

Sport in the Australian Jewish Community

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Introduction

Jews have been coming to Australia since the early days of white settlement in 1788. There were at least eight Jews on the first fleet, followed by scores of free Jewish settlers. From the middle of the 19th century, an organized Jewish community existed, with the first synagogue having been built in Bridge Street Sydney in 1830. Its members had come mainly from Britain and were English speaking. The Jewish community developed largely unhindered by the sorts of discrimination and persecution their co-religionists had been used to for centuries in Europe. Although the Jewish community may claim to be the earliest organized non-Anglo/Celtic community in Australia, with its own synagogues and institutions, pressures to assimilate were considerable. This paper will examine the contribution of sport in Australian Jewish communities, focusing mainly on the period from the 1920s to 1950, as well as the contribution of Jews to the Australian sporting heritage. By necessity, the study will concentrate mainly on the Sydney community, although I will refer to other communities from time to time. The focus of this paper raises several questions. What was the nature of the Australian Jewish community in the early 20th century? Why did sport become so important in these communities in the 1920s? Were Jews motivated to play sport by ideas of muscular Judaism, or did they take up sports because of the Australian sporting obsession—another means of assimilation? What role did sport play in the lives of Jewish migrants and refugees? Why is the foundation of the Hakoah club in Sydney in 1938 so important? Do Jews have a unique sporting culture in Australia?

The Australian Jewish Community

The relative culture of tolerance in Australia meant institutionalized anti-Semitism did not develop. However, there were pockets of it, as is evidenced by

the exclusion of Jews from some businessmen's and golf clubs. For example, in 1908 the Royal Sydney Golf Club committee "bowed to the pressure of general social opinion and ruled that with the exception of one candidate already before it, no further members of the Jewish faith would be admitted."¹ Likewise, the *Bulletin* and *Smiths Weekly* often carried anti-Semitic comments in the early to middle 20th century Andrew Moore has recently pointed out that anti-Semitism became part of the early Australian Labor movements' "Money Power" critique.²

The Jewish community that had emerged by the 1920s was largely indistinguishable from the rest of Australian society. Community leaders were happy with what Suzanne Rutland describes as an ideology of nondistinctiveness.³ Australian Jews, whether they were born in Australia or overseas, regarded themselves primarily as British subjects and loyal Australians. However, the lack of overt anti-Semitism and the relatively tolerant nature of society mitigated against a strong and cohesive community and encouraged assimilation. New and sporadic influxes of migrants and refugees, which began in the 1920s and continue in the 1990s, rejuvenated Australia Jewry, resulting in diverse and vibrant communities. I think it is important to note here that the Australian Jewish community is really a number of communities centered in each of the capital cities. Melbourne and Sydney have the largest communities and are quite different in character. Today these communities, made up of Jews from a myriad of backgrounds, can be seen as a microcosm of multicultural Australia (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Maccabean Institute Winners of the Sydney Jewish Rugby League Competition, 1924. Issy and Alex Brodsky were pillars of the Jewish sports movement in the 1920s. Lionel Vanpraag was later World Speedway Champion in 1936. Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish community opposed Jewish migration, particularly from eastern Europe. Likewise, they were cautious in accepting refugees from Nazi Germany after 1933—some sections actively campaigning

against their admission. They feared the distinctiveness immigrants carry—their language, dress, and culture. However, community elders slowly realized that the survival of a confessional and viable Jewish community in Australia depended on new arrivals. They also realized from the early 1920s (as did their European counterparts from 1900) the value of sport as a tool in increasing the social interaction of their youth in a Jewish environment. Around the world Jewish spokesmen had proclaimed the value of physical activity in fighting the traditional anti-Semitic view of the Jew as weak and bookish. Peter Levine has noted that eastern European migrants to the United States were urged to participate in all sports in order to challenge anti-Semitic stereotypes and develop an American Jewish identity.⁴ This notion had been adopted as a result of the philosophy of *Muskeljudentum*, or “muscular Judaism,” first described by Max Nordau at the Second Zionist Congress at Basle, Switzerland, in 1898.⁵ Peter Levine illustrates that sport was such an important element in popular culture that to become part of the American dream you had to play. In Australia, a country where sport assumed enormous cultural significance—an obsession, some say—it is likely that many Jews would have participated in sport in any case, simply because it was “the Australian” thing to do as part of Australian identity.

Sporting Tradition

Some writers have claimed that there is evidence that organized Jewish sport was being conducted in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (Vic), and Western Australia (WA) from around 1880.⁶ However, a more substantial sporting life could develop only after the Zionist movement seriously adopted the idea of creating “Jewish muscle” after 1898. In particular I will focus on the period after 1923, when the Maccabian Hall was opened in Sydney, followed soon after by the first Australian Maccabi Games.

