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Olympian moment for SA's chief in Paris

NICOLA MILTZ

"I was certain of that gold medal," said South Africa's man on the inside of Team South Africa at the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games. He was referring to Tatjana Smith's nail-biting 100m breaststroke win earlier this week to clinch South Africa's first gold medal at the Games.

"It took 12 years of planning for that medal, and I'm honoured to be a small part of that journey," said Leon Fleiser, the former Paralympian who is South Africa's chef de mission (person in charge of the national team) in Paris, a role that has him on the go 24/7. But he says he's "soaking up every minute".

What he means for the 138-odd squad of esteemed athletes is, "I'm their mother, father, lawyer, I'm chief cook and bottle washer," Fleiser told the *SA Jewish Report* from Paris.

While the nation held its collective breath during Tatjana's dash to gold on Monday, 29 July, Fleiser watched it from his single standard-issue cardboard box bed in the Olympic Village.

"I felt the start of a cold, and I didn't want to risk making anyone sick," he said, admitting that there were tears of joy as Tatjana did her victory lap, embracing her teammates in the Paris La Défense Arena.

"She's a wonderful woman, and I love the *gees* in the swimming,"



Team South Africa's chef de mission, Leon Fleiser

he said, "It's a small venue, and it gets packed out."

It's no wonder Fleiser had early signs of the sniffles - he's South Africa's busiest man right now.

"There's not much sleep going on, but I'm not here to sleep, I'm here to look after the athletes. They are my number one priority," he said, feeling perky and strong

the next day.

The chef de mission position at the Olympics is akin to a seasoned captain navigating a diverse and dynamic crew through rapid waters. He's the central figure of the national team, the go-to guy, responsible for charting the course from the moment the team is selected until it arrives back home. This will be after the Paralympic Games Paris 2024, which ends on 8 September, where he's also the chef de mission.

"I will have been away from home for two months," said the father of three. He grew up in Durban before making aliya with his family at the age of seven, returning to Johannesburg a while later where he attended King David Primary School Linksfield and later Parktown Boys' High School. "I call home every night, but most days that's around 23:00 because it only gets dark then."

Fleiser has been in a wheelchair for more than 30 years due to a shooting incident in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, when he was 20. Reflecting on his journey, he said, "On 25 May 1991, I was shot and paralysed instantly. It was the worst and best day of my life. I have a beautiful wife, Karen, and three amazing children, and I get to travel the world doing what I love. My life wouldn't be what it is today if it hadn't happened."

Fleiser cherishes his life, noting, "Right now, I'm in the Olympic

Village, surrounded by the world's best athletes, and I'm getting paid to be here. There's only 206 people like me in the world, I feel truly blessed."

His journey has taken him from being a top-level Paralympic sportsman to a high-level administrator. He captained wheelchair basketball at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics, an experience he said gave him a deep understanding of what it takes to lead a delegation of elite athletes as a chef de mission.

He's among the first former para-athletes to assume this leadership role at the Olympics. His path as a leader started with his role in Team South Africa's general management at the Beijing 2008 Games, and he has since been a consistent presence at every Olympics, culminating in his role as the chef de mission at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

"It's impossible to describe a typical day," he said. "As I wake up, my phone begins to ring. There's a problem with someone's accreditation; an athlete is injured and I need to secure a late replacement; there's a transport issue that needs attention; a press conference is about to begin; a high-level Olympic meeting; a toilet that needs fixing - it's endless." He's grateful for his team, including his deputy, Patience Shikwambana. The two, he said, "have each other's backs".

Continued on page 3>>



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Haniyeh's elimination a message to Tehran



DR DAN DIKER

OPINION

The elimination of Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Hamas political desk and the former chairperson of Hamas in Gaza, was a long time coming.

This targeted killing of Haniyeh, attributed to Israel, represented a breakthrough. If indeed it was an Israeli action, it crossed the line from fear and containment to the Middle Eastern "language" of assertiveness. With this targeted killing, the message was sent to Iran and its proxies that anyone who directs, finances, supplies, and mobilises terror against Israel will be eliminated. It may have come months late, but it's an important message nonetheless.

This is the language that the Middle East speaks. Israel has moved from containment to prevention and confrontation of those forces trying to destroy it.

Haniyeh was deeply involved in the planning of the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on 30 July 2024



Photo: Iranian Presidency - Handout - Anadolu via Getty Images

He had made frequent trips to Tehran to meet and strategise with his counterparts in the Islamic Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) under the command of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Haniyeh's elimination may come as a surprise to some. Following the recent mass murder of 12 children in northern Israel's Druze community of Majdel Shams and subsequent elimination of senior Hezbollah commander Fouad Shukur, the world's attention was primarily focused on how the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah might evolve.

However, in what appeared to be in sports terms a "head fake", an act of moving the head in such a way as to deceive an opponent about one's intended direction or move, the assassination of Haniyeh is an important and strong message to the Iranian regime.

It conveys that Israel's "long arm" can reach anywhere in the region and beyond, and eliminate terrorists of its choosing when it decides to eliminate them.

The elimination of Haniyeh is particularly important in that it occurred in Iran, especially as he was the guest of the incoming president, Masoud Pezeshkian. This is a strong message to the IRGC and the Iranian leadership that Israel can target them, reach them, and neutralise them with its advanced intelligence network and operational capabilities.

The targeted killing of Haniyeh was an important

psychological operation and action by Israel. It sent a resonant message to the Iranian terror network and its proxies across the Middle East, beginning with Hamas, extending to Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, as well as the Iraqi forces under the Iranian regime and beyond that Israel can reach any terrorist leader.

The taking out of Haniyeh was also important because it wasn't targeted specifically at Hezbollah, so it reduced Hezbollah and Iran's motivation to launch a major counter-attack.

Haniyeh's bloody past extended back many years since his election in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections in which he defeated Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas by a landslide. That election was then discounted by the United States-backed Palestinian Authority and Israel because Hamas failed to abide by the three conditions that the Oslo Peace Accords had laid out for the proper election of a Palestinian leadership.

Haniyeh militarised Hamas's operational capabilities extraordinarily since the early 2000s, with the help of Iran, while he led Hamas from within Gaza until he was replaced in 2016 by Yahya Sinwar.

Under Haniyeh's leadership, there were several Hamas terror wars: in 2008 and 2009; the attacks of 2011 and 2012; and 2014 to 2015; and then the well-known Guardian of the Walls counter-terror operation following Hamas's onslaught in 2021 that also triggered substantial violence within Israel.

Haniyeh had also become an expert in psychological operations and political warfare. Back in 2014, he addressed tens of thousands of Gazans, using as a backdrop a photograph of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr, and Mahatma Gandhi to try to send a message to the world that Hamas was merely a resistance defending its people as opposed to a radical Islamic terror group being mobilised and operated by the Iranian regime.

Even though Haniyeh was a leader of the Sunni Hamas, he had become a well-known Iranian regime operative.

And he had effectively used hybrid warfare, meaning traditional terror actions combined with popular and cognitive-warfare driven mobilisation of the public.

Haniyeh was president of Hamas in Gaza when he drove, directed, and motivated thousands of boys and girls to try to storm the Gaza-Israel security fence in 2018 in what was called the "Great March of Return", another psychological operation.

It has been reported recently that Haniyeh - who had made his operational headquarters in Doha, Qatar - had been behind some of the intensive Qatari-sponsored efforts to implement a ceasefire, and it was reported in Western media that that positioned him as a peacemaker.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Haniyeh's interest was in saving the Hamas regime, keeping it in the "cockpit", and blowing up the current negotiations between Israel and Hamas by changing and intensifying Hamas's demands.

Israel's alleged targeted killing of him wasn't at the expense of a potential deal with Hamas, but in fact, it was aimed at allowing Israel to continue its successful counter-terror operations and putting much greater pressure on Hamas to do a deal, which otherwise would have resulted in very few live hostages being returned, and condemning to death the majority of Israeli and American hostages still being held by Hamas.

The overnight elimination of Haniyeh is an important message that Israel won't accept Tehran's maligned behaviour, its unbridled and frontal attacks on Israel via its proxy terror forces, and its direct attack on 14 April. Israel has many ways to neutralise and defeat the Iranian leadership overnight. This action was only a taste of its capabilities.

It's also a clear message to Iran's Lebanon-based leader, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, that Israel can eliminate him as well and he is clearly high on the list.

• Dr Dan Diker is the president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs.

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Laughter amid the tears

Torah Thought



Rabbi Pini Hecht
 Marais Road Shul

In relation to the tribulations of exile and the hope for redemption, the Gemara at the end of Tractate Makkot relates the following: "Once, Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking along the road in the Roman Empire. They heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome from Puteoli. The city was so large, they could hear its tumult from a great distance. The other sages began weeping, while Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They asked him, 'Why are you laughing?' Rabbi Akiva responded, 'And why are you weeping?' They said, 'These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly in this colossal city, while for us, the house of the footstool of our G-d, the Temple, is burned by fire. Shall we not weep?' Rabbi Akiva replied, 'That's why I am laughing. If for those who violate His will, the wicked, it is so and they are rewarded for the few good deeds they have performed, how much more so will those who perform His will be rewarded.'" - Makkot 24b

These sages had lived through the destruction of our holy Temple and were struggling, together with the nation, under the oppressive regime of the Roman Empire. They had travelled from the heart of Israel to the capital of Rome to advocate on behalf of the Jewish people. What they witnessed couldn't have been more stark compared with what they were experiencing at home. Rome was bustling, affluent, and thriving, whereas the Israel they had travelled from was struggling, bereft, and deprived. Seeing the enemies of Israel and Judaism prospering and enjoying life while their own brethren were suffering unimaginable loss and poverty upset these sages to their core, and they cried - well, three did. But one, Rabbi Akiva, didn't. In fact, he laughed!

They asked him, "Why are you laughing?" He answered, "Why are you crying?" They replied, "Those

who bow down to false gods rejoice and celebrate, while for us, the house of our G-d is destroyed. Should we not cry?" He said to them, "That's why I laugh; if this is the celebration for those who desecrate His will, how much more so for those who exalt His will!"

For three weeks of every year, we're directed to mourn the destruction of our holy Temples and the downfall of the Jewish people. This period, when viewed as a commemoration of an ancient event, can feel irrelevant and pointless. It's that time of year now, between the 17th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av, and I believe the above story provides an illuminating perspective that lends meaning and relevance to our practice of grief. If

we mourn the destruction, if we show Hashem that we feel bereft without a Beit Hamikdash, like a loving parent who responds to the pain of their child, Hashem will respond to heal our pain.

This is what Rabbi Akiva was telling his colleagues - because you're crying, because you mourn, because you're not satisfied with the status quo, "that's why I'm laughing", that's why I'm hopeful, that's why I'm certain that whatever fleeting joy our enemies experience, we'll celebrate manifold times over. The sorrow of these three weeks is much more than mere nostalgia, it's the beginning of the future. It's the key to better days. May we see the transformation of these days of sorrow into days of joy and celebration!

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Will efforts to ban Israel from Olympics gather speed?

STEVEN GRUZD

There's been an embarrassing and alarming display of insubordination and mixed messages from the country's newly minted government of national unity (GNU), and Israel is at its heart.

Peace Mabe, South Africa's deputy minister of sport, art and culture, called for Israel to be banned from the Olympics for its treatment of the Palestinians – in a fiery statement that uses the words “genocide” or “genocidal” five times. Except, she obviously didn't clear it with her boss, Minister Gayton McKenzie. Mabe is from the African National

Congress (ANC), which is strongly anti-Israel, while McKenzie hails from the pro-Israel Patriotic Alliance (PA). The incident also demonstrates how far the ANC will go to demonise and delegitimise Israel in the international arena.

Mabe said, “The department of sport, art, and culture condemns the participation of the genocidal state of Israel in the Paris 2024 Olympics as it seriously undermines the principles of Olympism.” Israel's presence at the games was “grossly inhuman, and indicative of scant regard for thousands of Palestinian lives lost as a result of continued genocide by Israel against women, children, men, the elderly, and the sick,” Mabe said. “We call upon all peace-loving nations to shun the genocidal Israel [sic] state and pledge solidarity with Palestinian [sic] who will continue to face bombardment by the same Israel that will be participating in Olympics.”

After Mabe's statement was made public, McKenzie kicked for touch. He said on X (formerly Twitter), “I shall respond fully in regard to my displeasure about the statement released by Deputy Minister of Sport, Art, and Culture Ms Peace Mabe only after the Olympics. I don't want politics to take centre stage now, this is the time for @OfficialTeamRSA. Let's rally behind them.”

