Sport, Politics and Society in Israel: The First Fifty-five Years

YAIR GALILY

The State of Israel is home to a widely diverse population from many different ethnic, religious, cultural and social backgrounds; a new society with ancient roots, which is still coalescing and developing today. Throughout this article, a developmental approach, one that Elias¹ describes as ‘indispensable for advances in the study of human society’, has been used to describe the process in which sport was developed in the State of Israel. Elias, in discussing the approach taken by himself and his collaborator Dunning, has suggested that: ‘Sociological enquiries into sport have the task of bringing to light aspects of sport which were not known before or which, if known, were known only vaguely. In such cases, the task is to give knowledge greater certainty. We were very conscious that knowledge about sport was knowledge about society.’² And as Dunning puts it:

Sport is something people tend to take for granted. They may like it or dislike it but they do not usually question it or see it as posing problems, which require an explanation. In particular, they rarely ask questions concerning its development or its role in society as a whole. ... It [Sociology of sport] seeks to understand the part played by sports in society and to unravel the complex social forces which have helped to shape and which are currently leading to transformations in their character.³

According to Weill, a review of any country’s cultural history over the last fifty years would show enormous changes—undoubtedly a quantum leap—and certainly more changes than in any other fifty year period in history.

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Israel was a country in the throes of absorbing the remnants of decimated European Jewry—concentrating on surviving and creating a new life in the one piece of land that was prepared to accept them. Each of the decades that followed was marked by yet more social and political convulsions. The 1950s were the years of the mass immigration of Jews from Arab lands

Yair Galily is a sociologist at the Zinman College, Wingate Institute, Israel.

along with tens of thousands of Jews from some seventy-five other countries; all of them brought with them their own language, national heritage and cultural baggage. The 1960s were, above all, marked by the Six Day War of 1967, when a whole new national mythos and sense of euphoria engulfed not only the Jewish population of Israel, but indeed the entire Jewish Diaspora—only to be shattered to a large extent by the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and its aftermath, the effects of which are still very much here today. The 1970s and 1980s saw the first tentative bridges to peace with the Arab world, beginning with the epoch-making visit to Israel of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1977. Since the 1990s the State of Israel has been involved in the continuing struggle for normalization with at least part of the Arab world. However, the assassination in November 1995 of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the change of government, and the slowing down of the peace process, are also events that have had a decisive influence not only on the political life of the country, but also on its cultural development.⁴

Israeli sport, maybe more than any other cultural phenomenon, changed radically since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Over the past four decades, Israeli sport has evolved from an amateur hobby of a few ‘sports freaks’, to a passion of the masses. The transformation into a major cultural phenomenon is the result of general developments in Israeli and international society, but also of the enthusiastic efforts of key individuals. Thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands of people—athletes, coaches, referees, politicians, officials, media people and many others—have contributed to the development of Israeli sport. Similar to Dunning’s view, it will be argued here that an individual’s personal development cannot be understood apart from the social positions he occupies and the differential scope for relative freedom of action which they entail.⁵ Therefore, this article will point out a few of these key people, and review the major developments that turned Israeli sport into a central and legitimate part of Israeli society.

THE EARLY YEARS—LAYING THE FOUNDATION

As Reshef and Paltiel have noted, Israel represents a unique case of an immigrant society formed on the basis of an ideological movement. This has had a profound impact on the development and organization of sport and has led to the institutionalization of sport within a highly politicized framework.⁶

Sport in Israel was first assimilated into the ideological framework of Zionism when Zionist parties appropriated sports clubs as tools for partisan competition. From the early 1920s football clubs started being incorporated into nationwide sports associations that were affiliated with a specific political organization: Hapoel was an organ of the General

Federation of Labour (Histadrut), Maccabi was affiliated with bourgeois political parties, Betar was associated with the right-wing 'Revisionists' and Elizur was related to the religious-Zionist party.⁷ According to Reshef and Paltiel, sport eventually became a metaphor for politics, and marginalized groups used loyalties in sport to demonstrate disaffection with the political establishment:

From their inception, sport organizations have been an indispensable organ of the parties by providing concrete expressions of the respective political ideologies. The parties have used sport as a powerful weapon to increase their political influence. With the foundation of Israel, when Zionism was transformed from a vision into an institution, these organizations rather than losing their political coloration have been reinforced in the comparative arena of Israel politics.⁸

Nevertheless, other processes were also intertwined with Israel's process of state-formation: the processes of secularization, population growth, urbanization, militarization and, most germane for present purposes, the development of sport. These are not isolated but rather interdependent processes and therefore of importance when discussing the development of sport.

