

We arrived in Israel today and really enjoyed being with the athletes that are attending Training Camp. We can't wait to get started on the Israel Connect experience.

Co-Chairing the Israel Connect Program has been an amazing experience for so many reasons.

We were able to make some great connections through the Seed The Dream Foundation. They introduced us to Stand With Us, an agency in Israel, whose main focus is educating young people and creating ambassadors for this great country. Together we created a Shabbat Program that will include a service given by the two Team Rabbis, a Shabbat dinner, and breakout discussion groups that will center on the athletes' personal Jewish experiences, concerns, and questions, and the IC theme of US/Israel Relations. The athletes will be introduced to practical verbal tools to explain and support what Israel is all about. We have IDF guest soldiers that will travel regularly with athletes on the daily tours and stay at the IC hotels throughout the Program. The professional guides from our partners, Archeological Seminars will connect each daily tour with the thematic material. We have great partners with the Kfar Maccabiah staff who helped us put together a barbeque party for July 1st, that will celebrate US and Israel Together, and our Closing Luncheon Program that will celebrate the 4th of July and the send off for Team USA. One night we will have dinner at the Arab-Israeli village of Abu Gosh, and another we will dine under the desert stars at a Bedouin feast. We will experience all that Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have to offer, and learn more about our history while we experience the Dead Sea and Masada.

This spring we ran a competition called "Maccabi's Got Talent" where athletes could send in singing videos if they were interested in performing at one of the events. We have three vocal finalists. One will perform The Star Spangled Banner and one will perform Hatikvah at the BBQ, and the last one will sing America The Beautiful at the Closing Luncheon Program. We also have a trumpet player who will play an intro to Hatikvah and This Land Is Your Land. It is great fun seeing this other side to some of the athletes. Everyone we worked with, both in Israel and the US, both professional staff and volunteers, are very passionate

about making this the most meaningful Maccabiah experience we can create for the athletes.