This will serve only to prolong the issue and postpone the time of reckoning. It also suggests profound policy disagreement within this department.

On 28 July, the ANC doubled down on the message, saying on X, “Ban apartheid Israel! The ANC supports the international call of isolating Israel in all areas of global engagement. Let the athletes, fans, and sponsors of the Olympics take a stand. No normal sport in an abnormal society. #FreePalestine.”

Israeli journalist Rolene Marks, the spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation, said, “South Africa's attempts to get Israel banned from the Olympics is another prong of its ‘lawfare’ tactic on behalf of Iran and Hamas to further isolate Israel, to create this pariah status in the

family of nations. It's appalling that the deputy minister forced this without the sanction of Gayton McKenzie.

“With regards to the accusations of genocide, this is very, very unsportsmanlike behaviour. It does show that the government of national unity isn't united as far as foreign policy is concerned.”

Analyst Terence Corrigan said, “The problem with the GNU was that it was a shotgun marriage that no one really wanted, a ‘least-worst option’. McKenzie leads the portfolio, and thus has precedence over his deputy. But his deputy probably feels emboldened by the outsized influence the ANC has in Cabinet.

“My sense is that Minister McKenzie will reprimand his deputy, and his deputy won't really care.” Corrigan said. “It does, however,

serve as an illustration of the fractious nature of the arrangement. The exchange furthermore illustrates that the ANC in particular is struggling to come to terms with a truly pluralistic situation.”

A few months ago, graphic billboards around Gauteng calling for Israel to be banned from Paris appeared to have little traction. The International Olympic Committee refused to disinvite the Israeli team, and publicly supported Israel's participation. The billboards quietly disappeared.

Frans Cronje, who runs a political risk advisory firm, said, “It's part of the broader policy of stigmatisation of Israel. South Africa is probably the most influential global actor in

prosecuting that strategy. The end goal is to have Israel, as an institution, declared a crime against humanity. This would be the ultimate stigma.

“This strategy has a high chance of succeeding, and Israel could be brought down, not through force of arms, but information warfare. On the Olympics, I believe that without intervention, South Africa will succeed in having Israel banned from the 2032 games [in Brisbane]. South Africa's reasons range from ideology, cupidity and history to the enormous global acclaim it has earned since its ICJ [International Court of Justice] case. But more than that, its efforts succeed as Israel has developed no strategy or effective measures to counter the information warfare it's exposed to from South Africa.”

Said Corrigan, “Whether Israel participates in the Olympics or not will mean little practically for its endurance or the fate of the Palestinians. However, it's part of the broader question of its legitimacy - whether it has, as its detractors deny, a ‘right’ to exist. Appearing in such contests - the Olympics, or Eurovision - confirms that it's a fact, and that it's place in the world is a rightful one. [However], Israel's involvement in these events is always likely to stoke controversy. The war in Gaza and various legal cases being brought against Israel have upped the heat and focus.”

“On a personal note, as an Israeli, if you have an issue with us, take it to the mat, or the swimming pool or the courts, because we're not going anywhere,” Marks said.

International efforts to ban Israel for its actions in the Gaza conflict have flopped in Paris as Israeli athletes compete for medals in full force. But political campaigns like this play the long game, and may affect Israeli participation in future. In a sign of increasing pressure on Israel, its president, Isaac Herzog, received death threats while visiting Paris. Israeli athletes have been booed. And the memories of the Israeli athletes and officials murdered by Palestinian terrorists at the Munich Olympics in 1972 remain fresh.

The SA Jewish Report contacted the department for comment, but received no response by the time of going to press.



Graffiti on the corner of Barry Hertzog Avenue and Gleneagles Road in Emmarentia calling for Israel to be banned from the Olympic Games

Olympian moment for SA's chief in Paris

>>Continued from page 1

In the months leading up to the Games, Fleiser transforms into a meticulous planner, co-ordinating with sports federations, helping to secure funding, and ensuring that every logistical detail is attended to, from securing accommodation in the Olympic Village to arranging travel schedules. He works closely with coaches and athletes, understanding their needs and preferences.

Fleiser is a diplomat, building bridges with international counterparts, navigating complex protocols, and representing the country's interests in meetings with the International Olympic Committee and other governing bodies. His role requires a delicate balance of assertiveness, *chutzpah*, and tact.

During the Olympics, Fleiser takes on the role of a chief strategist, overseeing the daily operations of the team. He's the hub through which all information flows, whether it's updates on competition schedules, health and safety protocols, or media interactions. In this role, he must remain calm under pressure, quickly adapting to

unexpected changes or crises such as an injury or logistical hiccups.

“There are many highs and sadly some lows,” he said, referring to star gymnast Caitlin Rooskrantz's foot injury this week, which saw her out of the Games.

“It's heart-breaking, but unfortunately, that's sport,” Fleiser said.

The hardest part of the job is “when you see the dismay on an athlete's face when a performance hasn't gone their way”.

Beyond the competition, Fleiser works with media to ensure that the stories of triumph and perseverance are shared with the world. He also engages with sponsors and stakeholders, fostering relationships that will support future generations of athletes.

In essence, Fleiser is the heartbeat of the South African Olympic team, a true *boytjie*. He embodies resilience, dedication, and the unifying power of sport, guiding Team South Africa through the highs and lows of the Olympic journey.

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Military camp sets alarm bells ringing for Jewish community

TALI FEINBERG

When a secret military training camp in Mpumalanga was discovered just days after the United States treasury sanctioned two South African individuals linked to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), it set off alarm bells for South African Jews. "The Jewish community continues to face



South African Police Services raiding a military training camp in Mpumalanga where 95 Libyan nationals were arrested



Photos: Facebook

a discriminate threat of terrorism by Islamist extremists within South African borders, with that threat heightened given current developments in Gaza," says Ryan Cummings, the director of analysis at Africa-focused risk management company Signal Risk. "This incident will certainly lead to greater scrutiny of border control and regulation of the private security industry. [The latter] could be exploited by actors with nefarious intentions."

While analysts note that the camp was probably an illegal base training soldiers linked to Libyan warlord General Khalifa Haftar, they say its existence raises concerns about South Africa's intelligence, and its ability to clamp down on camps that may train terrorists.

"Does this increase the danger to the Jewish community? Of course, especially with the current antisemitism rampant in the world and the rhetoric of the South African government," says Willem Els, senior training co-ordinator at the Institute for Security Studies. "There's a heightened security risk to the Jewish community even without terrorists being trained here."

"What's alarming is the reluctance of the government to act against the radicalism that fuels antisemites," says Els. "In South Africa, with the direction that the government has taken, it places more risk on the community. Radical Islamists in South Africa might take it that the government would support them acting against Jews. That might lead some groups to take action, or it might lead to actions by lone wolves who are being radicalised. It may not be a sophisticated attack."

Jevon Greenblatt, the head of Gauteng operations at the Community Security Organisation, disagrees. "I don't think this incident signals a specific increase in risk to our community, but it does suggest that South Africa is seen as a destination for less than savoury individuals or groups to receive military-style training," he says.

"As such, there's no reason to believe that individuals linked to terror groups and radical ideologies won't take advantage of this."

"We do have a new police minister, so perhaps this does indicate a shift that will result in a clampdown on such

activities in South Africa, but it's too early to make such an assessment," Greenblatt says. "We know that there are those with radical views who see

action taken before. I would also flag that in spite of us having a new Cabinet and a government of national unity, the president hasn't appointed a minister of intelligence. It's a vacant position at the moment."

Says Els, "We saw the US treasury cited the two people a week ago - one for

financing and trafficking of terrorists for ISIS, and one for terrorist training. That gives us an indication that there must be some training going on in South Africa. Some years ago, there was an Al-Qaeda camp near Graaff Reinet in the Karoo, but the government just swept it under the carpet. There were also some camps near Pretoria, for ISIS and Al-Qaeda, which were also swept under the carpet. It's been happening here for a long time.

"It seems that the Americans know more than the South Africans about

what's going on here," he says. "So that means that yes, this poses a risk, especially for the Jewish community, in the wake of the current situation in the world."

"Do I think that the incident will herald the clamping down on terrorism activity in South Africa? It will put some pressure on the government and the police to actually inspect these sites. But it should also put some onus on our intelligence fraternity to identify and detect training camps. So, I think there will be a clampdown."

South African battles US student union over antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG

Jay Kaplan may now be studying at the University of Chicago (UChicago), but his strong Jewish identity emanating from growing up in Johannesburg led him to take on his virulently anti-Israel student union - and win his first battle.

This is just the beginning of Kaplan's fight against an openly hostile environment that excludes anyone who doesn't support an extremist anti-Israel position. He is working to ensure that no student who cares about Israel is discriminated against on American campuses.

"I'm thankful at a less severely antisemitic school than many of my friends and colleagues, but no, I don't feel comfortable," he says. "Everywhere I go, there's pro-Hamas propaganda. They have torn down our hostage posters. There are keffiyeh-clad students everywhere. When the encampment was up for about a week in early May, it was horrific. They barricaded the main quadrangle of the university, and blatant antisemitism abounded: 'From the river to the sea'; 'Resistance is justified'; 'Globalise the intifada', among other slogans."

Born and raised in Johannesburg and having matriculated from King David High School Linksfield in 2018, "I started studying medicine at the University of Sydney in Australia in January 2019 before leaving to study at Princeton University in August 2019," says Kaplan. "Here, I majored in chemical and biological engineering with minors in applied mathematics and computer science. I graduated from Princeton in May 2023 and began my PhD in molecular engineering at UChicago in September 2023."

It was there that he first encountered the antisemitic hatred on campus, and it came from the very institution that was supposed to protect students. "Recently, in the United States, graduate students, who are paid a stipend, began to unionise to increase wages and improve working conditions," he says. "UChicago unionised at the end of last year. As a requirement for our employment, we were now obligated to join the union and pay dues, or not join but pay equivalent agency fees."

"The union immediately put forward a vote supporting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions [BDS] coalition even before 7 October. After 7 October, it began regularly posting Students for a Just Palestine [SJP] propaganda and other antisemitic vitriol. When the pro-Hamas encampments began, it emailed us supporting the encampment. I immediately reached out to our union representatives, requesting that they withdraw support from SJP and BDS. I said that if they didn't, I, and other Jewish students, would refuse to pay our agency dues. They responded aggressively, saying that our positions at UChicago would be terminated if we failed to pay."

But Kaplan wasn't deterred. He reached out to the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, which had fought the same case against the same union at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and won. "We put together a letter to university administration and the union requesting a religious accommodation under Title VII of the US Civil Rights Act, which states that if a workplace or union violates your religious beliefs, you are exempt from paying fees and can divert these funds to a non-religious, non-profit charity. It has since accepted our religious exemption, and we're now pushing it to allow us to donate to Magen David Adom as the charity of our choice, which it is pushing back on."

"I have since helped other Jewish students file their own exemptions," says Kaplan. "However, other students that aren't Jewish and don't wish to associate with the SJP or pro-Hamas sentiments are unable to leverage the religious exemption."

As such "a group of law students, with the help of a top US law firm, Jones Day, filed a lawsuit against the union claiming that it violated their first amendment rights by forcing association with an ideological organisation."

Kaplan has been assisting with the case. "I've also connected Jewish students at other universities with the plaintiffs of the case, and other schools are now planning to file similar suits. Should this lawsuit succeed, the union will be unable to enforce agency fees on anyone, allowing all those opposed to the anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric to avoid paying them a dime, as well as potentially receiving compensation for the plaintiffs."

Back in May, when Kaplan entered the encampment at his university wearing his hostage dog tag, "I was immediately followed by an older woman who began recording me. I felt comfortable walking through the encampment only because there were campus police officers just outside. Later that week, they took down the US flag and raised the Palestinian flag. I went to take photos and was blocked by members of the encampment. I took photos over their heads, while other pro-Palestinians took photos of me. There was also a list circulating on campus of 'known Zionists' that I was on."

"Our pro-Israel group, Maroons for Israel, put up a pro-Israel exhibit with flags and posters, all of which were torn down and destroyed every night by the encampment people. The university police saw it happening and did nothing. It was told not to escalate matters as it watched our authorised exhibit get destroyed by masked terrorist sympathisers."