In 1947, the struggle between the members of the various sports organizations reached its peak. It was the Maccabi organization which dominated the Amateur Sport Organization in Palestine, but the Hapoel organization established its own programmes for basketball and volleyball while trying to gain international recognition. It was the Hapoel organization which eventually received an invitation to the youth sports festival in Prague in 1947. Its appearance at this festival was of immense significance, not only at the sporting level but at the political level as well. During the same period, the declaration of the establishment of the new State of Israel was about to be made (in May 1947) and the team's appearance in the sports festival along with 67 other countries was of great propaganda importance to the state-to-be.

The bitter negotiations between representatives of Hapoel and Maccabi regarding the composition of the team, specifically how many players from each sporting organization would take part in the festival, indicates the kind of relationship that existed between the two sports organizations. The solution, later dubbed 'the fifty-fifty system', marked the nature of Israeli national teams in the early days of the new state. Fourteen players were chosen to go to Prague: seven from Maccabi and seven from Hapoel. Two basketball coaches were nominated to the team: Joshua Rosin from Maccabi, and Dolk Oimshuf from Hapoel.

The war of independence (1948–1949) brought sporting activities in Israel to a halt. The athletes, like the rest of the population (both men and women), were drafted into the recently assembled army and helped to

protect the country from the invasion of the Arab forces. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Department of Physical Education, which was founded by the National Council in 1939, became a government body. Three years later, the first national sports institutes were established: the Olympic Committee of Israel, whose task was to represent Israeli athletes in international sporting events, and the Sports Federation of Israel, which was responsible for local sports activities. The institutes were responsible for all sports, except tennis and football, which had their own federations.

Three months after the establishment of the state, the Israeli football team participated in a tournament in the US. The purpose of the tournament was to collect donations from the American community, and to evoke global sympathy for the new state. Two years later, the Israeli women's basketball team participated in the European Championship in Budapest, and finished in eleventh place. The third Maccabiah⁹ Games took place in September 1950, and were held for the first time in the National Stadium in Ramat Gan. Maccabi Tel Aviv's football striker, Yehosuah Glazer, led his team to win League Championship, and received the 1950 best athlete award, together with Yehuda Gabai, Malka Koren (athletics), Avraham Shneur (basketball) and Nahum Buch (swimming).

The state sporting institutions established in the 1950s continued to enhance party affiliations established during the British Mandate period. This was reflected in the attempt to preserve a consensus regarding representation of the federations in the sporting organizations. At first, this consensus was characterized by the equal representation of the Hapoel and Maccabi federations, though during the 1950s this consensus came to be based on the proportional size of the federations.

This system created a clear advantage for Hapoel. Not only was it the sports federation of the ruling party, but it also sought to establish a foothold in as many communities as possible. This policy was one part of a larger world view of the Labour Movement, i.e., sport for the masses as opposed to achievement-oriented sport. Another ideological aspect expressed through policy was the emphasis placed by the Labour Movement on pioneering and on a move from the urban centres to the peripheries. During the 1950s a status quo was reached by which Maccabi would be the lesser of the two federations, but would take part in the management and organization of sport. The co-operation between the two major federations reflected the balance of power and coalition politics between the patron parties within the political system proper.¹⁰

The dispute between the two largest sports organizations, Hapoel and Maccabi led to the establishment of separate football leagues. In November 1951, the two organizations signed an agreement that ensured that all sports institutes in the country, as well as the national teams, would

have an equal number of representatives from each organization. In 1952, the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne welcomed Israel into the Olympic family. Knesset member Nahum Het was elected President of the Israeli Olympic Committee, and Israel participated in the 1952 Olympic Games, where sprinter David Tabak and diver Yoav Ra'anani produced impressive results. In 1953, Israel's basketball team finished fifth in the European Champions Cup, which was held in Moscow. The Moscow Jewish community was thrilled by the team's performance, under the guidance of coach Yaakov Shaltiel, and cheered Israeli players Avraham Shneur, Zecharia Ofri, Shimon Shelah, Marcel Hefetz and Fredy Cohen. Israel's achievements in the Moscow games paved the way to its participation in the World Championship in Brazil that year, where it finished in eighth place.

