

JUDAISM'S ENCOUNTER WITH AMERICAN SPORTS



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aries, who is concerned with Sabbath observance. The Jew, Harold Abrahams, could have cared less about Saturday strictures.) *Sports Illustrated*, that most esteemed commentator on the American sports scene, went on and on with a 2,700-word piece that took its millions of readers into the young man's Orthodox home and described how he peacefully waited out the end of the Sabbath before playing an "enthraling" game of basketball in front of hundreds of worshipping fans.¹⁶

For Jews, and especially for many Orthodox Jews, as the Goodman saga unfolded, the point guard from the Baltimore Talmudical Academy became larger than life. He was a dream come true. How many observant youngsters over the past century had fantasized that they might become so proficient in sports that this secular world would change its rules to accommodate them? And now, what they prayed for was being realized through Tamir Goodman. The ballplayer's own statements did little to dampen communal enthusiasm for his faithful stance. "In a sense," the youngster once declared, "I feel like God's messenger." Another time, he proudly observed that because of him, "when Jewish kids walk into gyms or parks, they don't get dissed as bad. They'll actually be invited into the games. You have to be proud of your religion and the way you were brought up." In a more reflective moment, Goodman added, "I know kids look up to me because I am an Orthodox Jew and a good basketball player."¹⁷

As this living legend continued to unfold, Goodman, who one scribe anointed as "the lone savior of the Orthodox sports world," even became the subject of a Jewish rap song. Orthodox lyricist Lenny Solomon and singer Etan G offered the following tribute to "The Kid with the Lid." He was

the brother that grew up as part of the tribe
Who plays a little hoop with a little bit of pride. . . . Phylacteries in the morn,
strings all day, dig (You're) never gonna get rid of the kid with the lid.
Kid with the lid is a basketball sensation.
Kid with the lid is a light unto the nations.
Kid with the lid is the real thing, baby.
He's gonna take you to the "Promised Land."

There was even talk around about a documentary film about the ballplayer's life and times. And everywhere Goodman went, he was called the "Jewish Jordan" when he was not being dubbed the "Chassidic Celtic" or the "Lubavitch Laker."¹⁸

I personally witnessed how big this phenomenon had become when in March 1999 Goodman brought his team and his entourage to Yeshiva University's annual Sarachek national Jewish high school basketball tournament. Fans, from silk-suited university trustees to gabardine-garbed Talmud teachers, clamored for reserved seats as the 1,100-seat gymnasium filled up for a 10:00 A.M. preliminary game. (The "Thunders" from Baltimore won their opening encounter against a club from L.A. but were destined, later on in the weekend, to lose two other games to more talented Orthodox clubs.) During that first early-morning game, a newspaper reporter asked a

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