Kaplan also spearheaded a group that planned and raised more than \$30 000 (R551 121) to put up a display of the 7 October massacre across from the encampment. However, "the university took down the encampment at 04:00 the morning our exhibit was going up, and we decided to hold onto the funding to use in the fall [autumn] should they return."

He emphasises that he isn't the only one taking on this fight. "James Hirschowitz, another King Davidian doing his undergraduate degree at Berkeley, has filed a discrimination suit against the school, along with some other students."

Kaplan has lost many friends "and people I have never even spoken to glare at me because they know I'm a Zionist - by word of mouth or my dog tag. These are just some of the disgusting experiences I have had on a college campus, and these are just my stories. There are countless other horrific stories, and this is nothing compared with the humanities departments at Columbia or Berkeley."

Meanwhile, the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is investigating unions for antisemitism, and Kaplan was asked to speak to Republican senate aides about his experience. "We're waiting to hear back from the committee," he says. "Nowhere near enough is being done to combat rising anti-Israel rhetoric and antisemitism on US campuses. These students have violated codes of conduct with minimal to no penalties. It's a glaring double standard with no repercussions."

"I truly worry about Israel's place in the future of academia," he says. "If these militant students continue, universities may succumb to pressure and sever ties. Even more worrying is that these useful idiots may someday be in positions to make these decisions."

"Unfortunately, very little can be done from abroad to support US Jewish students," he says. "If anyone wants to reach out, they are more than welcome. A big thing is the 'apartheid' accusation, so the generation of more material from South Africans combatting this would be useful. Regarding South Africa, it must be difficult living in a country with a Hamas office and a government that prosecutes Israel and South African Israel Defense Forces soldiers, so keep fighting the good fight."



Jay Kaplan

SA's silence on Hezbollah speaks a thousand words

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) have criticised the South African government's deafening silence after Iranian proxy Hezbollah launched an unprovoked attack on Israel on 27 July that instantly killed 12 children playing soccer. The atrocity was condemned by the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the European Union.

Naledi Pandor emphasised that South Africa's foreign policy was "guided by human-rights principles". This was echoed by her successor, Ronald Lamola, on 11 July, when he said, "The government of national unity [GNU's] statement of intent commits to a foreign policy guided by human rights, constitutional principles, and the national interest, as well as solidarity and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the creation of a just, peaceful, and equitable world."

watching closely for signals, not least the American Congress, which is weighing up how to deal with GNU South Africa."

Gruzd and local political analyst Daniel Silke surmise that South Africa struggles to respond to a situation that doesn't fit its narrow and shallow view of the Middle East. "The slow nature of any response would indicate that they are flummoxed as to how to respond to a massacre like this," says Silke.

"I don't think it's any surprise, because South Africa has been so blinkered in terms of her positioning on Israel, the Palestinians, and the entire conflict that she seems unable to understand the competing nuances in the region," he says. "And if she can't understand those nuances, she seems unwilling to be an honest arbiter on either side of the equation. It therefore looks like the South African government has been caught off guard by this particular attack



The soccer field in Majdal Shams where 12 children were killed by a Hezbollah rocket

"The SAZF condemns this attack in the strongest terms and calls on the South African government to denounce it unequivocally," says SAZF spokesperson Rolene Marks. "We stand in solidarity with the victims and their families, and urge the international community to take decisive action against such acts of terror. This heinous act marks a serious escalation in Hezbollah's ongoing aggression, which indiscriminately targets civilians, whether they be men, women, or children, Jew, Muslim, Christian or Druze."

"It's disappointing but not surprising that our government has once again failed to recognise a mass attack on Israeli civilians, just like on 7 October," says SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn. "The department of international relations and co-operation [Dirco], which claims to uphold the values of human rights, has repeatedly exposed its hypocrisy. Failing to acknowledge the unprovoked, brutal killing of 12 children playing soccer undermines any form of moral integrity."

"This silence stands in stark contrast to the numerous knee-jerk Dirco statements on events that were later proven incorrect and never corrected," says Kahn. "It's disgraceful that our government shows no empathy for the killing of innocent children when their murders don't fit its narrative."

Meanwhile, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein called on Israel to attack Iran. "Hezbollah's horrific missile attack that killed 12 children highlights the threat posed by Iran," he said on 29 July. "This latest attack is a stark reminder that a nuclear Iran, with its violent jihadi worldview, poses an existential threat to Israel. If Israel doesn't destroy Iran's production of nuclear weapons, no one else will. Israel needs to act now."

South Africa remains close to Iran, ignoring its human-rights violations. Throughout her term as minister of international relations and co-operation,

Says political analyst Steven Gruzd, "South Africa's silence on this attack will make it vulnerable to criticism that it's selective in the application of its foreign policy, especially its claim that human rights are at its core. When innocent children are killed on a soccer field, South Africa keeps quiet. Is it only human rights for some?"

The explosion was so extreme, the fate of one child was unknown for 48 hours as forensic investigators searched to recover enough of his DNA at the scene to declare him dead. One of the first witnesses to arrive at the scene described children with "no hands, no legs, no heads".



The African National Congress is selective in its condemnation. Sudan is exempt, and so are Hamas and Hezbollah. This is insincere and deceitful.

Meanwhile, Dirco has jumped to condemn almost every move of Israel's defensive war against Hamas, and its recent statements include condolences for landslides in Ethiopia and approval of Palestinian groups coming together in unity. But when it came to children murdered in an unprovoked attack by a terrorist organisation, the department didn't utter a word.

Political analyst Frans Cronje believes "this is an early test of the foreign policy of the GNU. The test will be whether the extreme pro-Iranian and Iranian proxy stances of the South African government have softened at all. A lot of people will be

emanating from Hezbollah.

"South Africa's foreign policy fails to understand that both sides face what they regard as an existential crisis for their own survival, and that for Israel, that obviously involves fighting back against Iranian proxies. The terror movements of Hamas and Hezbollah are seen as legitimate fighting forces, and South Africa therefore has no sympathy for Israelis," says Silke.

"I don't think it's surprising that South Africa hasn't commented, as this attack goes off the script," Gruzd says. "It's not the 'normal' way that this Middle East conflict is supposed to be playing out. It shows that South Africa has clearly picked a side, and when its side does something abhorrent, it just keeps quiet. I'm fond of the phrase 'one's friends never commit human-rights atrocities, but one's enemies always do'. It's appropriate in this case."

Glen Segell, visiting professor and research fellow at the University of the Free State and research fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran and Gulf States Research at the University of Haifa, says, "The African National Congress [ANC] is selective in its condemnation. Sudan is exempt, and so are Hamas and Hezbollah. This is insincere and deceitful."

"Since Palestinian independence hasn't taken place, the ANC believes that any means justify the end," says Segell. "So, both 7 October and this event mean Israel is to blame. Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iranian-sponsored violence and terrorism aren't just about the Palestinian cause. The ANC has taken an active stance that is both anti-Israel and anti-West. It would best turn neutral or face the consequences."

"As an Israeli, I want to emphasise how devastated we are as a nation at the merciless murder of our children," Marks says. "We stand with our Druze brothers and sisters."

The SA Jewish Report reached out to Dirco for comment, but didn't receive a response.

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A strong message

On Wednesday morning, we woke up to the news that Hamas's political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, had been assassinated in Iran. I'm not one to revel in death, but I do recognise that Israel's aim is to chop off the head of Hamas, and this assassination sends a strong message.

No matter what the world may be saying, Haniyeh is no martyr or hero. He's the political leader of the most heinous terrorist organisation in the world. He was one of the leaders behind Hamas's devastating massacre in Israel on 7 October that killed 1 200 innocent people and took 251 hostage. It was his organisation that committed the most depraved acts on innocent Israeli women and children.

So, taking Haniyeh out of the picture is undoubtedly a coup for Israel, and the world can see, once again, that Israel means business.

However, I cannot help holding my breath on the southern tip of Africa in fear of what this will mean for Israel and our people there. It will also reverberate around the world, without doubt.

Haniyeh's murder – especially the fact that it happened in Iran, where he had been a guest at the swearing-in ceremony of the new president, Masoud Pezeshkian – will cement the already strong bonds between Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas in their determination to eliminate Israel.

I have no doubt that the ANC and other anti-Israel political parties here will declare his assassination to be the murder of a hero and there will be no mention of his despicable acts or that of his terrorist organisation.

The killing of Haniyeh follows closely on an attack in Lebanon, which killed Fuad Shukur, known as Hezbollah's top military commander.

This attack by Israel was revenge for a rocket attack from Lebanon that killed children at a soccer field in the Golan Heights at the weekend. Amazingly, the attack, which killed 12 Druze children, has received no mention by the South African government (see page 5), which always claims to be dedicated to human rights and humanitarian values. But I guess we shouldn't be surprised as the ANC has long since nailed its colours to the mast in terms of Israel and its enemies.

Olympics

With all this happening in the Middle East, you may wonder why we chose to lead the *SA Jewish Report* with a story about the Olympics and the man at the helm of South Africa's team.

Truth is, there's a recognisable lightness in the air around the world associated with the Olympic Games. I know I'm not alone in the pride I felt in Tatjana Smith winning gold in the 100m breaststroke. She was our first gold medallist in this Olympics, here's hoping others will follow.

I have never met her, but along with the whole country, I feel overwhelming pride as if she were my kin.

That's what sport does to us.

I'm equally proud of South African mountain biker Alan Hatherly, who won the bronze medal in the cross-country event earlier this week. He gave us our first Olympic cycling medal since the Games were held in Melbourne in 1956. Truth is, he was so close to gold, he could almost smell it.

And, I can't say I am totally surprised at our rugby sevens team winning bronze, but I'm proud of them too.

Having one of our brethren as the leader of the South African team is marvellous (page 1), as is having one of our own winning a bronze medal in women's rugby for the United States. Who cares who she plays for, Sarah Levy is one of us, and we're proud of her achievements.

The point is that sport, in this case Olympic sport, unites us as a nation and a world. It creates joy, and envelops us with pride. Around the globe, people are keeping tabs on the Games and enjoying the successes of their nation and others.

While you may want your country to win gold, there's excitement in just watching gymnastics performed by anyone. In the end, it's about the effort and passion people put into being the best in their sport.

At the same time as the Olympics, a team of South Africans are competing in the 2024 European Maccabi Youth Games in London. May they, too, get the most out of competing and recognise that it's not all about winning but participating.

As 15-year-old Jonah Gruskin realised when he broke his collarbone (see story on page 16) and could no longer compete at the Maccabi Games, it's more about the camaraderie and friendship than anything else. In his wisdom, he was only too happy to go along as national flagbearer just so he could be there with his teammates.

As we bask in their glory and feel their pain, we set aside our differences and enjoy our national pride. It's not about what each person stands for politically or what school they went to, it's all about the sport and that fabulous Afrikaans word "gees" (spirit and enthusiasm).

Unfortunately, there are always those who will use sport to engender hatred. People who, like our Israel-hating brethren, cannot allow the world to unite. They must bring in hate.

There's no doubt the war in the Middle East is far from over, but Israel, like every country, is entitled to send its sports people to compete in the world's biggest sporting tournament.

For Israel to send its sportspeople to France is risky at the moment, but it's important for the country's spirit and integrity. The threat level against its players is the highest since the Olympic Games in 1972, when 11 Israeli athletes were killed by Black September terrorists in Munich.

President Isaac Herzog, who was himself exposed to a death threat in Paris, thanked French President Emmanuel Macron, saying, "I appreciate your work in the fight against antisemitism and your contribution to ensuring the ability of the excellent Israeli delegation to compete with respect and fairness in the Olympic Games."

I wish them and every other sportsperson at the Olympics and Maccabi Games, *behatzlacha!* May you all come home victorious!

Thank you all for lifting our spirits!

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



SA's second new dawn - but clock ticking

OPINION

DANIEL SILKE



With remarkable ease, South Africa has entered a new political era following the May elections.

The deep decline in voter support for the African National Congress (ANC) necessitated a new governing dispensation and a critical choice by the ANC to seek out a co-operative agreement with largely centrist parties anchored by the Democratic Alliance (DA). It has set the country - at least for the moment - on a new experimental course of multiparty decision-making.

Officially termed a government of national unity (GNU) but led by the ANC, a new Cabinet, parliamentary standing committees, and key office bearers now encompass a mix of the 10 participating parties.

Since voters clearly indicated that they had lost substantial faith in the ANC but were also unable to commit in large numbers to opposition parties, the outcome provides some hope that a centrist political grouping can begin to undo some of the severe damage inflicted over the past 15 years, and rebuild and reform not only a stagnant economy but also dysfunctional state enterprises and governance steeped in corruption, graft and patronage.

