

Dan Newman: Men's Open Volleyball Israel 2005

"My Maccabiah experience was literally life-changing. During the Maccabiah I learned more about my Jewish heritage than I had throughout much of my adult life. Furthermore I made some memorable friends that I still keep in touch with years later. Not only were those 3 weeks unforgettable, but I was also recruited to play for the Maccabi Tel-Aviv semi pro volleyball team. I stayed in Tel Aviv for a year afterwards and came to love everything about Israeli culture. The warm hearted people, amazing food, and the rich heritage makes this trip a must-do for anyone even remotely interested."

Sandy Kleinberg : Men's Open Volleyball Israel 2001 & 2005

I take a lot of pride from having been a member of the 2001 and 2005 US delegation of the World Maccabiah Games. It was truly a dream come true. The games represent more than just an athletic competition. They represent a coming together of Jewish athletes from all over the world. The games are truly a demonstration of solidarity.

From the training camp to the opening ceremonies, competition to closing ceremonies, the games were fun, enlightening and a huge source of pride. If you have the opportunity, take it. You won't regret it.

Sam Shweisky: Girls Junior Head Coach/Men's Open Player Israel 2005

Like many young, aspiring volleyball players, my dream was to play for the USA Men's National team and represent my country in the Olympics. After four years of college volleyball and a stint playing professionally in Europe, it became clear to me that I was not on the national team's speed dial list. I respectfully traded in my playing shoes for a coach's clipboard and continued in my pursuit to represent the USA in volleyball as a coach.

In 2001 however, I received the opportunity to play for the USA Men's Jewish National team in the Maccabiah Games. The trip was a great opportunity to play volleyball, see Israel, and meet Jewish athletes from all over the country. Winning a silver medal for the USA was an amazing honor that I deeply cherished.

In 2005 when Maccabiah called and asked if I would coach the 18-and-under girl's team, I was thrilled to accept the position. The Maccabiah Games, also known as the Jewish Olympics, are for athletes of Jewish heritage and occur every four years in Israel. It is the third largest Olympic style competition in the world that includes over 50 countries, 7,500 athletes, and 30 sports.

Less than six weeks before Opening Ceremonies we were able to solidify a team of 12 players; four were from California, three from New Jersey, two from New York, and one each from Massachusetts, Michigan and Texas.

Very excited to get my first taste of international coaching, I prepared diligently for the Games, crunching stats, developing lineups and trying to build a team in less than 10 days. The girls did a great job of bonding and forming a team concept with minimal training. They won the silver medal, coming up a few points short to host Israel who was competing with their junior national team.

After the final match, the Israeli team invited us over for dinner. It was a great opportunity for the players to meet one another talk about volleyball, Israel, and to experience the Israeli culture firsthand. The evening also turned out to be a great opportunity for me to speak with the Israeli coaches about training methods, philosophies and game tactics. This kind gesture by the Israeli team truly illustrated the spirit of the Maccabiah games - bringing people together.

As luck would have it, this would turn out to be only one of the great experiences Israel had in store for me. On one of our off days I went to watch the USA men play their opening game against Germany. Before the match, I was given a jersey and told to put it on - just in case I might be needed as a sub. (Luckily I happened to be wearing sneakers.) In game two I was called upon to enter the game and was able to contribute with steady ball control and leadership. We played well and beat Germany in straight sets (3-0). The coaches asked me to come back and play with the men's team when my schedule permitted. This resulted in many frantic cab rides between Tel Aviv to Jerusalem so I could coach after playing. (A special thanks to Mike Spector for the cab fare and Mr. Alon for taking off work to drive me between matches.)

Wins against Canada (3-2) and Brazil (3-2) coupled with a semifinal loss to the Ukraine (0-3) pitted us against Brazil in the bronze medal match. Down 14-10 in the fifth game we rallied to come back and win 16-14, scoring six unanswered points. Big swings from David Levi and Dan Newman led the comeback rally.

"It was the greatest comeback I have ever been a part of," said Leor Alon, the team's captain. "This is a moment I will never forget."

He was right. To have the privilege of representing the USA as a coach and a player this past summer was such an amazing opportunity for which I am very grateful, and is one I will never forget.

In total, the USA delegation sent six volleyball teams to the Maccabiah Games this summer, each of which came home with a medal. The open women's team won the bronze medal defeating Mexico 3-0. In the beach volleyball competition the USA women's team took the bronze, while the USA men's teams took the silver and bronze medals. The gold was won in all the volleyball divisions by the Israeli teams.

I want to extend a big thank you to all of my fellow American Maccabiah players, teammates and coaches, for an unforgettable three weeks in Israel. Any athletes interested to learn more about the Maccabiah Games and future competitions should please send an e-mail to Maccabiah@maccabiusa.com or visit the web site at www.maccabiusa.com.

Hopefully we can bring home the gold in 2009! I'll be there coaching for sure, and I'll be sure to bring my sneakers just in case...