This is not to ignore the fact that the communities had begun to develop sporting organization prior to this—indicating that ideas of the desirability of sport may have filtered down to Australia. By 1912 there were six amateur sporting organizations in Sydney. They were the Young Peoples Hebrew Association, Sydney Judean Amateur Athletic Association, Maccabean Social and Sports Club, Bankstown Judean Tennis Club, Jewish Social and Sports Club, and the Jewish Amateur Athletic Club. These clubs operated with varying degrees of success, and their activities were limited mainly to athletics, tennis, swimming, and cricket. It was not until the 1920s, with the formation of constituted sporting bodies in these three states, that these clubs flourished to the extent that significant numbers were involved in a wide range of sports.⁷

Organized Jewish Sport in Sydney in the 1920s

On 11 November 1923, the Maccabean Hall (also known as the Jewish War Memorial) in Darlinghurst Road, Darlinghurst in Sydney, was officially opened by Sir John Monash.⁸ That the hall was opened by such a great Jewish Australian demonstrates the importance of the event in the Jewish community, and it was accompanied by great fanfare. It was built as a memorial to those Australian Jews

who had served in the Great War of 1914 to 1918 and served to demonstrate the solidarity of Australian Jewry with nation and Empire. The utility of the hall was twofold; it was intended on the one hand to centralize all the social, educational, and sporting interests of the community and on the other to assist with the integration of Jewish immigrants.⁹ In his speech, Sir John Monash defined its future role:

It has a symbolic purpose, for behind it has the aim of keeping the Jewish people together and preserving the creed, perpetuating the faith; it is to prevent the regrettable drift that is making many of our people cease from owing allegiance to the religion of their fathers.¹⁰

In Sydney this event was followed by a phenomenal upsurge in the participation of young Australian Jewry in organized sport, and this was reflected in Melbourne and other cities in the commonwealth. Why and by whom was this competition organized? Why were the clubs and the competition formed on the basis of ethnicity? Why did they choose to run an intramural competition rather than form a strong Jewish club to compete in local competition? How did the Rugby League fit into the scheme of Jewish sport in Sydney in the 1920s and why did it fail? What does it reveal about the Sydney Jewish community and their burgeoning use of sport from 1923 on?

Muscular Judaism and Its Role in Sydney in the 1920s

In order to prevent a perceived drift away from the Jewish faith, many advocated that young Jews should become involved more in sport. Since the Second Zionist Congress at Basle, Switzerland, in 1898, there had developed an awareness in the Jewish Diaspora of the benefits to be gained from imitating the Muscular Christianity of the Gentiles. At Basle, the eminent Zionist Max Nordau gave birth to this idea when he declared: “we must aspire to create again a *Muskeljudentum* (muscular Judaism).”¹¹ In the same year the first Jewish Turnverein was formed in Berlin, and by 1904 twelve other groups had sprung up around Germany. This can safely be interpreted as both a reaction to the popular growth of the Gymnastic movement in Germany and an interpretation of Nordau’s philosophy. The new movement produced its



Sir John Monash and other dignitaries opening the Maccebean Hall in Sydney on November 11, 1923. Also called the Jewish Man Memorial—built in honor of the Australian Jews who fell in WWI. It was the center of Jewish organized sport for many years. Courtesy of the Stare Library of New South Wales.

own journal, the *Judische Turnzeitung*, which advocated the development of a healthy spirit in a healthy body and attacked the “one sided development of the spirit which has called forth our nervousness and spiritual exhaustion.” It set down the following guiding principles:

We want to restore to the flabby Jewish body its lost tone, to make it vigorous and strong, nimble and powerful.^x

We want this, however, in a Jewish way, so that we strengthen in it at the same time the disappearing feeling of cohesiveness and elevate (our) sinking self-consciousness.

We want to restore value and honor to the old Jewish ideals for which our youth appear to have lost understanding almost completely.

Courageously and with energy we want to confront anti-Semitism, which indeed has today laid aside its uproarious form but has gained intensity. We want to foster a noble national feeling which is free from all vanity and by no means (do we) exclude work for mankind as a whole. Openly, before the whole world, we acknowledge our nationality, to which we preserve loyalty, as we conscientiously and faithfully fulfill our civil duties.¹²