For jaded South Africans, often cynical about their country's dismal political performance, the outcome was, at the very least, the best possible option when faced with an alternative of an ANC/Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)/uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party coalition. That the ANC, DA, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and seven other parties were able to shut out the more radical and extremist political alternatives should be seen as a victorious outcome of the 29 May vote.

While the business community, which clearly pressured key protagonists to put the country before their own narrow political interests, will be satisfied, this GNU faces immense challenges in its attempt to steer a recovery course for the beleaguered nation.

In macro terms, the very broad cross-party agreement was echoed in President Cyril Ramaphosa's opening of Parliament address. A relatively impressive synthesis of the 10 participating GNU parties was woven into his address and found broad buy-in from parties that only months ago were lambasting the president for his February State of the Nation Address.

But pleasantries and platitudes need to be met with practical realities. In spite of the appointment of an enlarged Cabinet (executive), key challenges remain.



Photo: The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa Facebook page

Within the ANC, Ramaphosa and his confidants have driven the deal with the DA. However, rumblings of discontent continue to emerge from ANC formations like the South African Communist Party, elements within the ANC's Gauteng leadership, and at local government level, in continued disdain for the role of the DA in government.

Since the ANC had by the latter part of Ramaphosa's first term sought to enlist the private sector in partnerships to rebuild critical infrastructure, the DA's ideological support for enhancing the role of business dovetailed exceptionally well. And DA MPs smiled and applauded aspects of the president's opening address that dealt with related issues.

But make no mistake, the ANC remains fraught with internal divisions that have yet fully to reconcile the ideological divide between those who still see the state as central to economic planning and redistribution,

and those who are willing to embrace the private sector and deregulate the economy accordingly.

Certainly, this GNU also throws Ramaphosa a political lifeline with the potential to salvage a legacy after his initial false "new dawn". Should Ramaphosa be weakened within the ANC, the GNU will feel the internal ANC ructions.

Though the new Cabinet has been sworn in and the DA has taken full and deputy ministerial positions, the new working agreement will require a considerable settling-in period. DA ministers have ANC deputy ministers, and vice versa. These key positions will need to be relatively in sync to avoid policy and implementation gridlock or even departmental dysfunction.

Similarly, key bureaucrats like directors general and their senior teams need to be onboard with the political shifts, otherwise they too can disable possible progress.

In addition, big policy issues like the National Health Insurance are hotly contested between the ANC and DA. The GNU will be tested over issues such as this, which may demand deep compromise on the side of those with antagonistic views. The conflict-resolution mechanisms will be tested as we progress, and will either undermine the GNU or cement it accordingly.

Internally, the ANC is also going to face Jacob Zuma's MK party - now regarded as the new official opposition. Together with the EFF, this "progressive caucus" will seek to undermine the GNU at every turn. Criticising the ANC for being "sellouts" to the white liberals will become their mantra, and it could cause unease in rank-and-file ANC members.

Furthermore, the DA, too, must get used to a new way of doing business. Since it now shares governmental responsibility, it will have to review and reform its own modus operandi as it shifts away from critiquing the ANC at every turn. This will be tough given the DA's historically conflictual relationship, and will require deft communication management to outline to supporters ongoing issues in the GNU.

One controversial issue is that SA's foreign policy is still largely assigned to the ANC's worldview. Although a more moderating force like the DA will seek to placate a more critical United States over trade benefits, the ANC's stance on Israel will remain. How the ANC relates to China, the Brics grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates), and the Global South may also require deft internal management with the DA and others.

With these challenges come opportunities. Since GNU parties represent more than two-thirds of voter support, there is certainly consensus representation in Parliament.

As such, parties can begin a process of finding each other and building on common ground.

But the pressure is on, and the GNU shouldn't just be a technocratic public display of political "bromance". With investor sentiment supportive, there's a window for real reform, implementation, and performance enhancement. The GNU requires tangible results rapidly. And with less than 24 months to local government elections, the political heat is rising.

Though we should be cautiously optimistic that a better political outcome has been achieved, realists should continue to observe closely the political tides ebbing and flowing. It's a learning curve for all, but critically, it must deliver for all otherwise the elites can still be upended by mass discontent.

Let's get down to business!

• Daniel Silke is political economy analyst, keynote speaker, and director of the Political Futures Consultancy based in Cape Town.



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OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



Since 7 October, thousands have visited Israel to express their solidarity, which is appreciated, especially now. Many want to visit the south of the country to see the sites of the carnage. It's understandable that people want to bear witness at the kibbutzim and other sites, including the Nova festival. But it must be understood that these are mass crime scenes, not tourist attractions. A new phenomenon has crept in since 7 October - dark tourism.

The term "dark tourism" was coined in 1996 by two academics from Scotland: John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, who wrote the book *Dark Tourism: The Attraction to Death and Disaster*. Today, the term is generally used to describe travel to places that are historically associated with death and tragedy. Dark tourism is also sometimes called black tourism, thanatourism, or grief tourism.

We're all grieving 7 October. For Israelis, as resilient as we may appear, there's still a deep sense of trauma. For the residents of the communities and kibbutzim who lost their families, friends, and loved ones in the massacre or in kidnappings to Gaza, their grief is beyond what we can comprehend. It's understandable that now, nearly 10 months later, the kibbutzim have closed themselves off to visitors. The Israel Defense Forces and members tightly control visits.

In the days, weeks, and first few months, journalists, certain influencers, and dignitaries were allowed in to the kibbutzim to cover what we saw. I was part of one of these delegations, and witness to the devastation. The stench of death hung heavy in the air. Our purpose was to record history,



The site where the Nova Festival took place has become a dark tourism hotspot

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

bear witness, and document it because sadly, we have to prove that we were massacred, given the astronomic levels of gleeful denial. Denial, in spite of overwhelming evidence. As journalists, we understand the importance of this work, but there's still a feeling of intruding on people's grief and their private, sacred spaces. This wasn't a massacre that happened a long time ago where time has taught us how to process and prepare for what we will see. The wounds are still raw, and will be for a while.

When my delegation, organised by the foreign affairs ministry, visited Kfar Aza, we had an "influencer" tagging along who took selfies. It made me sick to my stomach. We were metres away from where Ofir Libstein, the head of the Sha'ar HaNegev council, was slaughtered defending his community. Many of us knew Libstein through working with

him on projects in the south. Each of these kibbutzim tells the story of horror, sorrow, heroism, and loss.

For many around the world, the distance has led to a feeling of helplessness, so coming to Israel gives a sense of doing something tangible. Nearly 10 months on, the kibbutzim are functional where they can be. Their residents remain evacuated, and many are debating whether to return. The IDF hasn't given the all-clear to return. Recently, a cornerstone-laying ceremony was held to inaugurate a new neighbourhood in Kibbutz Be'eri. One of the hardest hit kibbutzim on 7 October, 101 people were murdered and more than 150 buildings destroyed. The new Shikmim neighbourhood will contain 52 homes.

Israel desperately needs tourism right now, so it's understandable that tour guides

will conduct tours to the south. It's also important for people to see the magnitude of destruction because photos and footage don't do justice to the scale of it. But the influencer selfie-snapper really disturbed me. Maybe I don't understand the power of influencers, but it was sacred ground where our brothers and sisters were slaughtered and tortured in the most brutal way, not the place to perfect a photogenic pout. This is what many of us fear - that the sanctity of these places won't be fully appreciated by some. It's not far-fetched to feel that the devastated homes speak to you - they do.

Miri Gad Messika, a member of Kibbutz Be'eri, told Channel 12 that there were very difficult feelings on that day, with many residents and bodies still held hostage in Gaza, and that her home was burned down "so

I don't have anywhere to go back to. There's no choice but to rebuild and move forward."

"True rebuilding will happen only when the hostages return home - those murdered for burial, and those living for rehabilitation. Only then can we rise up from October 7," Messika said. Do these communities really need tourists traipsing through their grief?

I don't know if time will ever heal these wounds, but what I do know is that we need to take our cue from the survivors, and allow them the space and sensitivity to decide when it will be appropriate. They deserve nothing less.

• Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV, and is the co-founder of *Lay of the Land* and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.

Trump holds the cards, but all bets are off

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



With US President Joe Biden having finally bowed out - as predicted in this column two weeks ago - and being replaced by Vice-President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee, the question is, does this change the race, and who is now the favourite?

Trump's to lose

The polls are now showing the race tightening considerably, and Republican Donald Trump and Harris running neck and neck in the "battle ground" - seven swing states that will decide the race for the White House: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. However, most pundits are describing this race as Trump's to lose. Although there's a long way to go to November, he's the favourite to win if he concentrates on three key issues. These are:

Inflation

Inflation is a major issue for the average American as it has an impact on their cost of living. Although inflation rates have come down these past few months, prices of food and especially housing are still extremely high. As Biden's vice-president, Harris is in essence running as an incumbent. She will take responsibility, rightly or wrongly, for inflation and high prices that have characterised the Biden administration's tenure.

Immigration

According to *The Economist*, migrant encounters at America's southern border have surged during the Biden administration. There were nearly 2.5 million apprehensions at the border in fiscal year 2023 - a record. Polling from *The Economist* and YouGov suggests that 14% of registered voters view immigration as the most important issue facing the country, second only to inflation. Seeing as Biden had tasked Harris with investigating the root causes of migration, Republicans have jumped on this issue, calling her the administration's "border tsar" and placing the blame for high levels of migration exclusively on her. Probably the biggest challenge of her campaign, in addition to the economy, will be not only to counter these claims, but, more importantly, to show voters that she has a ready, workable, and practical plan to fix the problem.



United States Vice-President Kamala Harris

Crime

As California's attorney-general in her past, Harris is similarly being blamed by Republicans for many of that state's problems: homelessness, drugs, and crime. According to the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, California is losing population to Arizona and Texas at higher levels than ever before, including a greater share of college graduates and residents at all income levels. Although this is primarily due to the extremely high cost of housing, Republicans have been

quick to put the blame on that state's Democratic administration's policies of high taxes and supposed softness on crime as the main reasons. Again, crime will be a key issue, and the Republicans will attempt to paint the problems of California as caused by Harris's policies, and rightly or wrongly, that will become something she will have to counter.

Legitimacy

Harris has an issue with legitimacy. She never won any primaries either in 2020 or this time round, and is seen by many as having been appointed by the Democratic Party hierarchy to ensure stability. That will become an issue if the polls turn against her.

Trump going off script

However, just as Trump has key issues of Harris's to exploit, he also has his weaknesses. His main weakness is that he is seen by many Americans as dangerously unstable, rash, impulsive, and even a danger to American democracy. Harris will push all those buttons, including of course the issue that he has been convicted, and he and many of his staff are still being charged for many more misdemeanours, including trying to overturn the 2020 election. Also, now that Biden has withdrawn, suddenly Trump becomes the oldest candidate ever to run for president, and Harris will make his age an issue. Trump has to respond to this by "staying presidential" and sticking to the big issues described above. If he goes off script and starts insulting Harris, women, and other minority groups, he will not only upset the majority of voters, but the unstable and unhinged descriptions will start to stick, and he'll lose the election.

According to reports, his staffers keep coaching him to focus on the issues and not make things personal. However, Trump is Trump, and he's not an easy person to keep to the script. He does tend to lose it at times, and then all bets are off!

As *The Economist* concludes, Republican strategists are trying to portray a kinder, gentler form of Trump and Trumpism, and this was also the strategy on display at the national Republican convention, as they tried to consolidate their candidate's then lead by toning down extremism and welcome "never-Trumpers" back into the tent. However, that's not a natural position for Trump, and he clearly didn't stick to it for long. Republicans need to make it acceptable for non-Republicans to vote Republican. But only the face of the party, and its leader, Trump, can make that happen. Trump's unpredictable and erratic behaviour, or lack thereof, will ultimately decide this election. If he loses control, he will very likely also lose the election, rather than Harris winning it.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.



Former United States President Donald Trump

Levy reverts to SA roots on Olympic rugby field

LEE TANKLE

When searching for a Jewish South African competing in the Olympic Games, look no further than the United States women's rugby team, which includes winger Sarah Levy, who started her rugby journey only about 10 years ago in her first week of university.

Her team this week beat Australia to take home the bronze medal, which was the first time the United States have ever won a medal in rugby. The team then lost its semifinal game to New Zealand.

