

JEWISH STUDIES

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National Narratives in the Arena:

The Construction of Jewish National Identity through International Sporting Events

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Abstract: Traditional Jews have been extremely hostile towards sports. However, with the rise of Jewish nationalism in the late 19th century, Jews began to change their attitude towards sports, viewing it as an important tool for national education and the construction of a national state. In 1932, Jews organised their own regional sports event—the Maccabiah Games. Over time, the scale of the Maccabiah Games continued to expand, and its influence grew steadily. In 1951, Israel officially became a member of the International Olympic Committee and established the Israeli National Olympic Committee. Since the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, Israel has actively participated in every subsequent Summer Olympics. Overall, Israel has achieved extraordinary significance through its active participation in and hosting of international sports events in terms of reinforcing international recognition of its sovereign state identity, alleviating geopolitical tensions, enhancing the social status of women, and showcasing the secular characteristics of a modern nation. However, international sports events also exhibit negative characteristics such as ethnic chauvinism, militarised management, and constraints imposed by traditional values in the construction of Jewish national identity.

Key Words: Sports, International Sports Events, Jewish National Identity Construction, Olympics, Maccabiah Games