During the pre-Olympic games in 1956, Israel's football team played the Soviet Union's team in Moscow. Eighty thousand people watched the Soviets defeat Israel 5–0, and only the performance of the Israeli goalkeeper, Ya'acov Hodorov, prevented a greater defeat. Three weeks later, in the return match in Ramat Gan, 60,000 spectators again watched the Russians defeat Israel 2–1, despite the historic goal by Nahum Stalmach. The tens of thousands of people who could not watch the game in the stadium listened to the commentary of broadcaster Nehemia Ben-Avraham, who reported from the field:

Hodorov is about to kick the ball from the ground. Strong kick. Our goalkeeper has a strong kick – it is well known. To Stalmach. Stalmach to the centre, to Kaufman. Kaufman to the left, to Mirimovich. Mirimovich back to Kaufman who stands on the 16-meter line. He turns fast. Looking for the pass. Pass the ball to Stalmach. Stalmach bunts ... inside Stalmach scored and equalized to 1-1. I am passing the microphone to the crowd.

The National Sports Institute, named after the British officer Charles Orde Wingate, was inaugurated in 1957. Imanuel Simon and Baruch Bagg founded the Institute, which serves as a sports research, coaching and teaching centre. In 1989, the Wingate Institute won the prestigious Israel Prize for 'improving the quality of sports and physical education in Israel and for promoting numerous sports in Israel and in the international community'.

THE SECOND DECADE

The Sports Authority, which was established at the beginning of the 1960s, united the departments of physical education and sports. However, the authority had little influence on Israeli sport because of the relative independence of the sports federations and the dominance of the four main

organizations (Hapoel, Maccabi, Betar and Elitzur) that were supported by the major political parties.¹¹ Reuven Dafni headed the Sports Authority, and was succeeded by Assael Ben-David and Yariv Oren. In 1986, the Sports Authority was placed under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, where it remains until today.

The first remarkable achievement of the second decade was the 2–1 victory of Israel's football team over Yugoslavia (Rafi Levy scored the winning goal) in the 1960 pre-Olympic tournament in Belgrade. Maccabi Tel Aviv's basketball team began a tradition of European accomplishments in 1963, with its 72–71 victory over Olympia Lubliana in the European Champions Cup. The following year, Maccabi player Tanhum Cohen-Mintz participated in the European team's victory over Real Madrid, and Menahem Ashkenazi refereed the final football match of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. The seventh Maccabiah, which was held in the summer of 1965, hosted numerous first rate Jewish athletes, like swimmer Mark Spitz and basketball player Tal Brody. The remarkable Israeli athletes of the event were swimmers Gershon Shefa, Shlomit Nir and Ivona Tubis, and athletes Hanna Shezifi and Michal Lamdani.

Eighteen countries and 2,400 athletes, including Israeli athletes, participated in the 1966 Asian Games in Thailand. The Israeli delegation returned from Bangkok with impressive achievements (first place for the basketball team, a gold medal for Hanna Shezifi in the 800-metre race and a gold medal for Debra Marcus in the 200-metre race), and received a warm reception from Prime Minister Levi Eshkol.

In January 1967, Israel's basketball team, under the guidance of coach Yehoshua Rozin, and with the help of new-immigrant player Tal Brody, reached the European Championships finals. Maccabi managed to avenge a 31 point loss in the first quarter-final game against Joventut Badalona from Spain with a 32 point win in the return match in Tel Aviv. The game was later referred to as the 'The Badalona Miracle'.

One has to bear in mind in this context that the significance of sport was growing generally, especially the importance of sporting competitions between nations involved one way or another in the 'Cold War' of that period. Dunning, for example, referred in this context to the growing social significance of sport, a trend occurring at all levels of participation but most conspicuously in top-level sport. This trend has also involved a gradual shift from 'amateur' attitudes, values and structures, towards 'professional' ones.¹² Dunning further argued that it was a trend in which sport was being transformed from a marginal, low valued institution into one that is key and much more highly valued, becoming a central source of identification, meaning and gratification in the lives of many people. The processes discussed here should be understood in these terms.