"Being a women's rugby player in the United States, no one watches our games much, and now we're highlighted alongside the amazing US athletes," says Levy. "It's cool."

With rugby passion in her family and her heritage as a South African, Levy understood and loved the game. But, she says, it isn't the game of choice in the US. "... but they understand how important the Olympics are," she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. "Every month, we play a sevens tournament in a different location, but no one pays attention and now it's the Olympics, and all eyes are on us. It's huge."

Levy had been involved in sport throughout her childhood, but everything changed when she started studying at Northeastern University and saw that women's rugby was available.

"My dad, Denis, and everyone in his family played rugby growing up in South Africa, but up until I got to university, I had never seen a women's team," said Levy, "I always grew up thinking I wanted to play American football if there was a women's version or something like it. And when I saw rugby, I was drawn to it just because of the South African connection."

Levy was born in Rondebosch in Cape Town to a South African father and American mother. When she was two years old, her family made



Sarah Levy

aliya to Israel, and then moved to San Diego, California.

"I've visited South Africa a few times over the years, the last time being in 2020, and I loved it there," she said. "My grandfather and a few cousins still live there, so I cannot wait to go back and visit, hopefully soon."

It was on her visits that she realised just how important rugby was in South Africa and to her family. "My dad's older relatives started talking to me about the sport and our family's history with it, and I realised that I was only one part of my family's rugby history."

Levy's father and uncles Rob, Nelson, and Peter, all played rugby in their youth in Milnerton. She joins the legacy of her great-grandfather, Louis Babrow, who became one of the first Jewish Springboks.

It took playing one game at university on her first weekend there to become hooked on the sport. "I fell in love with it right away. It was something I could connect with my South African family members about, and we often talk about it at family braais," she said.

"I grew up wearing a Springbok jersey, even though I didn't fully understand how important that jersey was until I started playing," she said.

"Rugby was always something I could talk

about to my dad about when I called home from university. It was a good topic of conversation, like how our game went and what I had learned that week in rugby. As that has gone on and it has now become my job, he still wants to give me advice, which I take willingly."

When Levy graduated in 2018, she moved to Connecticut to play with the New York women's

rugby team in the women's Premier League, where she was scouted and was invited into the fold of the US women's national team at the seven's camp, where she could train full-time.

"It was perfect. It all fell into place right at the same time that I started graduate school in San Diego, where I grew up. I got invited to train full-time at the sevens centre, and got to be close to family, which is important to me."

At the time, the 2020 Olympics had just been postponed. Levy knew she wouldn't be part of that Olympic team and decided to put her all into training for the Paris Olympics this year.

"Being part of the sevens programme opened the door to the Olympics," said Levy, "It has contracts, and we have about 23 girls. The team is then down to 14 for the Olympics. You're training throughout the year. And then, as we get closer to the Olympics, you cut it down. It's 12 active players and two travelling reserves. So you're competing for that spot."

When Levy got the news that she was one of the 14 players going to Paris, she felt almost numb. "You're just making it to the next

tournament and playing consistently enough to make it to the next one and the next one, building experience. Then eventually, when it happened, I just was like, that's the next checkpoint. I didn't even think anything of it even though this was my greatest goal since I started playing.

"It got real the second we set foot in the Olympic village in Paris," said Levy. "We still had training leading up to leaving for Paris. Nothing is for certain in rugby, there's a lot of contact, and a lot of random things that could happen like injuries. I knew I had made it when I was in the Olympic village."

"When I saw that they decorated our rooms with a collage of all the girls from back home and letters from previous players and future players like younger girls, it was a beautiful setup. That was when it hit me, and I was emotional. It was like all the emotions I had bottled up came spewing out," she said.

Levy compares the community she has created through sport to her Jewish community. "What drew me to rugby was that everyone is inclusive. Everyone shares similar values to the Jewish community," she said.

"Being in the Olympic village was overwhelming at the start. There are just so many people everywhere, and from countries you haven't even heard of. Amazingly, our staff allowed us two days of taking everything in. I remember not being able to sleep because it was so exciting."

Levy is excited to play against the South African team. "I know a couple of girls on the team. It's always exciting to see them out there, especially because in South Africa, men have dominated for so long, so it's great to see the women start to dominate."

Model regrets Adidas campaign that evoked Munich Olympics

JACKIE HAJDENBERG – JTA

Bella Hadid expressed regret for modelling an Adidas sneaker originally designed for the 1972 Munich Olympics in which 11 Israelis were murdered in a Palestinian terror attack.

Hadid, a Palestinian-American supermodel and activist, said she hadn't known of the 1972 attack, which targeted Israel's Olympic delegation. She spoke of a "collective lack of understanding", and said she didn't "believe in hate in any form, including antisemitism". She posted the statement to Instagram on Monday, 29 July.

"I would never knowingly engage with any art or work linked to a horrific tragedy of any kind," Hadid said. "In advance of the campaign's release, I had no knowledge of the historical connection to the atrocious events in 1972. I'm shocked, I'm upset, and I'm disappointed in the lack of sensitivity that went into this campaign."

"Had I been made aware, from the bottom of my heart, I would never have participated. My team should have known, Adidas should have known, and I should have done more research so that I, too, would have known, understood, and spoken up."

Hadid's statement comes after Adidas pulled the advertising campaign last week in response to the backlash, and apologised to her and the other models in the campaign.

The Paris Olympics mark only the third time the Games have commemorated the 1972 massacre, in which 11 athletes and coaches were killed, in addition to a West German police officer. Officials reportedly

observed the location of the commemoration due to security concerns. French authorities are also investigating death threats targeting three current Israeli Olympic athletes, along with chants of "Heil Hitler" and Nazi salutes at a recent Israel-Paraguay Olympic soccer match.

Ahead of the Olympics, pro-Israel social-media accounts criticised the campaign and Adidas' decision to hire Hadid to model the shoe, citing her history of criticism of Israel. Hadid has also been accused of

spreading misinformation about the Israel-

Hamas war in Gaza, and sharing content that downplayed the experiences of Israeli hostages held in Gaza.

In her statement, Hadid lamented associations between Palestinian identity and terrorism.

"Palestine isn't synonymous with terrorism, and this campaign unintentionally highlighted an event that doesn't represent who we are," she said. "I'm a proud Palestinian woman. There's so much more to our culture than the things that have been equated over the past week."

She added, "Antisemitism has no place in the liberation of the Palestinian people."

The controversy marks yet another instance in recent years in which Adidas has faced criticism for antisemitism related to its design choices and celebrity affiliations. In April, the typeface for the German soccer team, DFB's, jersey number 44 - which isn't in use by the team, but which buyers could customise - was challenged as resembling the Nazi SS insignia. In 2022, following backlash, the company broke its lucrative partnership with Ye, the rapper and designer formerly known as Kanye West, after he made a string of antisemitic comments. The company's founders were also members of the Nazi Party, and made shoes for the regime.



Bella Hadid in the Adidas campaign for the reissue of sneakers from the 1972 Munich Olympic Games

Photo: Jackie Hajdenberg

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Israel is hurting. It's up to us to help

OPINION

BENDETA GORDON



Israel carries a heavy load for the Jewish world. Even though I spent two weeks in Israel in February 2024 on a self-styled mission, nothing prepared me for the pain and anguish our brethren are suffering now, which I witnessed during a five-week trip in June and July.

In February, my family visited Israel to volunteer and help in any way we could during the short time we were there. We packed homeware donated by citizens for the army and displaced Israelis; picked avocados, oranges, and strawberries; and we sorted flowers cut for export. The physical work was exhausting, but not as taxing as our visit to Nahal Oz and the Erez Crossing in the south of Israel. I was thankful that we couldn't visit Kibbutz Be'eri for the same reason that I cannot bear witness to the atrocities of the Nazis on our people in Poland.

settlement in Samaria. Dovi - not his real name - whom our family know well, is a 50-year-old soldier, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He went to Kibbutz Be'eri with his unit to defend it and work out the damage soon after 7 October. He became violently ill witnessing the ravages of a barbaric massacre. His commander relieved him so that he could go home. The devastation was just too much for him.

Dovi is a high school teacher. He no longer teaches but remains in the IDF as a reservist guarding the settlement where he and his family live. His main task is to protect access to the settlement, and he conducts observation of the IDF-manned junction on the road that runs past it. His wife, a specialised physiotherapist who treats disabled babies and toddlers mainly with cerebral palsy, told me that perhaps the

family should never have moved to a settlement. She said she understood the hate Palestinians have for Israelis, but she never knew the true extent of the hate. She expressed disbelief at how this hate had been expressed with such brutality. When she took me back to Jerusalem after Shabbat, she prayed loudly and fervently to Hashem to protect us on the road that went past Arab settlements.

The settlement is religious. It's beautiful and overlooks the magnificent terrain of Samaria. On Saturday afternoon, kids and parents walk the streets greeting their neighbours and friends. Every man I saw wore a kippah and carried either a rifle or holster with a handgun. I met a forensic specialist; a social worker specialising in helping abused women; a

gastroenterologist; a nutritionist; a kid on the spectrum; a son and father who are protecting Israel together in the north; a dental student; a young graduate working in a children's psychiatric hospital; and a scholar. There's no break from being on guard for the Jews of Samaria.

Samaria according to the Chumash, was captured from the Canaanites and assigned to the Tribe of Joseph.

I met several professionals while building a network of support for people going to live in a new country. One encounter needs to be shared. Their names aren't real. Asaf is a software engineer, and his wife, Aderet, a veterinary doctor. The two are at odds about whether to stay in Israel or emigrate. Both suffered losses on 7 October, and Aderet has a family member who is still being held hostage in Gaza. Aderet doesn't want her sons to go to the army. Her eldest is 14 and they have a year to decide because army selection and preparation starts when this son turns 15. Asaf, on the other hand, was an officer in the 1982 Lebanon War and believes fervently in defending Israel.

I've witnessed on a video recording how the convoy of trucks he was commanding in southern Lebanon came under attack. The video records how all the injured in the attack were taken by helicopter back to Israel for medical treatment, and how Asaf took control of the safety of all the soldiers he was responsible for. At the end of this harrowing testimony, the recording shows him falling from a standing position as he succumbs to his own injuries. He just collapses to the ground. He had a shrapnel injury in his back, but he mustered all the strength he had until all in his command were safe. Today, he too suffers from PTSD.

Asaf and Aderet are painfully at odds about the future of their beautiful three children. The mother wants to protect her sons from the ravages of war, and the father wants his boys to protect the land and its people.

These situations are heartbreaking but reflect the realities our brothers and sisters in Israel are facing. Israel is broken, and confidence is shattered. The country is being carried on the shoulders of young men and women who courageously defend all of us with their unselfish determination, patriotism, and their lives. There can be no gratitude deep enough from *klal Yisrael* to these heroes who do G-d's work here on Earth.

Now is the time when we Jews must ask ourselves not what Israel can do for us, but what we can do for Israel.

• Bendeta Gordon is an ardent Zionist, qualified chartered accountant, distribution development strategist, and property developer.



Photo: Omer Miron

Many Jews around the world are finding ways to help Israel

At the Erez Crossing, we were introduced to the Phoenix Unit of 200 combat soldiers who commandeer tanks. These warriors, formally retired from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), voluntarily formed the unit after 7 October. "Phoenix" refers to rising from the ashes. These soldiers obtained eight old tanks that were out of commission and being sold to Morocco. Two-hundred soldiers, mostly with grey hair, in eight tanks battered from previous wars, go in and out of northern Gaza. They fight Hamas terrorists who seek the destruction of our holy land and *klal Yisrael* (the entire Jewish community).

Hamas terrorists destroyed the border infrastructure at the Erez Crossing on 7 October. This crossing was vital for transporting commodities from Israel to Gaza. We looked at the destruction and the countless dogs that had become feral and ran around the area looking for food. The ravages of war on every aspect of life on Earth is destructive and heartbreaking.

"Your visit gives us so much strength. Thank you!" said a 50-year-old rabbi who was among the warriors. He was among haredim, olim, men with grey hair, and younger soldiers who were maintaining and re-arming these old tanks. They proudly told us about their need to protect Israel and how they had success that day in eliminating seven terrorists.

In my second, five-week trip, my heart became heavier with each day that passed. Very few people I chatted to weren't traumatised and deeply concerned about their future.