The idea of forming Jewish sports clubs in Europe was inextricably linked to the Zionist cause and with a conscious effort to promote the idea that Jews were different only in the fact that they practiced a different religion and that they could compete away from the field of business. Jewish gymnastic clubs spread throughout Europe. The famous Hakoah Vienna was formed in Vienna in 1909, and by 1913 there were 29 clubs throughout Europe with an active membership of 4,500.¹³ As a result of this upsurge in interest and participation in sporting activities, the Thirteenth Zionist Congress of 1921, held in Carlsbad, formed the World Maccabi Union. In its constitution, the Union’s aims were clearly defined: “To foster physical education, the belief in the Jewish heritage and the Jewish nation and to work actively for the rebuilding of our own country and for the preservation of our people.”¹⁴ The choice of the name Maccabi for the organization hearkened back to the legendary biblical Jewish patriots who fought against the Syrian invaders of Israel in 168 B.C. The selection of the name “pointed to a continued sense of unshakable commitment to Zionism among the Jewish people.”¹⁵ In this context, Mike Ticher’s argument that *Muskeljudentum* resulted from specifically Zionist thinking on the utility of participation of sport amongst Jews seems right on the mark. “This was the entirely practical desire to prepare young Jews physically for the hard manual labor which they would be required to undertake following emigration to Palestine.”¹⁶

Almost immediately after the opening of the Maccabean Hall in Sydney, moves were made to implement a community policy that bore the hallmark of Max Nordau’s philosophy. While there was a division in the Australian Jewish community over the need for and value of Zionism, most saw the benefit of getting young people involved in organized sport. The notion of a physically active Jewry had filtered through to Australia. However, it was utilized in a different way than in Europe. The concern in Australia was the viability of the

Jewish community but within the confines of Anglo-Australian society. In short, Australian Jewry sought a kind of limited assimilation where the integrity of their culture and religion could be maintained but in a way that did not impinge on their harmonious relationship with the wider society. It was considered imperative that they were not accused of forming an undesirable subgroup within society or that their attempts to halt the disintegration of their community would lead to an upsurge in anti-Semitism—a problem that had been minimal for Australian Jewry. Sir Isaac Isaacs, one of the greatest of Australian-born Jews, was vehemently opposed to the Zionist movement. In his biography of Isaacs, Zelman Cowen recounts nothing was more calculated to provoke Isaacs to anger than any suggestion of tension between his Jewishness and his Britishness. He was insistent that Jewishness was a matter of religion and not of race or nationality.¹⁷ This kind of denial of ethnic distinctiveness was common among Australian Jewry at the time. The utility of sport within the Jewish community in the 1920s was the promotion of Jewish muscle with the view to re-focusing the social intercourse of young Jewry. Brian Kino, in explaining the use of sport as a tool against exogamy, maintains that Jewish sporting clubs were seen as a marketing force for the desirability of mixing socially within the community. The elders saw the sporting clubs as a bulwark in the fight against assimilation.¹⁸ In the 1920s and the early 1930s, the utility of sport, then, was a defensive mechanism against the prevailing ethos of assimilation. The idea was to rein in the community and consolidate Jewish culture. It was not until the late 1930s, with the arrival of Hakoah, that a more assertive form of muscular Judaism began to emerge. The institution of the interstate Maccabi games in 1924 was a natural flow from this philosophy. The idea of “romance in the evening” was heavily promoted in games literature.¹⁹ In this way the playing of sport with coreligionists went beyond the rigors of the arena. The desirability of mixing socially was emphasized and the suggestion that involvement in sport facilitated this socializing was always in the fore.

It is obvious that the momentum behind the building of the Maccabean Hall had been the desire to commemorate those Australian Jews who lost their lives in the service of and for the preservation of the Empire. Simultaneously, the utilitarian nature of the memorial points to a realization that action had to be taken to heighten the awareness of the community of their own Jewishness. By building such a memorial, Sydney Jewry could at once demonstrate their loyalty to King and country and at the same time provide a focus and a forum for the manifestation, through sport, of the ideas expressed by Nordau. Zionist or not, the use of sporting clubs as a means of mobilizing the youth towards a group awareness was very attractive to the community as a whole and was being seen by the early 1920s as vital to the communities' survival. Susanne Rutland argues:

Assimilation, meaning both acculturation to Australian ways and the disintegration of ethnic distinctiveness, was one of the dominant features of Australian Jewry before 1933. Jews felt at home with the predominant cultural habits of dress, language, and behavior of the majority Gentile community, and outwardly became the same as their neighbors. At the

same time, the community risked the loss of structural separateness in its primary relationship, which included family, friends, and social clubs. Once structural assimilation occurs, this tends to lead to marriage outside the community, resulting in the eventual disappearance of the ethnic group.²⁰

Intermarriage was the major concern for Australian Jewry as they entered the 1920s. Kino maintains that it was concern over intermarriage that was the overriding factor in the advent of the Maccabi games²¹ with the social side of the games given as much emphasis as the sporting. This is confirmed by Rutland:

The limitations of the synagogue were realized by communal leaders who believed that the establishment of communal centers and the fostering of sporting and social activities for young people would provide a rallying point for the unaffiliated and so help reduce the rising intermarriage rates.²²

The “One Big Club Idea”: Sport in the Vanguard

By January 1924, the Jewish sporting community was mobilizing for a “monster sports picnic” to be held in Lane Cove. The press reported that “a combined sports picnic is being held at Lane Cove on Sunday, 20 January, and the outing promises to be a huge success. Never in the history of the Sydney Jewry has such a similar event been held. The majority of athletic clubs will be competing and some very keen contests should be witnessed.”²³

A new sense of community was being developed in which the sports clubs became a key element. Australian Jewry had, by the 1920s, developed a philosophy of nondistinctiveness in everything except religion. This attitude had degenerated into a communal posture of group invisibility. This was being threatened in the 1920s by the influx of Yiddish-speaking migrants fleeing from persecution in eastern Europe. Although the arrival of these migrants was feared by some Anglo-Australian Jews, their immigration, according to Rutland, was an important factor in maintaining the viability of Australian Jewry.²⁴ While restrictions were placed on the entry of eastern European Jews in 1928,²⁵ their impact on Jewish culture in Australia was vital and a precursor to the influence migrants and refugees would have on the community after 1934. The arrival of “new” Jews acted in tandem with the new awareness of Jewishness engendered in the community by increasing interest in the Zionist movement to begin the rejuvenation of Australian Jewry. The establishment of the Maccabean Hall and the enthusiasm it engendered for the organization of competitive sport in the Sydney community was an integral part of this rejuvenation. In the historiography of the Australian Jewish communities this has gathered little attention. The mass sports picnic announced with such enthusiasm was a great success. The *Hebrew Standard*, which labeled it “The Carnival of Happiness,” reported this most important day:

Go in the Macs, the Macs!
Gorn the waybacks, the waybacks!
The Y.P.'s to win The Y.P.H.A.! HORRAY, HORRAY!
And hundreds of shrill voices filled the summer air. Hundreds of hearts
throbbd with excitement and enthusiasm.
Yes! there were hundreds of them: boys of all ages—fast boys and slow

boys; girl—pretty, buxom, cajoling girls—from flappers—well! back to flappers again.

Happiness was the keynote of the whole affair, and youth unrestrained scooped it to hearts full.

The combined sports meeting that was held at The Avenue, Lane Cove, last Sunday will long remain a happy and pleasant memory to young Jewry. Not only because of its wonderful success but because of its excellent achievement in defiantly establishing the new spirit and ideal of Sydney's Jewish youth—the ideal that must ultimately culminate in the "One Big Club" scheme.²⁶

This spectacular event was followed by a successful swimming carnival in February 1924 and gave even further momentum to the push that had begun after the opening of the Maccabean Hall, for youth to become more involved in establishing a sporting life for the community.²⁷ The Maccabean Institute, and later the Maccabean Sports Union, controlled the growth of this new ideal. The "Mac" set the agenda for Jewish sport in Sydney for the next 15 years until the formation of the Hakoah Club in 1939 broke this monopoly. While this new enthusiasm for sport can be seen as a flow-on from the doctrine of *Muskeljudentum*, it evolved in the context of the established Anglo-Australian communal philosophy. The idea was to promote Jewish muscle. Yet, there was none of the aggressive "mixing of it" described by Bill Murray in his discussion of Hakoah Vienna: "Hakoah's athletes lived up to their name as they deliberately set out to upset anti-Semitic stereotypes, with a physical style that resulted in many free-for-alls."²⁸ Hakoah is a Hebrew word meaning force or strength, and they did their best to live up to it. In Australia of the 1920s, the idea was not to confront the Gentiles head-on; there was little or no institutionalized anti-Semitism. The successes of the likes of Monash and Isaacs meant that, for the most part, Jews were well respected as loyal, contributing citizens. By controlling the sporting scene, the Maccabi could encourage the revitalization of Australian Jewry. At the same time, there was no calculated confrontation between Australian Jewry and Australians on the sporting fields of Sydney, with the exception of individuals competing in interclub athletics. Here we have in operation an early manifestation of the operation of sport in an ethnic community in Australia. Sport was beginning to have a utility for Australian Jewry in conformity with the mainstream philosophy of world Jewry. However, it was within the Australian context. While the influx of Yiddish-speaking Jews, which took place in the 1920s, had a profoundly invigorating effect, sport was not the avenue for communal self-expression for these migrants that it was to become for Jewish migrants in the late 1930s and post-World War II era.

