

It is always sad when something you looked forward to for so long, and with such great anticipation, comes and goes in the blink of an eye. After an action-packed three weeks in Israel at the 20<sup>th</sup> World Maccabiah Games, Team USA's journey has come to an end.

Medals have been won, lifelong friendships have been forged, and lives have been touched.

Nearly 9,500 Jewish athletes from over 80 countries have come together to compete in sport, but the Maccabiah is about so much more than sport. It is about the Diaspora showing solidarity for its heritage and the State of Israel.

Regardless of what country the athletes were from, the language they spoke, or the level of Judaism they practiced, they all had something in common...they were Jewish. These athletes came to Israel bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, looking to have the experience of a lifetime. And, they sure did!

Starting with Maccabi USA's signature cultural and education program, Israel Connect, the athletes were able to get a great taste of the Land of Milk and Honey. While each of the six days of touring left an impact, the visit to Yad Vashem served as a lasting reality check. It certainly put winning medals in perspective, as athletes exited the Holocaust Memorial deeply touched.

As the son of a Holocaust survivor, my mother Alice, I join those athletes in saying, "Never Again."

There is no denying that the competition on the playing field was often fierce; yet, when the Games were over, the athletes all came together. In some cases, bitter rivals became best of friends.

That's the spirit of the Maccabiah.

The Maccabiah torch will be extinguished at tonight's Closing Ceremony. But, for 1,127 members of Team USA, the memories of the 20<sup>th</sup> World Maccabiah Games will burn brightly forever.

Maccabi USA's motto is "Building Jewish Pride Through Sports." Rabbi Irwin Kula, Team USA 2009, has said that "The Maccabiah is the healthiest engagement with young people that I have seen in American Jewish life."

Three weeks to experience, a lifetime to remember!

Congratulations to every proud member of Team USA 2017!