My first Shabbat, I met Gloria (not her real name), who was pale and extremely thin. She and her 95-year-old mother hid in the saferoom of her Be'eri home for 22 hours before help arrived. She can't understand why the terrorists didn't enter their home. Gloria has two children, a son and a daughter. Her 18-year-old daughter was working at the Nova festival to earn money. For eight days, Gloria thought that her daughter had been taken hostage. However, they found her body. Gloria cannot stay in the hotel on the Dead Sea with other Be'eri kibbutzniks as the collective trauma is too much for her. She has rented an apartment in a coastal city. She also adopted a puppy to help her deal with her trauma.

I chatted to a dog lover outside the market in Netanya. We both have Huskies, so we had much in common. He told me he had two sons, both fighting in Gaza. He and his wife haven't slept soundly since the IDF went into Gaza. Some days later, I saw him with his wife and Huskies walking on the promenade. Rather, I should say, he was walking, and his wife had a motorised wheelchair.

I spent my second Shabbat with dear friends in a

Humanity and horror: films examine 'day after'

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

A father whose daughter was kidnapped by Hamas. The life and death of peace activist Vivian Silver. Humanising the stories of those impacted by 7 October, two upcoming documentaries also delve into questions about Israel's future.

In a webinar hosted by Habonim Engaging in Dialogue on 28 July, the documentaries' filmmakers and some of their interviewees shared their experiences. For United States-based filmmaker Lance Kramer, his as-yet unnamed documentary grew out of the immediate aftermath of 7 October. Together with his brother, Brandon, and friend Yoni Brook, Kramer decided to explore the story of American Israeli Yehuda Beinon, whose daughter Liat was kidnapped by Hamas and returned 54 days later. It was eventually discovered that Liat's husband, Aviv Atzili, also initially believed to have been kidnapped, was killed on 7 October.

"When we spoke to Yehuda, to whom we're related through marriage, we learned that Liat and Aviv were missing," Kramer recalled. "From initial conversations emerged the importance of trying to tell a story about what the family was going through, which was something Yehuda remarked no one would believe. We did this in an intimate and nuanced way that could shed light on what a family of hostages was experiencing."

As Beinon and his kidnapped daughter are American Israeli citizens, not only were they thrown into the middle of the hostage crisis and the war, but also the relationship between the US and Israel. "In the immediate aftermath of 7 October, Yehuda, his other daughter, Tal, and his grandson, Neta, were among some of the first families to come to the US to try and engage with the government," Kramer said. "We thought what the family was going through at that time was something that would be important for people to see and understand better."

Beinon said that the days immediately following 7 October were a blur. Yet he does recall how most people initially believed that the hostages would be returned within a week or two and that everything would be fine. As Liat is a history teacher, he embraced the idea of making a documentary for posterity, something they could one day show to her kids or future grandchildren.

"Obviously as time went by, the seriousness of the issue became clear," he said. "The documentary ended up being, among other things, a memorial to my daughter's husband, Aviv, so there's a great deal of personal significance."

He also speaks of the broader political ramifications of his experience. "I was inspired by the words of US President Joe Biden, who spoke to the American hostage families on 13 October and laid out his plan, which hasn't changed very much since. He recognised that this event was an inflection point in history. 'What was is not what will be' were his exact words, as he talked about the diplomatic process."

Beinon spoke of the threat of "fanatic, religious Messianists" like Israeli politicians Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, who he said posed a danger to Western civilization and were cut from the same cloth as Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. "We need to understand the nature of this threat and what their agenda means for the future of Israel. They need to be stopped," Yet, Beinon said, many Israelis are deaf to this threat. "I was looking forward to the 'day after', when we could initiate some kind of change,

a different paradigm to what Israel had witnessed," he said. "The documentary has taken on that aspect."

Kramer said it was in the human story that social lessons could be learned. "There's power in being reminded that this is a complicated conflict but at the centre of it is people. Just as no two families are the same, no two people are the same. That seems like something that's particularly threatened in the midst of all the polarisation and populism. This is something we feel particularly in the US, where those dynamics are quite intense."

The innately human stories of Canadian Israeli feminist peace activist Vivian Silver and those she helped inspired Emmy-nominated Israeli filmmaker Hilla Medalia to make her documentary, still in progress. "It was a film I really wanted to make, firstly because of what happened on 7 October, but it's also a film about peace and feminism," Medalia said.

Canadian Israeli peace activist Vivian Silver



Lynne Mitchell, a Canadian childhood friend of Silver's who was interviewed in the documentary, gave insight into the beginnings of Silver's calling to leadership and activism. She spoke of Silver's leadership in Jewish youth movements, particularly those focused on young women.

Medalia said Silver traversed two worlds in the Middle East. "Vivian was, on the one hand, a Zionist, but on the other, she did so much for Palestinians living in Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza. I started filming before we knew she'd been killed. As I was speaking to her sons, I was hoping that she would be back and would agree to participate." Medalia said that filming Silver's memorial was an inspiring moment because of the multiple backgrounds of those that attended, from Arabs to religious Jewish women. "I looked around and thought maybe there's the possibility of figuring out how we can all live together in this complicated place."

Medalia also highlighted the contrasting impact of the events of 7 October on Silver's family and friends. "Vivian's son, Yonatan, who is featured in the film, quit his job to dedicate his life to peace building. Yet one of her friends from the kibbutz suffered major trauma and is no longer sure if peace is possible."

Ultimately the film delves into Silver's life but also tries to examine where Israelis go from here, Medalia said. "It's about the effect of Vivian's work and how she touched so many people. We're hoping this will be an inspiration and make people look at others like she did, even while she was so rooted in Israel."



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Iconic ballet teacher given lifetime achievement award

LEE TANKLE

There's huge satisfaction when your pupils go on to achieve, and so for 84-year-old retired ballet teacher Bernice Lloyd, having movie star Charlize Theron; Tanya Howard, principal soloist at the Canadian Ballet; and ballerina Kitty Phetla as former pupils gives her much pleasure.

But this month, the ballet world recognised Lloyd for all she had done in her 58-year career as a ballet teacher, giving her the Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Ballet Competition in Cape Town on 17 July.

When Lloyd heard from Dirk Badenhorst, who runs the competition, that she was going to receive the award, she was shocked.

"I thought people had forgotten about me since I stopped teaching in 2020," Lloyd said, "But this award shows that they haven't, and I'm being recognised for the amazing work that I have done. It feels good to be recognised by the ballet community."

"I'm filled with pride to see how the influence of the discipline of ballet reached heights locally and abroad, with generations of aspiring ballerinas keeping close contact. I'm still being asked to choreograph pieces here and there," Lloyd told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"It was an amazing experience. I was flown down to Cape Town to attend the gala at the Artscape Opera House. It was also amazing that the pride of my life - my daughter and grandchildren - were with me and saw me receive this massive award."

"One of my ex-pupils, Lisa Alhadeff Berg, flew from America to enter her son, Max, in the South African International Ballet Competition" Lloyd said. "The young man won a gold medal in the senior classical and contemporary section. It was beautiful to see the love for ballet passed down through the generations."

Lloyd caught the ballet bug when her mother introduced her to it at just five years old, and has been enchanted ever since. She danced until she was 16, and then joined the Spanish Dance Company, with which she toured Europe and North Africa when she was 17 years old.

"When I came back, I decided I preferred ballet as an art, and started teaching - and didn't stop until I hung up my ballet shoes in 2020," said Lloyd.

She ran the Bernice Lloyd School of Ballet in Forest Town, Johannesburg, for 58 years, training hundreds of girls and boys, starting from the age of 10, to create amazing dancers. Now, even though she's retired, she is still being asked by private ballet teachers for help with choreography.

Outside of her studio, Lloyd also taught dance at the National School of the Arts in Johannesburg as well as at Hoërskool Die Kruin, the Afrikaans arts school.

Speaking of the many dancers she trained who have become world-renowned for their



achievements, she said, "It's such a wonderful feeling that they have gone on to do such amazing things. It

gives me pride that they are using their ballet skills and discipline in their careers."

The highlight of her ballet career, she said, was teaching the hundreds of children that flowed through her studio doors.

"Seeing the children grow up into responsible adults, whether they pursued ballet or not, I knew that in the back of

their mind, they would keep the discipline that they learned through ballet for the rest of their lives.

"I worked hard to inspire children to love the art form. So when you see them enjoying themselves while dancing, it's a wonderful experience."

Lloyd would teach until 19:00 every night. She didn't use a syllabus because she believed "a syllabus doesn't make a dancer as you don't get a vocabulary of steps through a syllabus alone".

She didn't stop at teaching her pupils the steps, but would teach them the history of dance, music appreciation, and anatomy.

In spite of the hard and exhausting work of teaching every day for 58 years, Lloyd was always reminded of her love for the art form.

"My love for ballet has kept me going for so long," she said. "I was able to ignore all of the horrible parts associated with it when I was able to create these beautiful pieces of choreography and pass down the love of ballet to generations of young girls and boys."

"In spite of all the challenges of running a studio, I loved it, and loved to see the results. I always got excellent results. The children were happy, and it was just lovely," she said.

Afrika Tikkun celebrates 30 years of social impact

LEE TANKLE

Exactly 30 years ago, two Jewish men decided to launch an organisation to improve the lives of all South Africans. They were the great philanthropist Bertie Lubner and then Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. The organisation was named MaAfrica Tikkun.

This organisation, now known as Afrika Tikkun, has for three decades enriched the lives of more than 325 000 young people; served 25 million nutritious meals; distributed more than 77 000 food parcels; provided social-support services to about 105 000 families; and conducted more than 15 000 primary healthcare interventions. It has become one of South Africa's leading youth development non-profit organisations.

Today, Afrika Tikkun provides education, health, and social services to disadvantaged communities across South Africa, and is assisting more than 40 000 children and youth across the country. The organisation has a holistic approach to the development of young people from early childhood to contributing members of society.

"I work in the worst circumstances with the best of people," says Marc Lubner, the executive chairperson of Afrika Tikkun and son of the late Bertie.

"Most people who work in the organisation aren't here for the salary," says Lubner, "They're here because they truly believe that this organisation can and is making a difference. Whether it's the board members who give of their time *pro bono*, or the staff who could be earning much more in the commercial world. These are individuals who care about the country and the people in it."

Lubner says that when his father and the late chief rabbi started it, "It was a vanilla charity in the sense that it was driven by a desire to do good things in numerous areas around South Africa."

"The principles were driven by what different communities needed because my dad and late Rabbi Harris saw how some communities were struggling."

"It came from the idea that the word *tikkun* [amending] would be used to start an initiative that would harness the energies of those committed to building a new South Africa," Lubner says. "Rabbi Harris said that the concept of Afrika Tikkun was twofold - ideological while also 'brutally practical'."

Lubner says his father had taken the business acumen he acquired in the family business - PG (Plate Glass) Group - and applied it to his philanthropy. "My father's philosophy was that in any organisation, for it to be sustainable and well run, it needed 10 principles - his 10 commandments. He applied the same principles or 'commandments' that he had learnt in business to the running of Afrika Tikkun. "Celebrating this milestone of three decades means that we've transitioned from being just a charity organisation into what is hopefully an important player in terms of social impact, uplifting young people's lives in townships, giving them hope, giving them a sense of future, giving them opportunities. It marks a moment when we're going to be much more actively involved in informing policy and helping to develop strategy for the changes needed."

Lubner says that in creating the organisation, his father and Harris would bring into the fold people they believed could help them push it further. These included the Lubner family; financial manager Arnold Forman, Afrika Tikkun's non-executive director; Anne Harris, the late chief rabbi's wife; and the former chairperson of MaAfrica Tikkun, the late Herby Rosenberg.



Youth development is one of the core pillars of Afrika Tikkun



President Nelson Mandela praised the organisation for its work after a visit to one of its projects in Orange Farm in 1999, and offered to become the organisation's patron in chief.

"Afrika Tikkun projects demonstrate practically and sustainably what can be done with limited resources, great commitment, and passion," Mandela said. "The challenge to reach all the disadvantaged people of South Africa remains a paramount one. We need all the resources, both human and financial, to address these challenging tasks. I believe Afrika Tikkun represents the best of what civil society can offer in partnership with the government's considerable efforts. Afrika Tikkun has proven that it can reach sections of our disadvantaged population at grassroots level. It therefore provides physical help, as well as giving hope and dignity to recipients."

In the first decade of the organisation, Lubner witnessed the amazing work the organisation did, but it was only when he came into the fold as chief executive officer 19 years ago that he truly started to understand its impact.