The new enthusiasm for organized sport ushered in an era during which intracommunity leagues were set up in a number of sports. Most Jewish sportsmen were happy to compete within this framework. There were obvious exceptions. For example, Myer Rosenblum was a champion hammer thrower and Rugby Union player who represented Sydney University, N.S.W., and Australia. Lionel Von Pragg played Rugby League for Redfern United and Maccabi Institute and became World Speedway champion in 1936. Issy Sender and Alex Owen played

Rugby League for Sydney University in the days when they played in the N.S.W. premiership. If a player sought to excel at the elite level, he did this in the conventional way. For the Jewish athlete who did not have such aspirations, there was the local interclub competition run under the control of the "Mac." As we shall see, there were occasional forays against Gentile teams. These games, however, were played in a social spirit and, in the case of Rugby League, occurred when the internal competition had broken down or as an end-of-season novelty. The size of the community meant that the various leagues that were set up often had no more than four teams. Sports teams were formed around existing loose social groups. This placed great pressure on members. A survey of various sports reveals that often the same names appeared in a variety of different sports. In team sports this would place great pressure on clubs to maintain teams. For individual sports the pressure was not as great. The representative aspirations of these intramural sportsmen were fulfilled by the opportunity of representing the Jewish community of their state in the annual Maccabi games. The sports represented in the early days of the carnivals were cricket, athletics, swimming, and tennis. At this time, the guiding philosophy of Jewish sport as a mechanism in the fight against intermarriage meant that participation in sport was not gender specific. Of the sports that were available in the early carnivals, only cricket excluded women. In the local context, women, as well as participating in sport, were seen as necessary in the more traditional role of providers and servers of food at dances and other fund-raising activities.²⁹

Australian Maccabi Games

In 1924, the Sydney Judean Cricket Association suggested an annual interstate cricket match between Victoria and N.S.W. The subsequent visit of N.S.W. to Melbourne at Christmas 1924 was the beginning of the interstate Maccabi games. The games have endured into the 1990s and are the highlight of the Australian Jewish sporting calendar. Since 1933, Australian Jewry has sent a team to the World Maccabi games in Israel every four years. Being chosen for the team remains the pinnacle for the Australian Jewish sportsman. If individuals wish to pursue an elite sporting career, they do so within the structures provided by Australian Sporting organizations.

The Maccabi Organization

Maccabi Australia PTY Ltd. is the roof body governing Jewish sporting organizations. It was formed in 1957 as the Australian Judean Sports Council and later became the Australian Maccabi council, adopting its current name in 1991. Its stated aim is to "promote Jewish Identity through sporting, cultural, Zionist and social activities." It is affiliated with the Maccabi World Union and the Australian Sports Federation. Its constituents are the Maccabi organizations in N.S.W., Western Australia (W.A.), South Australia (S.A.), Victoria (Vic.), and Queensland (QLD). The Maccabi organization in each state serves as a roof body for constituent clubs and coordinate its state's participation in the annual Maccabi games. Every four years, Maccabi Australia sends a team to compete at

the world Maccabi games in Israel. There is a clear understanding within each organization of the goals of Maccabi within the Jewish community. N.S.W. Maccabi's motto is "Promoting Jewish Identity through Sport and Recreation." All sport conducted by Maccabi is amateur. Member clubs compete in numerous sports and in local community leagues. Gone are the days of the 1920s and 1930s, when Jewish sportsmen competed almost exclusively against each other.

However, Maccabi still plays a role in the ongoing battle against intermarriage. Since the 1920s, Maccabi Games' literature has promoted the social aspect of the carnivals: "The social aspect of the carnivals is undoubtedly vital to them. Carnival romances established are legendary, romantic games being the only ones never called off because of the bad light."³⁰ Clearly sport in the Jewish community has a definite agenda set for its youth. It serves to contain their social life within the confines of the community. At the same time, this ideology encourages a view of the world centered on support for the existence of Israel. That this occurs in the context of participation of sport indicates that Australian Jewry has faith in the benefits of sporting activity. This is in the tradition of *Muskeljudentum* and fits in well with Australian sporting culture.