THE THIRD DECADE: FROM THE LOCAL TO THE GLOBAL

Israel's football team reached the Olympic quarter-finals for the first time in 1968, the beginning of the third decade. The team was tied with Bulgaria, and missed its chance to proceed to the semi-finals due to an unlucky coin toss. Two years later, under the guidance of coach Immanuel Shefer, and with the help of players Mordechai Spiegler and Giora Spiegel, Israel reached the World Cup finals in Mexico. On 9 August 1969, Israel gained its first world title when dinghy sailors Zefania Carmel and Lydia Lazarov won the world championships in the 420 class. In 1970, Israel's delegation to the Bangkok Asian Games, headed by Esther Roth, won six gold medals, one of the greatest achievements of Israeli sport. In 1972, the Israeli youth basketball team, under the guidance of coach Ralph Klein, finished fourth in the European Youth Championship, after a surprising victory over the Soviet Union.

However, Israeli sport has also had some less glorious and even tragic moments. In 1971, a National Commission of Inquiry, headed by Justice Moshe Etzioni, exposed a series of corruption scandals, involving Football League teams and players. Nevertheless, the greatest tragedy of Israeli sport was undoubtedly the Munich Olympic Games. Despite the extraordinary achievements of athletes Lasse Viren, Olga Korbut, Valery Borsov and Frank Shorter, the 1972 Olympics are remembered mostly for the murder of eleven Israeli athletes. On 5 September 1972, a terrorist squad from the Palestinian Black September organization attacked the residence of the Israeli delegation in the Olympic Village. The squad killed wrestling coach Moshe Weinberg and weightlifter Yossef Romano, and took nine hostages. A futile negotiation, followed by an unsuccessful rescue attempt by the local authorities, led to the murder of the remaining nine hostages the following day. The Olympic Games were suspended for one day of mourning, and the Israeli delegation requested that they be stopped completely. However, the Olympic Committee decided to continue the games, claiming that 'the Olympic spirit is stronger than terrorist acts'.

After the games were renewed, the Jewish-American swimmer Mark Spitz won seven gold medals, and broke seven world records. Four years later, in the Montreal games, Esther Roth-Shachamarov became the first Israeli athlete to reach the finals of an Olympic event, and finished sixth in the 100-metre hurdles. The late 1970s will be remembered mostly for the achievements of Israel's leading basketball team, Maccabi Tel Aviv.¹³ After the team beat Central Sports klub of Army (Moscow) in February 1977, it went on to win the prestigious European Champions Cup, following a 78–77 victory over Mobilgirgi Varese in the final match. Players Tal Brody, Miki Berkowitz, Lou Silver, Moti Aroesti and Aulsie Perry, coach Ralph Klein and team chairman Shimon Mizrahi, became national heroes overnight, and received an unprecedented welcome in the Yarkon Park upon their return to Israel.

As noted by Jarvie,¹⁴ international sport and the success of international athletes have often been among the most important symbols of integration for many emerging nations. Victorious athletes not only tend to legitimize the nation within the international arena, but also present a positive image of that nation. The underlying assumption behind Jarvie's argument has been that cultural heroes/heroines (along with political leaders) helped to bridge the gap between national and global recognition, with citizens often feeling affection for the athlete and the nation. Pursuing this very line, it can be argued that Maccabi Tel Aviv's victory in the European Champions Cup incarnated the positive image of Israel. However—and probably even more important—it contributed to the legitimacy badly needed by Israel in the international arena at that time.

The victory of Maccabi Tel Aviv in 1977 had another important repercussion as far as Israel's national identity was concerned. It has often been observed that the importance of sporting achievements takes on an added resonance in countries like Israel, that embody large numbers of immigrants from many different parts of the world. For example, Wilson¹⁵ suggests that the function of sport as a national identifier is especially important in countries faced with acute problems of assimilating waves of immigrants into a single 'melting pot' (e.g., the United States, Australia, or New Zealand), and/or in countries that, through their pattern of settlement, or the way in which national boundaries were drawn by colonial powers, embrace regions or peoples with quite different cultures (e.g., Canada and many African countries). As will be seen, the role of basketball as a national identifier would be further strengthened in about 1979, when the Israeli basketball team was about to achieve another one of the greatest successes ever in Israeli history.

