

Sports

Israel Athletics Championships

All change at top, but no records

By Rami Hipsh

New champions, surprises, tears and traffic jams – all were on the menu during the second day of the Israel Athletics Championships at the Hadar Yosef stadium yesterday. The traffic jams were due to a far more popular musical event taking place in the nearby Yarkon Park – athletic events don't draw the kind of crowds they did earlier in the decade, when pole-vaulter Alex Averbukh was competing among the world's best.

Yesterday was Averbukh's last national championship. He passed 5.35 meters at the second attempt, watched how Yavgeniy Olhovskiy registered 5.45 meters, then unsuccessfully attempted 5.55 meters three times. Olhovskiy was crowned champion, and Averbukh ended his glistening career by saying: "I'm disappointed with this result. I started well and thought I would do better. I tried not to think about this being my last tournament – there's still the Maccabiah, the World Championships and maybe one or two more competitions. The

hardest jump will be when I really know that this is my last competition."

Olhovskiy, who in recent years has competed in the U.S., was magnanimous in victory. "I'm happy that I won, but Alex should have been the champion," he said.

There was also a change of guard in the javelin event; Vadim Bavikin, at 39, is used to winning the national championship, but this time he was surpassed by 25-year-old Ashael Arad, who threw 61.82 meters. Arad had his photograph taken with two javelins that cost him 800 euros apiece, as well as with family and friends – and enjoyed every moment. "I should have won the title years ago. I've been training at javelin throwing since I was 16," he said.

Arad took a year off to train in the U.S., and from there moved to Helsinki, Finland, where he lived for a year. This year he's training in Israel, and at the winter European championships was told by a Portuguese coach that if he improves his technique, he could throw over 70 meters. He will be flying to Portugal



SO LONG: Alex Averbukh bids farewell to Israeli athletics fans.

Sharon Bukov

in September for training. "My mother is footing the bill," he said. "My club, Maccabi Be'er Sheva, provides NIS 1,000 every two months. I want to pass 70 meters, and then 80 meters. I want to reach the London Olympics [in 2012]. I can get an academic degree at the age of 30 from the Open University – medals

have to be earned now." Ma'ayan Forman leaped 1.77 meters in the high jump to win her third successive national championship, but burst into tears at her disappointing result. Dorit Naor in the javelin and Niva Ziv in the triple jump also retained their crowns. Sivan Aballi was also crying – tears of joy.

After years of narrowly missing out to Sivan Jan in the shot put, she threw 14.81 meters to leave Jan, who registered 13.16 meters, in second place. "The distance is not a good one, but I'm happy that I won," Aballi said. "This is the result of hard work – after all these years, I'm champion at last."

Off the couch and into the melting pot

ian flag.

Masud Ganaim, a Sakhnin man himself, and elected this year to the Knesset for the United Arab List – Ta'al, observes sadly: "Jewish Israelis, when they grow up, love to explore the world and make friends in the four corners of the earth, but they rarely bother to get to know their next-door neighbors right here."

Likewise, while Arab-Israeli children are accustomed to going into Jewish towns, in contrast, all too few Jewish children get the opportunity to visit an Arab town.

up to Sakhnin from Jerusalem was in the company of wannabe soccer stars from the Alliance Israelite Universelle school for the deaf in Jerusalem. They would push the other participants in the Sakhnin Cup – Jews and Arabs – to a steeper challenge yet: the need to accommodate "the other."

Most of the team, Palestinian children from East Jerusalem, have to handle several identity predicaments: They are not Israelis, but they live in an area which is defined as an integral part of Israel's capital. They study in an Israeli school in West Jerusalem and their sign language is culturally rooted in Hebrew, not in their mother-tongue Arabic.

Soccer is a serious bridging force, says their counselor, Galia Daniel-Teacher.

"It's become critical in helping them cope with the multiple challenges of their lives," she says. "We introduced an organized soccer program only this year and, already, it's literally transforming the children, their discipline, their self-esteem and encouraging them to work as a team."

Not 13-year-old Erez from Zichron Yaakov. He plays regularly in a league in which Arab village teams compete, though he did note that "during the war (in Gaza) we had security people with us when we played against Arab teams."

But he says some of his fellow pupils, or their parents, had been wary about coming into an Arab town, and had pulled out of the tournament.

His teammate Tom says candidly that he had been "quite a bit nervous." But the drive to play soccer "anytime, any place" got the better of his doubts and, after a terrific day, he was very glad he'd overcome them. Fourteen-year-old Leila from Sakhnin, who played goalie for the Romanian team, says, "We hope that, just as we welcome them to play with us in our homes, they will want us to welcome us in their homes."

An Israeli television reporter challenges Rehak with the argument that this soccer initiative is hardly likely to make much of a dent in the antagonism that dogs the region. Rehak dismisses the cynicism: When young people interact this easily with one another without resorting to negative stereotypes, surely that's no insignificant step forward towards a better chapter in inter-communal relations.