Statistics show that there is a high level of participation in sport by Australian Jewry. These figures can be contrasted with those of the GAA clubs in the Irish community. In the latter case, the importance of the GAA to the postwar Irish in Australia is paramount, yet their membership numbers are low. Jewish membership of the various Maccabi Associations reflects the more socially cohesive nature of the Jewish community and its desire to maintain a community identity within clearly defined boundaries. While sport is dwarfed in importance by cultural and philanthropic activities, it is nevertheless clear sport plays an important role in the community. N.S.W. and Victoria boast the biggest Maccabi organizations—in line with their respective Jewish populations. However, it is notable that even South Australia, with its tiny community, deems sport important enough to have a Maccabi organization and to participate in annual carnivals. Given that 53 percent of the Australian Jewish population at the 1986 census was born overseas, there must be a substantial migrant content in sporting teams, given the age profile of the community.³¹ For example: W.A. Maccabi reported significant numbers of expatriate South African Jews in their soccer teams.³²

STATE	JEWISH POPULATION	MACCABI MEMBERS	CLUBS	SPORTS
VIC.	33,862	2,000+ ^{33†}	26	20
N.S.W.	25,175	2,000+	20	13
QLD.	4,278	[unavailable at press time]		
W.A.	4,421	730	1	4
S.A.	1,304	28	ROOF BODY ONLY ³⁴	
ACT.	530	NIL	NIL	
TAS.	234	NIL	NIL	
N.T.	143	NIL	NIL	

The Maccabi organization has shown no gender preference in its history. While women have struggled for equality within the community—in religious and matrimonial matters in particular—sport has, for the most part, been a forum where women had a foothold from the beginning in the push for equality. Given that sport has been used to fighting the drift into intermarriage, women were necessary for its success. However, women have often been depended on to fill the traditional roles of preparing food for functions and the like.

Women are active in the all-female sport volleyball and most other sports provided by Maccabi around Australia. In addition, many women are active in the administration of sport, including Gayle Beissel, who is secretary general of Maccabi Australia, and Helen Gold, who is secretary of N.S.W. Maccabi. On the whole, one must admit, that there still remains a bias toward men in positions of power.

The formation of the Hakoah Sports Club in Sydney in 1939, by refugees from Nazi dominated Europe, brought a new dimension to Jewish sport. Its soccer team in particular was keen to carry on the traditions of its forerunner in Vienna. In the post-World War II era, Hakoah played a pivotal role in the evolution of Jewish sport and the development of community identity.³⁵ Likewise, in Melbourne, a Hakoah club had been formed in the late 1920s and was a successful promoter of sport in the Jewish community. The role of the Hakoah soccer club in Sydney is important, particularly in light of the role soccer has played in the development of community identity amongst ethnic minorities in Australia.³⁶



At Wentworth Park Secretary Harry Lakmaker issues Hakoah membership badges from his “office in the boot.” Picture was tendered in evidence during the club’s licence application, pointing up the need for a social club. Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.

The Sydney Hakoah Club

Sydney Hakoah became the driving force in Australian soccer between 1957 and 1987. Its directors were the most influential in the formation of the breakaway N.S.W. Soccer Federation and the foundation of the Phillips Soccer league of Australia in 1977. It was the business acumen of Hakoah men who guided soccer through these revolutionary, and their most popular, phases. However, in the early years of the clubs' existence it played the role played by all of the ethnic sporting, and particularly soccer clubs in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. Andrew Lederer OAM, who served as vice president of Hakoah for 14 years, maintains that sport is the best public relations to bring people together, regardless of nationality or religion. Likewise when interviewed in 1995 he recognized that

the Hakoah club, as any ethnic club, was the first base to try to get root for the new immigrant in the country, and if the leadership of the club is open minded it acts as a go between, between the community and the migrant group. The club helps the integration of the Jewish immigrant in the country.³⁷

The Hakoah Soccer club, despite being the most successful soccer club in Australia, no longer competes at the elite level—having withdrawn from the national league in 1987. However, its licensed club is the hub of Jewish communal life in Sydney. Boasting palatial premises at Bondi Beach, the club, with upward of 10,000 members out of a population of 29,614 (see Figure 2), serves as a focal point of community activity. The club grew out of the need for a licensed premise to fund the professional soccer team. Sadly enough, by the mid-1960s there were rarely any Jewish players on the team. As the community, as a whole, became more successful and the postwar generation of migrants gave way to a new generation of Australian-born Jewry, the soccer club lost its meaning to the community. However, the social club matured into a vital organization catering to the wider needs of the community. While it still supports Jewish sport through sponsorship of the amateur Maccabi teams, its *raison d'être* has become the enhancement of Jewish cultural life—and as Syd Einfeld stated, “giving substantial practical assistance and support to our communities' needs and to the state of Israel.”³⁸ While the sports club in this instance has altered its mode of operation and priorities, it has not fundamentally moved from the principles on which it was formed.

In the case of Hakoah, its role has been significant in that it has provided a forum for the mixing of the different cultures that make up the Sydney Jewish community. In this role it is feasible that the club helps mould a community identity within an Australian-Jewish context.