THE FOURTH DECADE: GAINING INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

In 1974, the Israel Prize was awarded to a sports activist for the first time (Yehoshua Alouf, for 'laying the foundations of physical education and sports in Israel for 50 years'). In 1979, the prize was awarded to Yosef Yekutieli, founder of the Israel Football Association (1928), the Palestine Olympic Committee (1933) and the Maccabiah Games, for 'dedicating his life to promoting and laying the international foundation of Israeli sport'. Yekutieli shared the award with basketball player Tal Brody, the first sportsperson ever to be awarded the nation's highest honour, who received it for being 'a great athlete, a role model of sporting behaviour and an example of successful immigration and absorption of foreign athletes in Israel'.

Israel reached the 1979 European Champions Cup finals after a victory over Yugoslavia, the world champions at the time, but was defeated in the finals by the Soviet Union. Winning the silver medal was considered by

most Israelis to be the greatest ever achievement of Israeli sports and as a very important event in the state's history.¹⁶

Following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the US decided to boycott the Moscow Olympic Games, and urged its allies to do the same. As a result, most Western countries turned down their invitation to the Olympic Games, except for Great Britain and Australia, who decided to allow their athletes to compete under the Olympic flag. Israel also boycotted the games after Prime Minister Menahem Begin and the Israeli Olympic Committee acceded to the American President's request.

Israel's disabled athletes showed great talent in the 1980 Paralympic Games, which were held in Arnheim, Holland. The delegation returned with gold medals in swimming (Uri Bergman), weightlifting (Avraham Shtroich and Shmuel Haimovitch), and athletics (Tzipi Rubin). However, the greatest achievement of the delegation was the basketball team's impressive victory over the US team, which secured it the gold medal. Israel's leading basketball player was Baruch Hagai, today an Israel Prize laureate (2001), and an Olympic record holder in table tennis (four consecutive gold medals).

Agnes Keleti, the coach of the Israeli gymnastics team and one of the greatest Jewish athletes of all times, lit the Independence Day torch of 1981. Keleti won four gold medals, two silver medals and two bronze medals in the Helsinki and Melbourne Olympic Games, where she represented her homeland, Hungary. The Israeli basketball team Maccabi Tel Aviv won the European Champions Cup for the second time in 1981, and consolidated its position as a European leader and the unquestionable master of Israeli basketball.

Tennis was in the limelight at the beginning of the 1980s,¹⁷ after tennis player Shlomo Glickstein won the New Jersey Tournament in 1981. In 1983, Glickstein defeated Ivan Lendl, the top-ranked player in the world. Another tennis player, Amos Mansdorf, was the second Israeli to win the New Jersey Tournament in 1986, and in 1987 Israel's tennis team beat the acclaimed Czechoslovakian team and reached the final stages of the Davis Cup. Ian Froman was awarded the Israel Prize in 1989, for his 'tremendous contribution to the development of tennis in Israel'. Nevertheless, despite the immense popularity of the sport, it failed to produce talented successors after the retirement of Mansdorf and Glickstein.

THE FIFTH DECADE

A few key developments made the fifth decade significantly different from the previous ones, and turned Israeli sport into a central part of cultural life. The privatization process and the declining influence of the major organizations turned sport into first-rate entertainment. From the 1980s

onward sports have been disentangled from politics, although the various movements maintain their old links. Hapoel remains affiliated with the Histadrut but most of its leading sports teams have been sold off to private entrepreneurs. The same is true of Betar. Elitzur remains rooted in its religious affiliations, and while there are leading professional basketball teams like Elitzur Netanya, there are no leading soccer Elitzur teams because professional soccer is played mainly on the Sabbath in Israel.

But if the linkage between sports and politics has declined since the 1970s, it has intensified in the international arena as the country's Arab neighbours sought to isolate the Jewish state from 1973 onwards. Ironically, this tactic backfired. For while Israel was expelled from all Asian sports' federations, it was eventually accepted into the European sports' bodies, enabling the country to compete in many of the world's most prestigious competitions such as the European Athletics Championships, the European Swimming Championships, the Union Européenne de Football Association (UEFA) football cups, the European Basketball cups and all other major European tournaments.¹⁸

The Budget Control Authority, which was established in July 1990, required every football team to register as an association and to present a real, balanced budget. The Maliniak Committee report, which was submitted to Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein in 1993, explicitly recommended making the transition to full professionalism, separating sports and politics, putting an end to the Gambling Council's support of professional sport, and cutting the central organizations' budgets by 80 percent. The acquisition of the Maccabi Haifa's football club by businessman Yaakov Shahar in January 1993 was an important landmark in the privatization process¹⁹ of sports clubs in Israel.

