



A BIG WIN FOR THE ENTIRE TANENBAUMCHAT COMMUNITY

When the school brought Jewish athletes from Israel, Canada and the United States together for the Israel Becker International Invitational Basketball Tournament, everyone learned what it really means to be part of a Jewish nation

BY ERIN SILVER

Basketball teams from Canada, the United States and Israel came together for the return of TanenbaumCHAT's Israel Becker International Invitational Basketball Tournament in January. Following a pandemic shut-down, five teams of girls and six teams of boys were excited to compete in five gruelling days of play. In the end, our senior girls team won first place in their division while the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School team from Rockville, Maryland won the boys division.

Yet as much as the athletes enjoyed competing on the court, the highlight was the bonding that took place between competitors and their families off the court. "I'm proud of how the tournament ran and how it strengthened our ties with all our visitors, helping us fulfill our mission of becoming part of a global Jewish nation," says **Dr. Jonathan Levy**, Head of School at TanenbaumCHAT. "The tournament is an opportunity to bring together Jewish teenagers from different places. Having the chance to connect with three teams from Israel was really the icing on the cake."

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— **Shira Meirman**

Dr. Levy was thrilled by the enthusiasm shown by the whole school community. "The gym was full and there were lots of kids and parents cheering. They all wanted to be part of the excitement that was in the air," he says.

This spirit was also embraced by the TanenbaumCHAT families who volunteered to host out-of-town athletes and coaches during the tournament. "We had two girls from the Beth Tfiloh team from Baltimore in our home," says **Stefanie Goldschmied '95**, a TanenbaumCHAT parent who co-chairs the Parent Engagement Event

Committee and the Billeting Sub-Committee. "We picked them up from the airport and had a homemade sign with their names on it. When we got home, my son invited several friends over, so the girls met a bunch of TanenbaumCHAT kids right away."

Her husband, Ozzie, played on the TanenbaumCHAT basketball team as a Class of '95 student. He was especially thrilled to attend the girls' games and provide feedback and support. "We made sure that at least one of us was at each of their games so they felt like they had their own personal cheerleaders. I think they appreciated it," says Goldschmied.

The Goldschmied family was excited to show their guests what it means to be part of the Jewish community here. "On the last night, a couple of their teammates came over to our house and they all hung out together. My son is now keeping in touch with them."

This tournament was extra special for the family. "**Israel Becker '88 (z"l)** was my cousin," says Goldschmied. "So, this tournament holds extra special meaning for me because it's held in memory of Israel, whose life was tragically cut short," she says, noting how she still vividly remembers the day he died. "This was the best way for us to give back as a family and honour my cousin at the same time."

The Becker Tournament began in 1995 in memory of Israel who died in a car crash in 1994. The alumnus loved basketball and enjoyed playing for the TanenbaumCHAT team. A group of his family and friends started a tournament in his memory, and by the late 1990s, it was so popular that 14 teams from across North America came to compete. After a few starts and stops over the years, including a pause for COVID, this year's tournament, which ran from January 20 to 25, featured teams from Bialik High School in Montreal; Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School in Baltimore, Maryland; Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland; and the Leo Baeck Educational Center in Haifa, along with a boys team from Elitzur Petach Tikvah. Games were live-streamed and students turned up en masse to cheer everyone on between classes and after.

TanenbaumCHAT's Israel Engagement Officer, **Shira Meirman**, is tasked with assimilating Israel and Israeli culture in the school, both in the formal and the informal sense. "I was responsible for the Israeli delegations that came to the school, and it was my job to create the connections between them and our students," says



The TanenbaumCHAT Tigers take on the Charles E. Smith Lions.

Meirman. "I think the real meaning of this tournament is the opportunity to be exposed to and get to know students from different Jewish schools around the U.S. and Israel, and to get a sense of the Jewish nation."

Indeed, the Becker Tournament committee's main goal was to convey one important message. "There is strength in unity and brotherhood between Jews, no matter where they're from," Meirman says, "and such a thing can only be learned through meeting each other and connecting as they did during the tournament."

It's a sentiment current parent **Tania Samson** and her daughter **Eliana Samson '24** couldn't agree with more. "We hosted three girls from Leo Baeck high school in Haifa," explains the younger Samson. "It was so amazing being able to have people here that I could connect with. We all like sports, and would talk about life and just hang out all night."

"Even though they come from two different places, they liked the same music and had so much in common," says her mom. "I had to cheer her up when they left because they really bonded and were so close. They talk every day and we went to visit them in Israel this Passover."

Teams from Montreal also experienced that same connection with their Toronto hosts. "We brought our Grade 10/11 boys and girls to the tournament," says Matt Starr, Athletic Director for the Bialik Montreal team. "The student-athletes were excited for this since the beginning of the season. This is always one of the most well organized and community-building events through sports and basketball. We are thrilled to be invited year after year."

Becky Silberman shares those sentiments. "It was a great experience," says Silberman, who coached the team from Rockville. "The combination of high-level basketball and



Reaching for excellence on the court: TanenbaumCHAT Tigers vs Leo Baeck Education Centre, Haifa.

getting the chance to observe my students as they built deep connections with other Jewish athletes from around the world was really amazing.”

Adam Chaim and **Aubrey Zimmerman '74**, Co-Athletics Directors at TanenbaumCHAT, organized the on-court part of the tournament. From planning the schedule to coordinating the referees and scorekeepers, it was a big team effort. “Overall, I would say that 70 TanenbaumCHAT students participated in one way or another,” says Zimmerman. “Then of course there were the generous families who opened their doors to the more than 100 coaches and players who participated.”

In addition, having the Leo Baeck school from Haifa and Elitzur Petach Tikvah added a flavour to the tournament that can’t be replaced,” says Zimmerman. “The atmosphere in the school was electric. The gym was always full and the crowds were always pumped up. The livestream announcers and the music contributed to the special feeling.”

Beyond the sports, “the highlight of the tournament is being able to speak to and get to know other teams from different areas and their coaches,” says Starr. “It’s amazing to see the kids interact with new people and form friendships in the Jewish community. All of the kids made good friends and we hope the relationships will carry forward.”

TanenbaumCHAT’s Operations Manager, **Zoe Shuman**, was responsible for organizing and overseeing a range of tasks, including budgeting, security, transportation, communication and social events. She says it took her and the rest of the Becker Committee “hundreds of hours to pull off this monumental task.” Though there were expected planning hiccups along the way, the tournament was a huge success. “After not hosting this event for two years, getting back to it was fun,” says Shuman. “We will likely begin planning for the next tournament in April.” Additional teams beyond the five who participated in 2023 have already expressed an interest in attending.

Billeting families are lining up to host as well. “For nine fun-filled days, we hosted six Israeli basketball players during the tournament,” says parent **Hannah Boulakia**. “We view hosting visitors as an incredible way to give back to the community, but we also think there’s no better way to teach our kids and remind ourselves about the importance of community and sharing what we have,” says the mom of five, including **Daniel '27**, **Jonah '24** and **Noa '22**. “Welcoming people into your home creates a spirit of celebration that we missed during the COVID years!” Her five-year-old still asks when his basketball “brothers” are returning and he’s working on his basketball skills. ♦



Visitors from Israel making the most of a Toronto snowstorm.