The Ajax Football Club

Melbourne's Jewish Australian Rules Football club is an amateur club playing in the Victorian Football Association. Through AJAX, the Jewish community has adopted the local game successfully. AJAX regularly draws up to a thousand spectators to its senior matches and also runs a successful junior division. Australian

rules football is almost a religion in Victoria, and its adoption by a section of the Jewish community demonstrates its willingness and desire to fit into the Melbourne way of life. To play “footy” in Melbourne is normal. Participation indicates you have adopted the ways of the receiving tribe. By playing for a Jewish club you are reinforcing your ethnicity while competing with the locals on their own terms. AJAX is affiliated with Maccabi and, as such, is philosophically bound to the traditions and goals of the organization. Browne notes that leading community identities often attend AJAX home games, indicating that there is prestige attached to the community’s participation in the local football code.



Figure 2. Winners of the 1956 Second Division premiership and Challenge Cup series. Courtesy of the Hakoah Club Sydney, Hall St. Bondi Beach, Sydney. Permission given by Sandra Ward.

Jewish Communal Attitudes to Sport

Ashley Browne claims that while sport has been one of the hallmarks of the Australian Jewish community, recognition of sporting achievement has lagged behind recognition for achievement in academia, the arts, science, and business. He believes this apathy stems from the attitudes of prewar and postwar refugees and migrants who had new lives to start and often came from environments, such as Polish *shtetls*, which did not have a sporting culture.³⁹ Nevertheless, the importance of sport for individuals and groups within the community cannot be so simply discounted. While interest in sport perhaps lagged behind interest in

educational and philanthropic pursuits, the sports club provided many Jews with a point of contact and a cheap form of entertainment. It was also consistent with the philosophy of many of the refugees and migrants who were committed Zionists.

Muskeljudentum, for many, was an essential facet of their nationalist ideal. Just as the soccer club has been of enormous importance to the Croatian national cause within the Australian Croatian community, so the sports club of the Jewish migrant in Sydney, usually Hakoah, was an important focus of the national cause.⁴⁰ While many eastern European refugees did not have a sporting culture available to them in the ghettos they fled, they were counterbalanced by those from central Europe who came from Jewish communities with a strong sporting ethos.

Contemporary Jewish Sport and Community Identity

Jewish identity and consciousness elude precise definition. For Jews it is doubly difficult to come to terms with a concept of Jewish ethnicity, implying as it does an emphasis on differences and distinctiveness.⁴¹ Clearly, the single most binding factor for the Jewish people is their religion. Yet there are atheists who profess to be Jews. The Jewish community in Australia is made up of descendants of the old Anglo-Australian Jewry together with migrants and their offspring from all corners of the earth and a myriad of cultural backgrounds. A seminar on Jewish identity in 1978 attempted to categorize aspects of Jewish identity. The most pertinent of these factors were feeling oneself to be a Jew, allowing that the world can be seen from a Jewish standpoint, being aware not only of contemporary Jewish issues but also of the long sweep and significance of Jewish history. This could ensure having a commitment to ongoing education and awareness of the centrality of God throughout Jewish history.⁴² Some or all of these factors may or may not apply to individual Jews, but they describe approximately a view of Jewishness. The maintenance of such feelings of Jewishness has been under constant threat throughout Australia's history. The small numbers of the community and the absence of Jewish ghettos have led to intermarriage. The various waves of migrants and refugees have saved the community from extinction, but its continued viability remains in doubt.

In the post-World War II era, sports clubs have made a significant contribution to the development of Jewish identity in Australia despite the fact that many Jews do not see sport as a priority. While the need for ethnic self-assertion through sport has long been eclipsed in the Jewish community a new generation of Australian Jews is, nevertheless, immersed in sport. Browne maintains:

As our community becomes more Australian in outlook and identity, sport is becoming a major part of its focus. As a growing percentage of Australian-born and bred Jews take on positions of influence in our community, sport is gaining in credibility. The basic tenets of Jewish life in Australia have not changed: Family, career, education and philanthropy remain the hallmarks of our community. But sport has become an important part of our lives, which is why the attitude among the

communities' leadership towards sport is welcome. Those in the community who choose to express their Jewish identity through sport have become a constituency too large to ignore.⁴³

Despite this, sport does remain secondary in the community to higher education and the pursuit of material well-being. There is still only a trickle of Jewish sportsmen pursuing elite sporting careers. Recent additions to the list have been Brad Rosen of the Sydney Kings basketball team, Steve Herzberg, who has played Sheffield Shield Cricket for Western Australia and Eastern Suburbs, and Grant Lodge, who represented Australia at the Rugby World Sevens. As the Jewish community has evolved, bringing together all that is best from the multitude of cultures it represents, sport, while it has not displaced the traditional concerns of Jews, remains an important ingredient in community formation. On the final account, for many Jews, the arts remain the preferred form of ethnic self-expression. Examples are the composer George Dreyfus and Samuel Smorgan OAM, who through his Smorgan Trust has for many years supported community arts. The honor list of Jews in literature and the arts dwarfs that from the sporting fraternity indicating that, perhaps dissimilarly from many ethnic communities, the pursuit of "high culture" is more important to the Jews.