Another key development was the end of one-channel Israeli television, and the beginning of the multi-channel era.²⁰ The one-channel era, which had lasted nearly a quarter of a century (1968–1993), left Israeli sport fans rather unsatisfied. Due to the channel's tight budget and full programme schedule, it could offer only limited broadcasts of sporting events. The first Israeli football league game was broadcast only in 1986, and a local basketball game was not broadcast until 1991, with the launch of Channel 2.

The establishment of a commercial channel (Channel 2) and cable TV channels started a revolution in the Israeli media. In fact, it would not be too far-fetched to say that not only the media, but also the whole of Israeli society became multi-channel almost overnight. For the first time in Israel, people were exposed to sports channels, like Eurosport and Star Sport, which more than doubled the supply of sports programmes. Furthermore, the two 24-hour news channels, CNN and Sky, provide daily sportscasts which cover sporting events from all over the world.

The new local sports channel, Channel 5, significantly raised the standards of local basketball broadcasts, forcing Channels 1 and 2 to raise

their standards to the international level too. Channel 5 also devoted airtime to less popular sports, and for the first time in Israel people could watch broadcasts of the volleyball and handball leagues. Consideration must also be devoted to the fact that other factors besides the transformation of Israel into a multi-channel media society intertwined with Israel's process of state-formation: secularization, population growth,²¹ urbanization, militarization²² and, most germane for present purposes, the development of professional sports. As stated earlier, these processes are not isolated but rather interdependent processes and therefore of importance when discussing the development of sport in Israel.

Other important developments include the introduction of the Sports Bill, the increased immigration of foreign athletes²³ to Israel, and the acquisition of Israeli football players (like Roni Rosenthal, Eyal Berkowitz and Haim Revivo) by European clubs. The constant transfer of athletes between clubs signalled the decline in the clubs' influence, and the rise of athletic 'stars'. The achievements of silver-medallist Yael Arad and bronze medallist Oren Smadja in the judo events of the 1992 Olympics were an important breakthrough in Israeli sport. Additional Israeli accomplishments, such as a bronze medal for windsurfer Gal Friedman in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, and a silver medal for kayaker Michael Kolganov in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, proved that these achievements²⁴ are not accidental. Rather, they are the direct result of fostering excellence in sport, cultivating young talents (by opening boarding schools for gifted athletes and establishing high school soccer and basketball leagues) and long term planning.²⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Modern sport has never had more influence on people's lives than it does today. People have never had so much free time, and sports events were never before so tightly linked to economic factors as well as identity, nationality, health and technology. The differences in the physical activities in different societies remind us that every cultural activity, including sport, can serve a number of social purposes.

It can be seen, then, that in the Israeli context, sport and nationalism have been closely linked in the time period under discussion here. As an emerging nation, Israel used sport, and mainly basketball, as an instrument of national unity and integration.²⁶ The success of Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball club, for example, over the years helped to reinforce national consciousness and cultural nationalism. Moreover, it helped the new state, via success on the basketball court, to gain international recognition and at the same time, as Jarvie²⁷ has put it, contributed to the quest for socio-cultural identity on the local level.

As such, the development of Israeli sport has to be seen as interdependent with the broader political economy of Israel and in conjunction with the close relationship between the developing sport organizations and the development of an Israeli state. Moreover, it is argued here that the development of sport in Israel can be understood adequately only by presenting it in its historical context.²⁸

It seems that Israeli sport,²⁹ more than any other cultural phenomenon, has changed radically since the establishment of the state in 1948. The decision to put Deputy Minister of Education Pinhas Goldstein in charge of Israeli sport in 1990 was an important landmark, which was followed by similar appointments of Deputy Ministers Micha Goldman and Moshe Peled. The decision to appoint Matan Vilnai as Minister of Science, Culture and Sport in 1999 indicated not only the growing importance of sports in Israeli society, but also the need to carefully supervise and foster a growing phenomenon, which has become a substantial part of Israeli culture. Israel's recent achievements in the local and international arena, like Maccabi Tel Aviv's third victory in the European Champions Cup, and the unprecedented accomplishments of the Israeli football teams (Maccabi Haifa and Hapoel Tel Aviv) in Europe,³⁰ prove that as far as Israeli sport is concerned, the future is (almost) here.