"I decided that I wanted to spend a couple of years with my father in the activities of Afrika Tikkun," he says. "But I certainly didn't anticipate that it was going to be my life path. I came from a commercial background. I had been with the PG group, my family group, for 11 years, and then I spent time

building my businesses and so I always thought I was going to be a businessman. I was just going to take a few years off to try and bring some business principles to Afrika Tikkun and share time with my father, who had been diagnosed with a heart condition at that time."

When he came onboard, Lubner had to find a model that could be sustained once his father and Harris passed on. "We were feeding people, but so what? If you're going to feed them forever,

you're not changing anything," he says.

This is why it was important that the organisation branched out into early childhood development through its early child and child and youth programmes. The organisation also helped youngsters get through school and into the job market and working environment.

"It's effectively a cradle-to-career model," Lubner says, "which means we start with children at an early age where we teach them values, then teach them to believe in themselves as they grow older and take responsibility for themselves, and then we help them with their selection of subjects for school and towards career pathways."

Afrika Tikkun's programmes now consider the needs of young individuals across different stages of their lives, from preschool to high school, followed by a post-matric programme offering jobs skills training and assisting with job placements.

"Our programmes culminate in the development of talented and disciplined youth, instilled with good values from an early age. These individuals are brimming with potential and ready to meet in-demand skills needed from South Africa's labour pool," says Onyi Nwaneri, Afrika Tikkun's group chief executive.

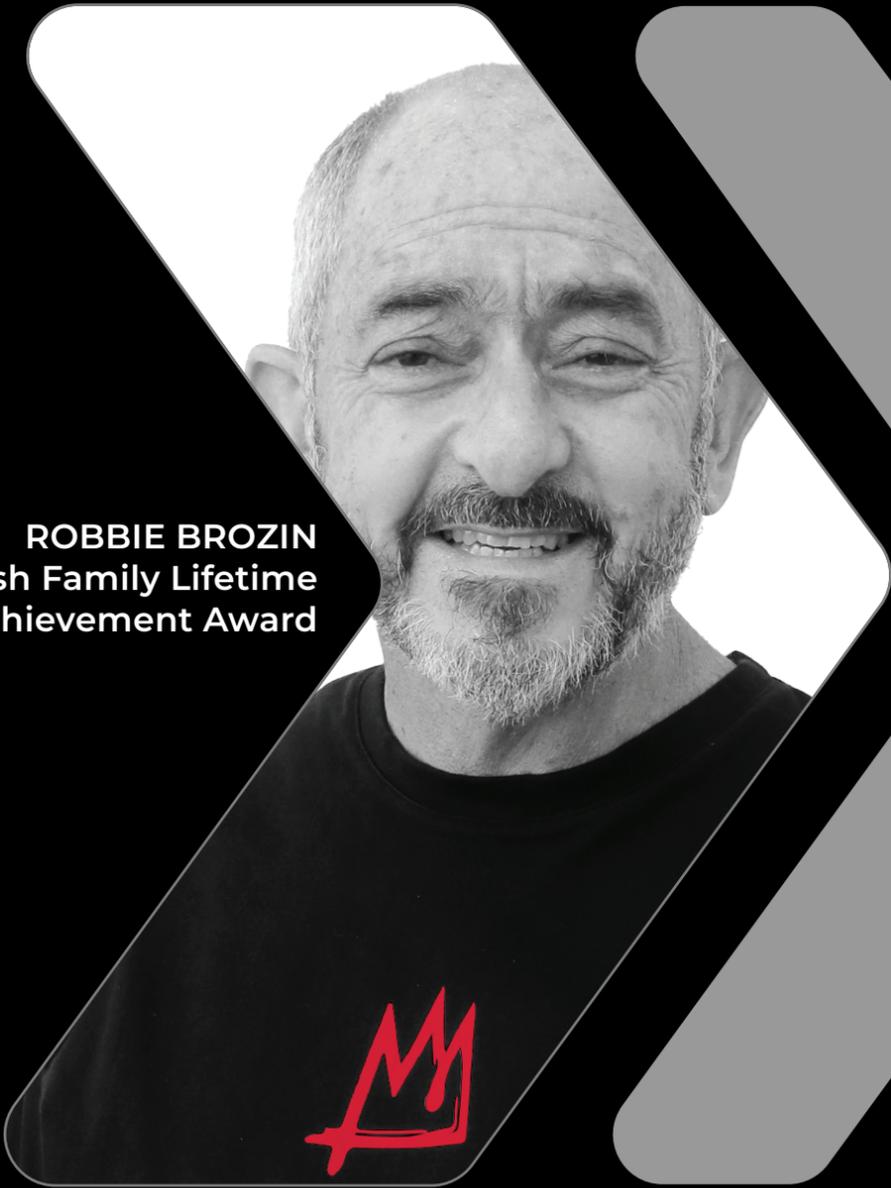
In spite of Afrika Tikkun's achievements, it believes significant progress still needs to be made to address, among other things, the country's unemployment rate of 33% - the highest rate globally - and even more among the youth. Afrika Tikkun has partnered with government's Youth Employment Service (YES) programme to create substantial work opportunities for unemployed youth through its Head Start programme.

"Investing in skills development and vocational training equips the youth to navigate the demands of an evolving global economy. The YES initiative seeks not only to improve the lives of young people but to assist in the expansion of enterprises in which they are employed. Placement into well-suited employment requires an investment over time that provides a seamless transition from infancy to career," says Nwaneri.

Lubner says, "Our most important achievement is that we partner with various organisations because we're not hung up on our ego, we don't have to own and control everything because we realise it's important that we work collaboratively with other organisations to get young people into jobs."



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The Shakedown brings lightness to Cape underworld

The Shakedown, a South African crime-comedy caper by **Ari Kruger** (AK) and **Daniel Zimblar** (DZ), will premiere on Prime Video on 8 August. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to Zimblar, and his co-writer, Kruger, the movie's director.

What inspired you to write/produce *The Shakedown*?

AK: I've always found our criminal underworld in South Africa intriguing in that it's filled with colourful characters, clumsiness, and absurd stories of hits gone wrong. I felt like I hadn't seen a film that explored the danger of our underworld in a comic way.

Having grown up in the Jewish community in Cape Town, I've witnessed how this underworld is one degree of separation away. Whether it be through a black-sheep sibling or an old friend from school, these worlds have the ability to collide at a moment's notice. I thought it would be fun to have our protagonist be a clean-cut pillar of the community who lands up getting pulled into the danger and comedy of this underworld.

When you began the process, what were you hoping to achieve?

AK: My intention was to make something entertaining, funny, and filled with a lot of heart. I also haven't seen enough local films made within a crime-comedy genre, and I felt there was an opportunity to offer South African audiences something fresh, and hopefully transcend this specific comic tone to a global stage.

How would you describe *The Shakedown*?

DZ: It's a crime-comedy caper. It's also an inverted morality tale about brotherhood and family: a Fresnaye golden boy takes his blessings and his family for granted, and suffers an excruciating and embarrassing fall from grace. But in the process, he recovers his relationship with his black-sheep brother and his family. And so his hubris, which leads to his fall, also leads to his redemption. In the end, after a pretty hellish ordeal, our protagonist gets his priorities straight and rediscovers the relationships that really matter.

This is the first South African-original film that will go out on Amazon Prime Video. How did that come about?

AK: We were lucky to get in quite early with the Amazon team as it was familiar with our work on the *Tali* series that we made for Showmax. It really was an incredible experience working with it. The team was supportive and encouraging throughout the process.

We didn't necessarily feel any kind of pressure about it being its first commission, we just focused on trying to make the best version of this film that we could make.

DZ: In terms of it being an Amazon first, it's been really exciting. My hope is it will be the first of many, and that the appetite for South African TV shows and films keeps growing locally and internationally.

Why do you believe it was accepted on the platform, especially because it's supposedly scaling down on content from Africa?

AK: I can't speak too much on this, but from what I can tell, Amazon was in the process of commissioning several local projects but due to its global restructure, it decided to push pause on the commissions.

While getting onto Amazon Prime is a first, are there any other firsts in this for you?

AK: This is my first feature film, which was always a huge dream of mine. I've been fortunate to have made three seasons of television, short films, and comedy specials, but as a filmmaker, the feature film is the holy grail. It was also my first time having a director's chair with my name on the back!

DZ: I've spent a lot of the past 10 years writing and directing on TV series. But it wasn't TV that first made me want to be a



Ari Kruger and Daniel Zimblar

filmmaker, it was film. And so, writing a movie feels like returning to the source.

What are you trying to say in a movie about a guy who has it all having an affair and getting mixed up in the underworld because of his mistress's threats?

AK: My work has always in some way reflected the stage of life I'm in. When we started writing this film, I was in the early throes of starting a new family while at the same time building my career. This film explores the conflict that we may feel in sacrificing our careers for our family, and tries to discover what really matters.

DZ: Like Justin Diamond, we're all capable of making terrible mistakes and finding ourselves cornered by those mistakes. But, and here I hope we're striking a hopeful, even uplifting note - which has nothing to do with the hiring of hit men, betting on horses, extortion, intimidation, and attempted murder - redemption is possible. If we can step back and figure out the things that really matter, we can survive the dark night and make it to the dawn.

What were your best and worst moments in making *The Shakedown*?

AK: It was a huge privilege to get to make this film on a large scale with a world-class crew, cast, and post-production team who were all on the top of their game. We also had a bigger budget than we had been used to working with, so generally it was such a positive and exciting experience.

The worst moments were dodging the winter rain in Cape Town. We quite literally shot through the storm, and it meant sometimes losing precious shooting time in the day while waiting for the skies to clear.

What made you decide that he should be Jewish? What does that add to it?

AK: I grew up in a Jewish world, and no matter what, the Jewish aspect seems always to find its way into my work. We had also experienced a lot of surprisingly positive feedback through our *Tali* series about the Jewish nature of the show. I felt like there was more to explore in the Jewish world, but within the crime-comedy genre.

How does *Tali Babes* compare?

DZ: It's a different story and a different genre, but the intention is the same: that

the audience should laugh, have fun, and be entertained. As a feature film, it was an opportunity to write a story with a clear, complete arc for our characters, without thinking about a next season or whether to hold back in order to give the characters a longer, multi-season arc. That was quite freeing, challenging, and a lot of fun.

How does South African content generally do in an international market like that of Amazon Prime?

AK: There seems to be a global interest in South African content at the moment, which is really positive. There certainly have been some recent South African hits making waves overseas. *Spinners*, which Daniel was a writer on, is a local show about spinning culture in the Cape Flats, and it's performing well in France.



Carl Beukes as Justin Diamond in *The Shakedown*

DZ: Added to that, with the arrival of the streamers, in particular Netflix, local shows are getting real exposure to international audiences for the first time. *Blood and Water*, *Fatal Seduction*, *Unseen*, *Heart of the Hunter*, these are all shows and movies made for local audiences that are hitting it out of the park

when it comes to international streaming numbers, making Netflix's top 10 globally in some cases. So it's an exciting time to be making South African work, and no doubt the best of it will rise and be seen on the international stage.

The humour, much like with *Tali*, has a very Jewish flavour, but do others resonate with it like we do? If so, why?

DZ: Given that *Curb Your Enthusiasm* was one elaborate Jewish joke from start to finish and it lasted 12 seasons, we know for certain that Jewish humour can resonate with everyone. Humour is pretty hard to pin down and takes many forms, and the success of a joke is notoriously difficult to predict. But in most cases - not all, but most - where we have found something really funny in the writing, others find it funny too. And that seems to cut across cultures and borders.

How did you select your cast, particularly your stars?

AK: I had some ideas about which actors I wanted to play some of the characters. In some cases, I gave the role to some of these actors, but we also had to do quite extensive casting. It's always the most difficult part of the process for me as it can make or break your show. In this case, we had a great team led by Bonnie Lee Bouman who cast the net wide for our characters. The big one was bringing down Carl Beukes from Los Angeles, but luckily Amazon bought into him playing our lead and supported the decision to bring him down here.

What's next for the two of you?

DZ: We plan to exhaust every Jewish South African stereotype we can find. In addition, we're developing a couple of new comedy series together. And coming up in 2025, a really exciting series for Netflix that I've written and Ari will direct.

Maccabi boys tennis team trains for tough competition

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The under-16 South African Maccabi boys tennis team has been training hard to ensure that it can go toe-to-toe with tough competition at the 2024 European Maccabi Youth Games in London, which started on 31 July.

The team, comprising captain Jayden Myers, a home-school student, and King David Linksfield Grade 9 pupils Dean Herskovits, Luke Mostert, and Zackary Katz, has been preparing for months, attending individual coaching sessions and practising with doubles partners.