Getting off the couch and onto the field had a special added dimension. The two-and-a-half hour minibus ride



RONALDO WANNABES: Receiving recognition for their efforts.

Live on Television

- Fri. 14:00, Sport 5+: Beach soccer, Bank Yahav league
- Fri. 15:00, Sport 5: Tennis, Wimbledon men's semifinals
- Fri. 19:30, Sport 2: Soccer, Macc. Haifa vs. Spartak Moscow
- Fri. 21:30, Sport 5: Athletics, Golden League, Oslo
- Fri. 21:00, ESPN: Golf, AT&T National, second round
- Fri. 23:50, 5 Live: Motorsport, MotoGP, Laguna Seca
- Sat. 03:00, ESPN: Motorsport, Nascar Daytona Speedway
- Sat. 16:00, Sport 5: Tennis, Wimbledon, Women's final
- Sat. 18:30, Sport 5: Tennis, Wimbledon, Men's Doubles final
- Sat. 21:00, Sport 5: Tennis, Wimbledon, Women's Doubles final
- Sat. 16:30, Eurosport: Cycling, Tour de France, first leg
- Sat. 20:00, Sport 2: Athletics, Grand Prix, Madrid
- Sat. 22:00, ESPN: Golf, AT&T National, third round
- Sat. 23:00, Fox Sports: Baseball, MLB, Phillies vs. Mets
- Sat. 23:50, 5 Live: Motorsport, MotoGP, Laguna Seca
- Sun. 00:30, Sport 2: Soccer, Flamengo vs. Vitoria
- Sun. 03:00, ESPN: Motorsport, Nascar Coke Zero 400
- Sun. 06:00, Fox Sports: Soccer, New England Revolution vs. L.A. Galaxy

Tennis / Davis Cup

Semifinal beckons

By Nir Woolf

Israel's Davis Cup quarter-final tie with Russia will begin next Friday, and the timing couldn't be better. "It'll be crazy – you'll see. Dudi made the country crazy," exclaimed Andy Ram at yesterday's press conference, intended to generate interest prior to the Russians' arrival in Israel on Sunday.

"After his achievement [at Wimbledon], tennis in Israel has gone crazy. I come home and my little boy, who's only two months old, says 'Dudi, Dudi,'" Ram added.

As expected, Dudi Sela attracted most of the attention at the press conference, which combined public relations for tennis and for the sponsors, who even presented the players with cellular phones. "Wimbledon gave me lots of confidence," Sela said. "I proved to myself that I can play with the top players every week. I'm playing not-bad tennis right now, and always seem to excel in the Davis Cup. That's why I think we can beat the Russians. The fans will be completely behind us, and every one of our players is capable of bringing back his point."

The team comprises Sela – who is expected to earn two of the three points necessary for victory – Harel Levy, and Andy Ram and Yoni Erlich, who will be playing together again for the first time after a lengthy separation. "It's great to play again in the Davis Cup," said Erlich, who was out of commission for a considerable period with a shoulder injury. "I'm 100-percent fit and in good form,

despite the fact that I lost in the first round in Roland Garros and Wimbledon. Andy and I trained together before the clay [tournaments] and Challenger events in Israel – these are things that don't go away. I'm sure the spark won't disappear."

"We're both professionals," added Ram. "We played together for six years, and I'm sure the partnership will remain what it was. The crowd will see the AndyYoni they're used to seeing in the Davis Cup. It will be an important juncture in the tie, and we'll have to bring the point."

The Israeli players believe that next week's quarterfinal will not be the end of their Davis Cup road. The Russians will have to compete in a packed Yad Elishu stadium – some 9,000 tickets have already been sold. "The Russians are undoubtedly the favorites on paper," said team captain Eyal Ran, "but when we're playing in Israel in front of our home fans, the players excel themselves. This will blur the gaps between the teams," he promised.



Dudi Sela

Basketball / Maccabi Tel Aviv

Bluthenthal's third coming

Journeyman hoopster hopes for success under Pini Gershon

By Vered Cohen

David Bluthenthal is making the most of the summer break to spend quality time with his two girls. "My second daughter was born last summer, and it's important for me to have time for them. I'm really excited about returning to Israel and feel like I'm coming home," says the 6'7" (2.01 m) Los Angeles-born forward.

It's easy to understand why he calls Israel "home." This will be his third stint playing for Maccabi Tel Aviv, although he left at the end of his two previous seasons with the club. "Both times they were different situations," he explains. "The first time I went to try to play in the NBA, so we parted ways. The second time, last year, I wanted to stay but had no choice. Maccabi fired Tzvika [Sherf] and had three candidates for the coaching position – I would have happily worked with any of them. In the end they hired [Effi] Birnboim, who I understand is a good coach but did not figure me into his plans."