NOTES

1. See Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, Oxford, 1986, p. 22, in which Elias clearly distinguished between 'history' and 'development', using the former term to refer to the level of events and the latter to refer to more enduring figurations.
2. *Ibid.*, p.19.
3. Eric Dunning, *Sociology of Sport: Selections of Readings*, London, 1971, p. xv.
4. Asher Weill, *Fifty Years of Culture in Israel: From 'Melting Pot' to 'Bouillabaisse'*, Jerusalem, 1997.
5. Eric Dunning, 'Sport in the Quest for Excitement: Norbert Elias's Contribution to the Sociology of Sport', *Group Analysis*, Vol. 30 (1997), pp. 477–487.
6. Nurit Reshef and Jeremy Paltiel, 'Partisanship and Sport: The unique case of politics and sport in Israel', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol. 6 (1989), pp. 305–318.
7. Amir Ben-Porat, 'The Commodification of Football in Israel', *International Review of Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1998), pp. 269–276.
8. Reshef and Paltiel, 'Partisanship and Sport', p. 317.
9. In 1932 the first Maccabiah, the international Jewish Olympics, sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee, were held in what was then Palestine. They attracted 500 Jewish athletes from 23 countries. The second Maccabiah took place in 1935 with similar participation; many athletes stayed in the country, preferring not to return to a Europe threatened by the Nazis.
10. Iddo Nevo, 'Sport Institutions and Ideology in Israel', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2000), pp. 334–344.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Eric Dunning, 'The Sociology of Sport in Europe and the United States: Critical Observations from an "Eliasian" Perspective', in R. Rees and W. Miracle (eds.), *Sport and Social Theory*, Champaign, IL, 1986, pp. 29–65.

13. For further discussion see Yair Galily and Ken Sheard, 'Cultural Imperialism: The Americanization of Israeli Basketball (1978–1996)', *Culture, Sport, Society*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2002), pp. 55–78.
14. Grant Jarvie, 'Sport, Nationalism and Cultural Identity', *Centre for Research into Sport and Society* (1995), *Module 3 Unit 4*, pp. 281–302.
15. John Wilson, *Playing by the Rules: Sport, Society and the State*, Detroit, MI, 1994.
16. In the qualifying round, Israel's national team beat the Polish squad and lost to France. In the next game, Israel had to face the basketball world champions at that time, Yugoslavia. Israel had beaten Yugoslavia 77–76 on the way to the final, which was against the Soviet Union. Even the eventual defeat (98–76), in the final did not detract from the celebrations in Israel.
17. Amos Mansdorf has reached the highest international ranking for an Israeli tennis player, with a career-high of eighteenth place in the world ATP ranking in 1988. This superseded Shlomo Glickstein's achievement a decade earlier of reaching nineteenth place. Glickstein and Mansdorf, together with Shahar Perkis and Gilad Bloom, kept Israel in the World Division (top sixteen countries) of the Davis Cup for nearly a decade from 1985 until 1993.
18. Simon Griver, *Sport in Israel*, Jerusalem, 1999.
19. For further discussion see Amir Ben-Port, 'The Commodification of football in Israel', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol 3, No. 33 (1998), pp. 269–76.
20. See Yair Galily, 'High Five: The Local, the Global, the American and the Israeli Sport on Television', *Media in Transition 3rd International Conference*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, MA, 2–4 May 2003.
21. Over the years Israel continued to absorb immigrants. The most recent wave of mass immigration comprises members of the large Jewish community of the former Soviet Union which struggled for years for the right to emigrate to Israel. While some 100,000 managed to get to Israel in the 1970s, since 1989 over 700,000 have settled in the country.
22. It should be mention that the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) also has sports teams, as physical fitness is regarded an integral part of combat readiness. Through the Council for Sporting Excellence, run by the Ministry of Education's Sports Authority, several hundred talented sportsmen and sportswomen recommended by the Council are allowed by the IDF to serve in non-combat positions near their place of sports training and are given leave of absence to compete in major competitions abroad.
23. Mass aliyah of Jews from the USSR, later to become the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), was not essentially a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, with the exception of the very first years of its statehood, Israel had never received such a large wave of immigrants at any one time (approximately one-fifth of its total population!). Together with the dream of the exodus of the Jews of Silence (as the Jews behind the Iron Curtain were known), problems associated with aliyah rapidly began to emerge, mainly because of the scale of the influx: employment, housing, lack of Hebrew – and, above all, the transition from the society of origin to Israeli society, which, as we have seen, was rapidly becoming a highly Westernized society.
24. At the professional level, Israel has enjoyed some achievements in swimming in recent years. In the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games Keren Leibovich won three gold medals, while in 1997 Eitan Urbach scooped the country's first medal in a major international competition when he won the silver medal in the 100 metre backstroke in the European Swimming Championships in Spain. In the World Swimming Championships in Australia in 1998 Urbach finished seventh in the 100 metre backstroke final—the best performance by an Israeli swimmer in the world championships—and in the 1999 European Swimming Championships he won the bronze medal. At this meeting, Yoav Gat was placed fourth in the 200 metre backstroke final. In the 1996 Olympics Israel reached its first swimming final when the 4 × 100 metre medley relay team finished eighth. The same team finished fifth in the European Championships. And Yoav Bruck, a member of that team, became the first ever Israeli to reach a final of a major world swimming championship when he finished eighth in the 100 metre freestyle final in the World Swimming Championships in Korea in 1994. Mikki Halika finished fourth in the 400 metre medley in the world short-course swimming championships in Hong Kong in 1999, and won the silver medal in the European Swimming Championships in Istanbul in the summer of 1999. Among the most promising crop of young female swimmers is new immigrant Anna Gostamelsky, who won a gold medal in the 100 metre freestyle in a World Cup grand prix