In the final event before their departure to London, they were put through their paces in the inaugural Challenge Cup between Maccabi South Africa and one of the country's top tennis academies, VHS Academy.

Myers won in what was to be the match of the day. Top tennis playing and rallies were showcased in his three-set match against Neil van der Walt. Myers says his mental toughness helped him come out trumps in the super tie-breaker.

"Neil is a tough competitor, and we have had many close matches before," Myers says. "I knew I had to bring a big game to the court in order to compete. In the end, the game plan was to rally long, wear him out slowly, and take opportunities when I had them, which I'm glad I was able to do."

The Maccabi team got confidence from Myers' win, and almost won the doubles afterwards.

Herskovits and Katz fought well in their matches. So, too, did Mostert, who almost won the second set of his match against a Tennis South Africa junior circuit tournament player after suffering a 6-1 defeat in the first set.

Mostert took a while to settle into the match and find his rhythm. The wind made his struggles more challenging. In the second set, he played good tennis and used the wind to his advantage by switching from flat serves to sliced serves, making it harder to return.

The matches enabled the players to get a little bit of preparation in and further team camaraderie, says the academy's founder, Louis Van Huyssteen, the head tennis coach at King David Sandton for more than 20 years, who has coached three of the boys representing the Maccabi team.

He says they have a realistic chance of winning medals at the Games. They will compete in the singles, doubles, and mixed doubles, in which they pair up with partners from other countries.

Herskovits is thrilled to be representing South Africa, and is excited to be attending with many of his peers from King David Linksfield, who are competing across tennis and soccer.

"I have heard from peers in my school tennis team that the standard is high, especially from the United States, which has probably specialised in tennis and competes frequently," he says. "We'll do our best, of course, but the Games will include incredible experiences outside of the competition, especially in meeting others from around the

world and building lifelong memories."

They will be playing on astroturf, Katz says, and although he has never played on this kind of surface, he plans to manage his nerves and bring his best game.

Katz can rely on his experience of moving up the tennis ranks to join a stronger squad. "Leading up to the training session, I was worried I wouldn't be able to hold my own and would feel out of my depth," he recalls, "but when I left there that day, I felt proud of my skills and mental stamina to stay in the game and prove myself."

Katz, who loves being on the court, has been preparing for the Games by doubling his training time on court, doing both squad and individual sessions, entering more local tournaments, and practising with his doubles partner.

While Katz has been playing tennis since the age of five, Mostert swam and played soccer but eventually found his passion for tennis three years ago. He feels proud to represent South Africa and the country's Jewry at the Games.

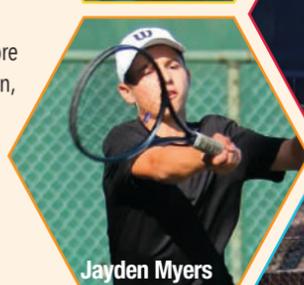
"Luke's connection to the faith is special as we are converts," his mom, Joanne, says. She's finding out more about her family's roots, which seem to stem from Persia before spreading to India and then South Africa.

The firstborn of six sons, "Luke is a great inspiration to his younger siblings who are besotted with him," Joanne says. "He's also part of Bnei Akiva and goes on all its camps and Shabbatons. He's really into our religion. We feel very privileged to be part of South African Jewry."

Myers, who made the finals of the recent Norval Rustenburg tournament, has high hopes for the Olympics: "I want to show the rest of the world that I have come to compete and how seriously I take my tennis career." Herskovits, meanwhile, is excited to continue the legacy of his uncle, now based in Sydney, who competed in Maccabi soccer many years ago. "My late grandfather was also a provincial swimmer and cyclist. I know my Maccabi participation would have made him proud," says Herskovits, who participates in a variety of sport, with tennis being the first sport he played, captaining his primary school tennis team.



Dean Herskovits



Jayden Myers



Luke Mostert



Zackary Katz

Spring is inevitable. Let's embrace it early



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

It's been a long winter. And while it might not have been colder than it usually is, it has felt more desolate. Perhaps because the season started very early - on 7 October to be exact - when the temperatures might have seemed high but our hearts were plunged into the depths of despair, causing our bones and blood to turn to ice.

Most of us haven't felt warmth since. Although spring officially begins on 1 September in the southern hemisphere, for years I have demanded that, like Shabbat, we "bring it in early" and celebrate Spring Day on 1 August. We have cause. A careful observer will note the budding of blossoms, the earlier sunrise, and that the sun is starting to gather its African strength. We might not be there yet, but rebirth is around the corner. It's in the air.

In my book *Smile Dammit*, I argued that the reason I receive such adamant pushback on the idea of an early spring, a concept so obvious to me, is this: in winter, we expect to be cold. We expect the earth to appear barren and brown. We expect darkness to continue, and we aren't hopeful that anything should grow - in contrast to spring, when our expectations shift and we allow ourselves to be hopeful. Winter cannot disappoint us. Spring can. And so, we remain safely in the season of hopelessness in fear that we might be let down.

This week Thursday is 1 August. And I'm doubling down on an early Spring Day. Because if there's any year when this is needed, it's this year.

The fundamental question following the horror of 7 October is when is it reasonable to shift into a different season? With many hostages still in Gaza; with men and women away from their families defending Israel; with Jews around the world being targeted in almost every area of their lives; and with the very real spectre of a full global regional war triggered by Hezbollah, it appears that the season hasn't changed. With increasing anti-government protests; and with former friends of Israel under

significant pressure, no one could be blamed for thinking that winter will never end.

But it will. At some point. For nearly 10 months, Israel has been on a war footing. It began by fighting for the lives of the people of the south, shifted to fighting for those taken hostage, and is now fighting not only a physical war but also a legal one. For nearly 10 months, the sole focus has been defence against physical attacks as well as media misinformation.

What this means is that there has been little focus on other areas. We had been accustomed to seeing articles on medical innovation; academia; agricultural and natural-resource excellence; and water and technological innovation. That field, as far as the world is concerned, has been laid fallow and is (understandably) barren. The result is that for 10 months, all media consumers would have seen is Israel on the defensive. Israel as nothing more than a country at war.

No one can survive a perpetual winter. As difficult as it is to believe that "we will dance again", it's imperative that we believe that we will. Jews know how to live in life cycles and contradiction. Periods of mourning are followed by periods of joy. With faith in G-d, this has never let us down. We have lived like this for thousands of years, and we dare not forget that terrible times will pass.

Winter will lead to spring.

Spring is unstable. And sometimes disappointing. But what follows is a period of sunshine. The first of August is my chosen Spring Day in South Africa. Let's pray that for Jews around the world, for the supporters of Israel, the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces and their loved ones, and the hostages and their families, Spring Day is just around the corner.

Horror in Majdal Shams

Over the weekend, our collective hearts were once again broken as we learnt of the indiscriminate and

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner



deadly rocket attack on a soccer field in the Druze village of Majdal Shams, which killed 12 children. We join in the outpouring of grief in all Israeli society. It's worth remembering that in spite of the relative success of Israeli interception attempts, these rockets have deadly intent. Only the resurrection of peace will mean that no more children or innocents of any kind are killed in this conflict.

The attack on a Druze village has once again shown the utter disregard for life by the Hezbollah terrorists who fire indiscriminately into civilian areas. The Druze community is an integral part of Israeli society, and we mourn with it the unbearable loss of these children.

We note that, once again, the South African government has avoided condemning the attack on Israeli civilians (at the time of publication on Wednesday, 31 July). It's disappointing that a country claiming to have a human-rights-based foreign policy can be so impotent in criticising the Iran-backed international terrorist network.

Olympics

Once again, we witness the trite calls to have Israel removed from the Olympic Games, which go against the

very spirit of the Olympics, and as usual, doesn't engage at all with the real issues that need to be resolved to bring peace. The calls for an Olympic boycott have clearly not landed with the general population, who, like me, are simply loving the spectacle of human achievement on display.

The sevens team showed us the power of perseverance and grit, overcoming the odds and some lacklustre play to rely on their fortitude and win a bronze. Maybe the lesson from this achievement is more poignant than if they had simply blown away the competition all tournament long. Further congratulations need to go to the other medal winners: Tatjana Smith and Pieter Coetze (swimming), as well as to Alan Hatherley, who gave us all a reason to watch mountain biking!

We pray that these Olympics continue in the same vein, entrenching the ideals of competition, personal improvement, and international camaraderie. Certainly, following the week we have witnessed, never have these messages been more needed!

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Teen carries Maccabi flag despite injury

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Fifteen-year-old goalkeeper Jonah Gruskin may not be able to show his football prowess at this year's European Maccabi Youth Games in London, but he held pride of place in leading the South African team as its flag bearer at the opening ceremony on 31 July.

Gruskin made the under-16 football team and had trained for the tournament for three months before he broke his collarbone and had to step down from competing in the Games.

This Grade 10 student at Johannesburg-based St David's asked if he could still attend and support his team from the sidelines, in the changeroom, and wherever else needed.

Gruskin had the option of withdrawing and getting a refund, but though he was disappointed not to be able to play, he was clear that he wanted to be with his teammates and friends in London.

"I had been looking forward to it for long," he says, making it clear that Maccabi is more than just about sport, but "about making new friends and meeting new people".

Gruskin was chosen as flag bearer not only

for his sporting talent, but also for upholding two key values of Maccabi South Africa: teamwork and sportsmanship. This was announced at the team's official sendoff on 13 July. Being chosen as flag bearer is an honour bestowed on very accomplished South African athletes.

Gruskin was injured while playing for the St David's under-16 rugby team. "I caught the ball and started running, and as I was about to get tackled, I tried to pass and offload the ball. As it happened, the person tackling landed on my arm, which was extended."

The injury wasn't his fault, Gruskin's mother, Shelly, says, "so it felt more like a punishment not to let him go to the Games. Also, it shows a lot of courage and commitment to stick with your teammates. It was his decision. He really wanted to go."

Shelly says being with the Maccabi team at the Games was important because Gruskin had to give up some of his Jewish observance by going to St David's for sport.

"He'll be able to meet youth from around the world," she says.

"Jonah was very young when he came with us to Maccabi to support his brothers. It's not just about the sport, it's about the experience."

Besides sport, the athletes will enjoy a special Shabbat dinner with other delegations; an opening party; DJ parties; an educational programme with talks and sightseeing tours; and a closing party in which the teams swap kit, a popular Maccabi tradition.

The European Maccabi Games (EMG) is held every two years, alternating with the Maccabi Games in Israel. This year's edition is the first just for youth (under-16 and under-18 age groups). Fourteen

countries and more than 800 athletes and management are taking part in six sports: basketball, hockey, football, futsal, table tennis, and tennis. Maccabi South Africa achieved huge success at the EMG in Berlin in 2015 and Budapest in 2019.

Gruskin's family is passionate about Maccabi, with brothers Benji and Lee having won gold for cricket at the Games, and his uncle having earned gold for squash in the 1981 edition.

In 2013, Gruskin's one brother played for the under-16 soccer team and his other brother for the senior cricket team that won gold. Four years later, they both played in the senior cricket team and won gold. His oldest brother was crowned player of the tournament.

In 2022, they were very disappointed to get "only" a silver medal. "We now want to see if all three Gruskins will go to the 2025 Maccabiah," Shelly says. "Jonah could play for the cricket and soccer teams. My two big boys would have to play senior cricket."

Gruskin followed in the footsteps of his one brother by becoming a goalkeeper. He played club soccer until Grade 7, when he made the district provincial team. "But the

school sport at St David's is very hectic, so I haven't been able to play club again," he says.

He's recovering well. He no longer has to wear an arm sling and is allowed to do light training like running with the ball. He plans to return to full sport in about four to six weeks. "The surgeon has been blown away by Jonah's strength and mobility," Shelly says. "It's down to his hard work. He's already allowed to play in the cricket nets. Contact sport isn't yet possible because the bone is weaker than the plate, so the plate can break the bone."

Gruskin plans to become a professional sportsman. "He has been privy to the first team squad for cricket at St David's," Shelly says, "and has played in school soccer tournaments where the team has done well. Jonah is often on the sidelines supporting the school's teams and singing war cries. He's as passionate about soccer as he is about cricket."

Gruskin played for the South African B side at the World Cup for action cricket in Dubai last year. In his spare time, he can be found practising soccer or cricket in the garden. At some point, he'll have to choose his game, his mom says.



Jonah Gruskin

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