

Jewish Olympics

10 Oregonians bound for 19th Maccabiah Games



above: Baseball player Clayton Gelfand will be competing in the games for the first time.

middle: Lauren Goldstein, 14, of Bend will compete in Junior Girls' Volleyball.

left: Golfer Adam Ruben will be competing in the games for the first time.

By Deborah Moon

More than 9,000 athletes from 72 countries are expected to participate in the 19th Maccabiah Games in Israel July 18-30, including nine athletes and an accommodations manager from Oregon.

The Maccabiah Games began in 1932 in what was then British-ruled Palestine. Held every four years in Israel, the Maccabiah Games now are the third-largest international sporting event after the Olympics and the World University Games. The Maccabiah Games are intended not only to encourage athletic excellence, but also to foster a sense of Jewish belonging and pride among the participants, to which end juniors/youth/open athletes and staff will participate in the seven-day Israel Connect education and cultural program that takes athletes to cultural and

historic sites to experience firsthand their own connection with Israel and Judaism.

At least three members of the Oregon contingent have participated in the games before, though two will have different roles this time around.

Portland native Joji Kurosaki says, "For a person of Jewish heritage, the Maccabiah Games are the most important and meaningful athletic competition in the world. The games represent all that is good about sports. Maccabiah is about heritage, awareness, peace and athletic competition."

After winning a bronze medal in rugby at the 2009 Maccabiah Games, Joji was invited to play international rugby. He moved to Sydney, Australia, in January 2010 to play rugby for a year, where he is on a team with some of the Australian Maccabiah players he met in 2009. He's

still living there, but will be competing on the Maccabi USA rugby team for the second time.

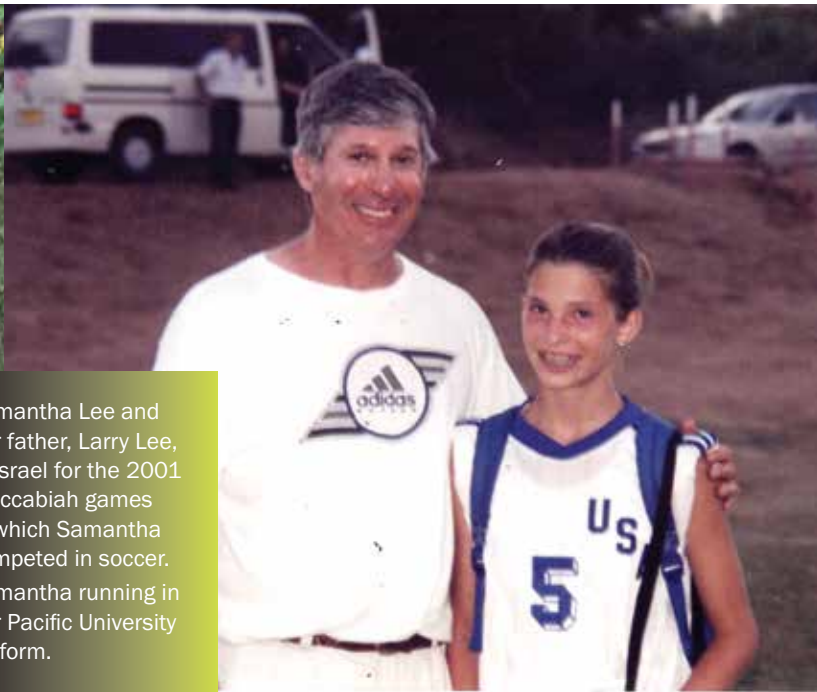
"I can't tell you how proud I am to have been selected again. It is an unbelievable honor and a privilege to be able to represent my country alongside some of the best Jewish athletes America has to offer. I wouldn't miss this opportunity for the world. Although Australia is now my home, Oregon is where I became the person I am now, and the Jewish community had a huge part in that."

A majority of his family still lives in Oregon. Joji attended Portland Jewish Academy in fifth grade, participated in BBYO and belonged to Neveh Shalom, where he became a bar mitzvah.

Portlander Glen Coblens has been involved with Maccabi USA since 1999. In 2000 he went to Israel with Maccabi



Samantha Lee and her father, Larry Lee, in Israel for the 2001 Maccabiah games in which Samantha competed in soccer. Samantha running in her Pacific University uniform.



OREGON MACCABIAN ATHLETES

- Russell Brown,
Open Track and Field, Eugene
- Glen Coblens,
Men's Masters Basketball 45+, Portland
- Adam Frank,
Open Fencing, Portland
- Clayton Gelfand,
Junior Boys' Baseball, West Linn
- Lauren Goldstein,
Junior Girls' Volleyball, Bend
- Joji Kurosaki,
Open Men's Rugby, Portland/Australia
- Samantha Lee,
Open Half Marathon, Forest Grove
- Jeffrey Merrill,
Open Track and Field, Portland
- Adam Ruben,
Open Golf, Lake Oswego

MANAGEMENT

- Matan Cohen,
Accommodations Manager, Portland

USA to participate in a planning meeting for the 2001 Maccabiah. At the 2001 games he was the team manager of the women's basketball team, returning in 2005 with that team as chair and assistant coach. This year Glen will compete for the first time – in men's masters basketball.

