

## SHELBURNE TEEN TO COMPETE IN WORLD GAMES IN ISRAEL

*Maccabiah Games:* The world's largest Jewish athletic competition, often referred to as the "Jewish Olympics"

*Maccabi USA:* America's delegation to the Maccabiah Games, planning to send 1,200 Jewish athletes to Israel in July

*Futsal:* A type of soccer played indoors on a smaller court

*Neil Kanarick:* Local teen and OZ member representing the US on the Youth futsal team in the 2022 Maccabiah Game



Neil, who turned 17 on December 22, won a spot on the US's Under 18 futsal squad after highly competitive tryouts in the Philadelphia area last summer. About 90 athletes vied to become one of the soccer or futsal players in the Youth (Under 18) division in the 2022 Maccabiah Games. He was thrilled to hear from the coaches that he would be playing with and against athletes from all over the world in July. This year there are eight or ten other U18 soccer

teams representing every continent. Competition is expected to be robust, and the US has a chance to win a medal for the first time in the sport.

The athletes leave for a three-week adventure in the Middle East the first week in July. Neil is excited about the prospect of his first trip to Israel; about the pageantry surrounding Maccabiah; about meeting, practicing and playing with teammates from all over the US, and learning from professional, experienced coaches and players.

He lives in Shelburne with his parents, Mike Kanarick and Liz Kleinberg, twin sister Rae and younger sister Melina. The family has been in Burlington since the fall of 2007, when Mike accepted the position of Executive Director at Ohavi Zedek. Liz, an attorney, joined a law firm in town and subsequently served as Vice President on the synagogue's Board of Directors.

Now a junior at CVU, Neil especially enjoys math and science, and will most likely be pursuing an engineering degree when applying to college. A 2018 graduate of Ohavi Zedek Hebrew School, he has been an active NADAV intern in the synagogue kitchen for the past three years, guided by Jeff Potash. With direction from Jeff, Neil has learned how to cook many Jewish staples, and is now well-known in the congregation as a talented challah baker. Jeff, his 'mentor-in-an-apron,' describes Neil as exact, careful, and dependable. Beyond challah, he has made hamantaschen at Purim, kugels, babka, latkes and more. Jeff likes working with all the kitchen interns, but he says Neil stands out. "He's a great kid, a quick learner, tremendously dedicated, and best of all, he really enjoys it."

Outside of school and synagogue, soccer is Neil's passion. He is a member of CVU's soccer team and the BFC (Burlington Football Club), a travel team. He has been involved in the sport since he was 4 years old: outdoor soccer in good weather (two teams, 11 on a side including a goalkeeper, on a large field); indoor or arena soccer (usually 6 or 7 on each side on a walled hard court) or futsal (5 against 5 on a smaller hard court surface marked by lines, played with a smaller, harder, low-bounce ball). Futsal is described as a great skill developer, demanding quick reflexes, fast thinking, and spot-on passing. The court surface, the ball and the rules favor ball control and accurate passing in small spaces, and the game – emphasizing improvisation, creativity and technique – is intense.

Originating in 1930 in Uruguay, futsal is currently played on all continents and over 100 countries by 12 million players. It has been gaining favor in America, and has recently been among the 45 or so Maccabiah sports. The games are held quadrennially in Israel, but the scheduled 2021 games were postponed in the face of the worldwide pandemic. The last Maccabiah, in 2017, featured 10,000 athletes from 85 countries in 45 sports. Planning for this summer's event is proceeding, with full recognition of the possibility that some countries may not be able to participate, and, worst case scenario, that the games can again be postponed.

"I've known about the Maccabiah Games for a long time," Neil says, "because my family is friendly with Jeff Schulman and his family." Jeff, the Director of Athletics at UVM, and his wife, Deb Lichtenfeld – also members of OZ – have been associated with Maccabi USA since 1997, when Jeff competed in the games on an ice hockey team. Officially involved in the large

volunteer organization since 2001, he subsequently served as Vice President and has been a USA Team Manager for many of the games. Currently both he and Deb are on the Executive Committee of the Maccabi Board. This year Deb was asked to oversee the 'Israel Connect' component of the athletes' experience in Israel: the first six days, focusing on Israeli culture, education and sightseeing. She is leading the effort to design, organize and enhance the initial week of the trip. "Israel Connect is the 'jewel in the crown of Maccabi USA,'" she says. After the six-day orientation the team participates in the official Opening Ceremonies to kick off the two-week competition.

"The Maccabiah experience is often a life-changer for participants – especially for youngsters," Deb maintains. "It affirms and promotes pride in their Jewish identity."

Every participant in each of the designated categories, which include Juniors/Youth, Open, Paralympic and Masters; also Coaches, Assistant Coaches, Managers, Athletic Trainers, Physicians and Mental Health Professionals, does his or her part to raise funds for the Games. As a Youth participant, Neil is committed to raising \$8,500, which goes toward lodging, feeding, transporting, and covering other program expenses for the team's three weeks in Israel. Because the games provide an opportunity for Jewish athletes to compete, sightsee, learn and have fun, they also attract contributions, matching funds and scholarships from philanthropists. Neil is seeking scholarship aid and reaching out to family, friends and the community for support. Please visit his event page at <http://support.maccabiusa.com/goto/neilkanarick>.

"In Vermont there are only ever one or two Jewish kids on my soccer teams," Neil says, so he is excited to be among hundreds of other Jewish athletes and coaches from all over the world at the Maccabiah in Israel. A cousin of his will also be there, competing in the adult soccer division. "My whole family is coming too," he adds, "maybe even my grandparents, depending on the COVID situation. And we might get to stay an extra week."

A medal would be icing on the babka.