Were you hurt by this? Bluthenthal: "No, I don't feel hurt. I like and respect Maccabi, and I think that [club chairman] Shimon [Mizrahi], [part-owner] Ra'anana [Katz] and [vice chairman] David [Federman] like me, but Birnboim preferred Jason Williams and Tre Simmons over me. Lior Eliyahu and Omri Casspi also played in my position, so I was forced to leave." A year ago, Bluthenthal finished up a difficult season for him, after Sherf gave him little

court time. In interviews he was quoted as saying that he would not play again for Sherf, because he had "hurt me financially."

Yesterday he sounded more reserved. "I said that in the past, and didn't think about it all year. I don't think anyone can affect my chance of success. That was some time ago."

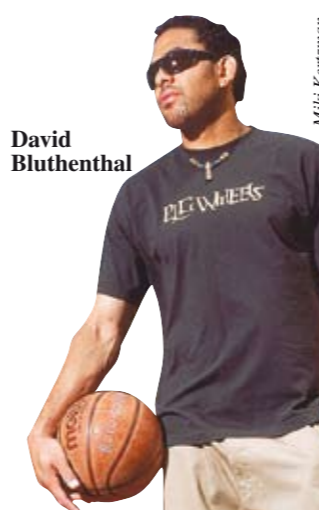
However he does point out that, "Tzvika is no longer coach at Maccabi. I wish him the best of luck in whatever he does."

Frequent flyer miles

Bluthenthal, who will soon turn 29, represented the United States at the Maccabiah in 1997. His mother is Jewish and his African-American father is a convert. Although he has Israeli citizenship, he decided not to play for the national team in the European Championships in 2005 and 2007.

After graduating from the University of Southern California, where he was consistently among the top players in the Pac-10, the forward spent two years with Maccabi Tel Aviv, winning the Euroleague championship and the State Cup twice. He scored 20 points off the bench in the 2004 Euroleague final against one of his future teams, Fortitudo Bologna.

Bluthenthal signed with the NBA's Sacramento Kings in August 2004, but was released in November before the 2004-05 season began. He went on to play eight games – shooting 69.6% from two-point range –



David Bluthenthal

Miki Kerzman

for Dynamo Saint Petersburg under former Maccabi coach David Blatt. After only two months in Russia, though, he went to Italy to play for Benetton Treviso. In the summer of 2005 he moved to Bologna, where he became one of the team's top players with 20.2 points per game. After one season, he signed with Virtus' hometown rivals Fortitudo for a year, returning to Maccabi in June 2007, before playing last season in France.

He prefers not to speak too much about the financially-strapped Le Mans of the French Pro A league, where he played last season. "I worked hard and gave the club all that I could, and led the team when needed," was all he said.

Regarding Maccabi, however, he sounds far more enthusiastic. "I believe that we've got a good team. I've seen all the names that are due to come to Maccabi, and I don't see any reason why we shouldn't reach the Final Four again this season," he declares.

He's already held a meeting with coach Pini Gershon. "We had a good conversation. We have a good relationship and I believe we can be successful. I'm really excited about playing for Pini – he's one of the coaches I've most enjoyed working with."

Have you changed in the past year?

"Every year you get a year older and absorb another year of experience. I think I've blossomed in a number of respects, both in basketball and in life."

SCOREBOARD

Tennis	
Wimbledon	
Men's doubles semifinals	
Daniel Nestor/Nenad Zimonjic (Canada/Serbia, 2) def. James Blake/Mardy Fish (U.S., 3) (7-6, 6-2, 3-6, 5-7)	(Bob Bryan/Mike Bryan (U.S., 1) def. Wesley Moodie/Dick Norman (South Africa/Belgium, 9) (4-7, 6-4, 3-7, 6-4)
Major League Baseball	
Cincinnati 3, Arizona 2	

sudoku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

The game board is divided into 81 squares, with nine horizontal rows and nine vertical columns. A few numbers already appear in some of the squares. The aim is to fill in numerals 1 to 9 in each of the empty squares, so that every row and column and every box (a group of nine squares outlined in boldface) contains all of the numerals 1 to 9. None of the numerals may recur in the same row, column or box.

Solution to the previous puzzle:

8	4	6	1	2	7	5	9	3
3	1	5	6	9	8	2	4	7
7	9	2	3	4	5	8	1	6
9	2	4	5	7	1	6	3	8
1	6	7	2	8	3	4	5	9
5	8	3	9	6	4	1	7	2
2	5	9	7	1	6	3	8	4
4	7	1	8	3	2	9	6	5
6	3	8	4	5	9	7	2	1

Tips and a computerized version of Sudoku can be found at www.sudoku.com

			2		6			1
4					9			8
5								
	4	6	9	2				
			1	4		8	7	
					3	5	6	4
								7
	2		7					8
9			8		3			

Difficulty: Hard