"It will be totally different as an athlete because I get to play as part of a team and hang out, play and compete with men in the same age group," Glen says. "Also I'm going with my family, and we'll stay with my wife's aunt in Jerusalem. We will be at a home and experience how life is in Israel." He and his wife, Mia Birk, have three children, ages 1, 11 and 14. "We will get to see the beauty and values of Israel and also all kinds of sports. We will meet people from around the world through sports."

Samantha Lee, who will be running the women's open half marathon this year, was the second-youngest soccer player on the 2001 junior women's soccer team. "I then played with the (Maccabi USA) junior's team and open women's team in Australia in 2003 and Chile in 2004. I had a fantastic time playing at a higher level against teams from different countries, playing under brilliant coaches and traveling," says Samantha.

"I'm very excited to be able to travel to Israel again with the Maccabiah Games. I'm sure running, opposed to playing on a soccer team, will show its own

differences in practice time and focus, but I'm also certain that I will have a much more mature outlook, understanding and appreciation of this opportunity on my second trip."

During high school she excelled in both soccer and distance running. Born and raised in Fort Wayne, IN, in 2008 she moved to Forest Grove to attend Pacific University, where she eventually shifted her focus back to distance running.

"I had some great teammates and a superior coach at Pacific and still hold the records for the steeplechase and 10,000 meter run," says Samantha. "I proceeded with running and fitness after college in large part to honor my family's value in outdoor exercise. My father is a lifetime runner, as is my sister, Jennifer – both ran in the half marathon (with Maccabi USA) in Australia in 2003."

Family history also plays a role for Wilsonville High School graduate Clayton Gelfand, who will play on the junior boys' baseball team. Clayton has signed a "Letter of Intent" to play baseball for the Sacramento State University Hornets, where he was recruited to be a dual player for both pitching and middle infield (shortstop/second base).

Clayton's father, Scot Gelfand, has fond memories of trying out for the Maccabiah games.

"As a youth I would say I was a successful athlete in the sport of wrestling," says Scot. "My father signed me up for

the tryouts and flew with me to the University of Penn, to be in my corner and support the great opportunity to go to Israel to wrestle in the games. I did make it to the finals of my weight class but unfortunately lost the match in the final period. I was appointed as the first alternate for my weight class but did not make it to Israel. The trip was a special trip nonetheless, because I had a special time with my father before I went off to college. This was one of those times that I would remember forever.

“In 2011, I had the hunch that the games would be coming along soon, so I called to see if baseball was an option. I signed him up like my dad did for me. Clayton and I drove to Los Angeles for the tryout. We had a great time together in Los Angeles. I hope that Clayton will remember this moment in time, like I did with my father.

“Clay made the team and will get the opportunity that I never had. In the end, I will be traveling to Israel and riding the coattails of my son’s success. I hope one day my son is fortunate enough to experience this memorable time with his children.”

Lake Oswego High School 2012 graduate and Linfield College freshman, Adam Ruben, will compete in men’s open golf. He is the son of Daniel and Lisa Ruben of Lake Oswego.

Adam says, “I’m really excited about having the opportunity to go and visit Israel and all the history it has. I’m also excited that I get to represent the U.S. team, my Jewish community in Portland and my congregation Temple Beth Israel.”

In April Adam shot the best score of any Linfield golfer for this season at the Willamette Cup, where the freshman carded a blistering 68.

Lauren Goldstein, 14, will play junior girls’ volleyball. A freshman at Summit High School in Bend, Lauren is the daughter of Kirsten and Mike Goldstein. The family belongs to Temple Beth Tikvah of Bend.

“This is my first opportunity to travel by myself anywhere, let alone to an amazing location like Israel. I’ve always had the desire to visit Israel because I’m a pretty committed Jew and have always been interested in Judaism. In addition, I love travelling.

“I’ve also never been so passionate about any sport I’ve ever played before, and having the chance to play volleyball in Israel is an indescribable opportunity. ... I’m excited to get to know other Jews from around the world who are around my age and to get the chance to make friendships with teens with the same interests as me.”



Russell Brown will compete in open track and field.

above: Joji Kurosaki returns to Israel to compete in Rugby for the second time.
right: Adam Frank hopes his first appearance in the Maccabiah launches a fencing career similar to legendary Maccabiah fencers.

Adam Frank, 16, will compete in open fencing. A student at Catlin Gabel High, his parents are Fred Frank and Jacqui Frank.

“I am looking forward to it as an opportunity to embrace my heritage and compete on a high level in the sport I love,” says Adam. “I hope that I will be able to do well and compete in this tournament in the future. Many legendary fencers have done this tournament, and I hope to become one of them. As an Oregonian I hope to represent my state well, and as an American I hope to represent my country well through sportsmanship, integrity and victories.”

Russell Brown, a professional track and field athlete representing Nike, will compete in open track and field. He is a member of the Oregon Track Club Elite – a professional track club based in Eugene.

“I have a lot of family in Israel that I get to see only periodically,” says Russell. “They keep up to date on my races, but rarely get to see any of them. This is an opportunity to allow them to see me race while participating in a moving and important event.”

Russell also understands the Jewish as well as the athletic significance of the quadrennial event: “I also am looking forward to forging a connection to a place that is very important to my family and our history.”