competition in Spain, and Adi Bichman, who won two silver and two bronze medals in the World Youth Olympics in Moscow.

In other water sports, Israel has hosted two major world championships in recent years—the World 470 Sailing Class Championships (Tel Aviv, 1997) and the World Windsurfing Championships (Haifa, 1996). In the former competition, the female duo of Anat Fabrikant and Shani Kedmi finished fifth while in the men's tournament brothers Nir and Ran Shental, bronze medallists in 1995, only mustered eighth place, and Ze'ev Kalach and David Schwartz finished ninth (see Griver, *Sport in Israel*).

25. In the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Eitan Friedlander and Shimshon Brockman finished fourth in the 470 sailing category and would certainly have won a medal had the duo not refrained from participating on Yom Kippur (the holiest day of the Jewish year), thus forfeiting one crucial race. Esther Roth, sixth in the 110 metre women's hurdles in the 1972 Munich Olympics, and Edouard Weitz, fifth in the weightlifting competition in the 1976 Montreal Olympics, also came close to winning medals for Israel. Tragically, however, Israel's greatest impact on the Olympics was during the 1972 Munich games, when PLO terrorists massacred eleven Israeli athletes and coaches (Griver, *Sport in Israel*).
26. Jarvie, 'Sport, Nationalism and Cultural Identity'.
27. Grant Jarvie, 'Sport, Nationalisms and their Futures', in Ken Armour and Robert Jones (eds.), *Sociology of Sport in Practice*, Upminster, Essex, 2000, pp. 83–96.
28. Yair Galily, 'Playing Hoops in Palestine: The Early Development of Basketball in the Land of Israel (1936–1952)', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2003), pp. 143–151.
29. Israel's Arab community plays an integral part in the country's sports in general and in soccer in particular. Rifat Turk (Hapoel Tel Aviv) and Zahi Armeli (Maccabi Haifa) have both won championship medals and played for Israel in the 1980s. The current national squad includes Walid Badir (Hapoel Petah Tikvah, Maccabi Haifa) and Nejwan Grayev (Hapoel Haifa). Hapoel Taibe became the first Arab-owned club to compete in Israel's top soccer division in the 1996/97 season (followed by Sachnin and Achi Nazareth in 2003) and referee Daoud Sahil was in charge of Israel's 1996 cup final.
30. Israel's club teams have competed in the major European competitions since 1993 and after some remarkable single victories—Hapoel Petah Tikvah 2–1 over Feyenoord in 1993; Maccabi Haifa 1–0 away to Parma in 1994; and Betar Jerusalem 2–1 over Bruges in 1997—Maccabi Haifa became the first team to pull off a major shock when it beat Paris St. Germain 4–3 on aggregate in the European Cup Winners Cup in 1998 going on to reach the quarter-finals. Another impressive achievement was Hapoel Tel Aviv reaching to the quarter-final of the UEFA cup in 2001 after victories over Chelsea and FC Milan and Maccabi Haifa victory over Manchester United in the first round of the Champions League in 2002.