The fact that the Jews have their own community museums may be another indicator of the importance of this facet of community identity. The Holocaust Museum in Sydney expresses the triumph and tragedy of the Sydney Jewish community and reaches out to the general community to show what they have been through and what they have to offer. As the museum, for many Jews, sport plays a minor role in the expression of this identity.

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1. C. Tatz and B. Stoddart, *The Royal Sydney Golf Club* (Sydney: n.p., 1993), 46.
 2. A. Moore, *The Right Road: A History of Right Wing Politics in Australia* (Sydney: n.p., 1995), 20.
 3. Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Brandl & Schlesinger, 1988), 146.
 4. Peter Levine, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 162.
 5. Max Nordau, "Muskeljudenthum," *Juedische Turnzeitung* 1/2 (1900): 10-12.
 6. See Brian Kino, *The Carnivals: A History of Jewish Amateur Sporting Contests in Australia 1924 to 1974* (Melbourne: York Press, 1974), and M. Swibel, "A History of Australian Jewish Sport," *Hakoah Star* 5/7 (1981): 20.
 7. Kino, *Carnivals*, 1-3.
 8. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 155.
 9. *Ibid.*, 155.
 10. *The Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, Nov 16, 1923, 7.
 11. Nordau, "Muskeljudenthum," 10-11.
 12. Nordau, "Muskeljudenthum," 11.
 13. *Maccabi Newsletter*, midyear edition, Sydney, 1992, 2.

14. M. Swibel, "Birth of the Maccabi Movement," *Hakoab Star*, 5/6 (August 1981): 12.
15. *Maccabi Newsletter*, 2.
16. M. Ticher, *Jews and Football in Berlin* (master's thesis, UNSW, 1994).
17. Zelman Cowen, *Isaac Isaacs*, (Melbourne: University of Queensland Press, 1967), 226.
18. Brian Kino, interview, November 1993.
19. Kino, *Carnivals*.
20. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 141.
21. Kino, interview, November 1993.
22. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 154.
23. *Hebrew Standard Of Australasia*, January 4, 1924, 13.
24. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 106.
25. Hilary L. Rubenstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History, 1788-1945*, vol. 1 (Melbourne: William Heineman Australia, 1991), 151.
26. *Hebrew Standard Of Australasia*, January 25, 1924, 13.
27. *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, June 6, 1924, 14.
28. Bill Murray, *Football: A History of the World Game* (Aldershot: n.p., 1994), 103.
29. *Hebrew Standard Of Australasia*. On June 5, 1925, the paper reported on a recent sports dance: "Supper provided a welcome interlude, and well laden tables of appetizing sandwiches, cakes, fruit etc which bore evidence of the work of various young ladies of the committee;" and on August 26, 1927, under the heading *Girls Note*: "Local sportswomen will be afforded the opportunity in the next few months to indicate the extent of their ability to successfully deal with the problem of supplying eats for the interstate sports tourney."
30. M. Gelman, foreword, in Kino, *Carnivals*, 1974.
31. S. Encel, "The Australian Jewish Population: How Many Are We," in *The Guide to Jewish Life in Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific*. Ed. David Bernstein (Melbourne: n.p., 1993), 4.
32. Cohn Rockman, interview, September 1995.
33. The Elitzur club operates outside the control of Maccabi. It is a community organization, which operates under the auspices of the Mizrahi Organization, which adheres to Shabbat observances. Basketball and cricket are its main activities. Numbers of members not included here.
34. S.A. Maccabi does not run regular competitions.
35. See T. Hughes, 1995.
36. See Phil Mosely, 1995.
37. A. Lederer OAM, interview, Sydney, October 1994.
38. S. Einfeld, 1994, 4.
39. A. Browne, "Australian Jewry Comes of Age," in David Bernstein, ed., *The Guide to Jewish Life*, 16.
40. See J. Hughson, "Building a Brotherhood: A Case Study of Soccer, Male Identity and Ethnicity in Western Sydney," unpublished paper presented to the first annual Australian Conference on Men's Issues. Sydney, December 1994.
41. S. Encel and B. Buckley, eds., *N.S.W. Jewish Community* (Kensington: n.p., 1978), 81.
42. N.S.W. Board of Deputies, State Zionist Council of N.S.W., report of "Seminar on Elements of Jewish identity," Sydney, 1978.
43. A. Browne, "Australian Jewry Comes of Age," 1993, 16.