

INTRODUCTION

“It’s a book about Australian Jews in sport,” we would keenly tell friends and acquaintances. “Must be a thin volume,” was the quip that inevitably came in reply.

At first, we smiled politely and laughed along. We understood the inference. Jews are leaders in law, commerce and medicine. They build things. They are lauded for their philanthropy. They teach, they write and they perform. But sport? What is there to write about? Jews don’t play sport.

The joke wore thin. *This* is exactly why a book of this type is needed.

Australia is a country famed for its love of sport, where sports folklore forms such an important part of its modern psyche. But little has been written about Jews and their relationship to sport. The Jewish population of around 100,000 is numerically small, but not insignificant.

Jews have made a profound on-field and off-field contribution to just about every sport in Australia. Their feats have encompassed world championships, AFL premierships, Olympic selection and medals. Their legacies in sports administration and business are many: they have saved sporting codes, reinvigorated national competitions and they have mended the bodies of champion athletes. They have climbed Mount Everest and the major peaks of the world.

These are stories that need to be told. But where to start?

When we set out to compile this collection, Professor Colin Tatz, an esteemed academic on discrimination and racism, set the record straight. Yes, Australia has represented a largely safe and secure place

of Jewish domicile. But it has not been free of discrimination and anti-Semitism. Jews were once denied the same opportunities as other Australians to fully participate in economic and civic life. This, too, extended to sport.

For much of the first half of the twentieth century, the leading establishment golf clubs in Sydney and Melbourne didn't accept Jews. Neither did surf and life-saving bodies. Jews in both cities established Randwick-Coogee social clubs and the Monash and Cranbourne golf clubs because doors were shut on them elsewhere.

These clubs served an important function – they became venues for dancing, dating, playing chess and bridge, and essentially social sports. Fanny Reading, a notable Jewish community leader, saw them as places and spaces where “together we will be able to secure the future of Jewish life in this country”.

In the 1920s, a soccer club emerged in the small Jewish community of Perth. The Maccabeans offered young Jewish boys a social and physical engagement with the predominately Anglo-Australian community. But the club also represented a space for the cultivation of Zionism – and a place for Jews to feel pride in their Jewishness.*

In Sydney, the broader Jewish communal bodies of the 1920s and '30s embraced sport, too. Sydney's Maccabean Hall organised picnics with athletics and swimming carnivals as intra-communal sporting activity blossomed. Similar scenes were played out in Melbourne, where, for many years, the biggest social gathering of the year centred around the annual Australian football match between the Jewish communities north and south of the Yarra River. These events evolved into the Maccabi carnivals and associations we know today. A celebrated place for Jewish participation.

By the mid-twentieth century Jewish community life flourished when a wave of migrants and refugees left Europe for Australia after World War II. Not only were they the catalyst for Jewish life to flourish in Australia. But in time they integrated their way into all corners

* For more on the fascinating history of The Maccabeans: Joshua Chiat, “Muscular Judaism on the frontier” in vol. 53, *Griffith Review*.

of the country's political, social, economic and cultural life. Sport was often the most direct way to do so.

Our collection begins with a historical note. And in Melbourne, the so-called sporting capital of Australia (and, some say, the world). The Jews of Melbourne have long embraced the city's main sport – Australian Rules football.

Ashley Browne opens the archives to find that, despite discrimination plaguing Jewish participation in some sports, Jews forged a distinguished record at the helm of Melbourne's biggest football clubs. He recounts the contrasting experiences of two presidents, **Joseph Gutnick** at Melbourne and **David Smorgon** at Footscray (later the Western Bulldogs), who took over their crisis-ridden clubs in the 1990s.

Carlton and St Kilda – centres of Jewish life for much of the community's history – have most aroused the passion of Jews. *Daniel Cherny* takes us back to 1966 when St Kilda's grand final against Collingwood fell on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism. The experiences of club supporters and Jewish player **Ian Synman** are memorably recounted. The Saints won that day, but haven't won a premiership since.

AFL football can be a brutal game that takes a significant physical toll on players. Doctors are often the unsung heroes of football success. Jewish doctors have been counted among the AFL's most respected medicos. *Sam Landsberger* goes in search of the doctors, including his father Jake, who helped make premierships happen.

Unlike St Kilda, Carlton has had greater on-field success. But its off-field fortunes declined significantly in the early 2000s. Enter **Richard Pratt**, a post-war migrant turned businessman who played for the Old Dark Navy Blues in his youth and became a long-time benefactor. *Howard Kotton* writes of the struggles experienced by **Graham Smorgon**, first Jewish president of the Blues, and his eventual leadership handover to Pratt in 2007.

A decade has passed since Sydney businesswoman and footy mum (of the Aussie Rules kind) *Tanya Oziel* delivered on an ambitious plan

to unite Palestinians and Israelis for the AFL International Cup. **The Peace Team** overcame border checks, protests and mean-spirited social media campaigns to compete in the spirit of friendship and peace. She shares the team's miraculous journey.

Baseball – a game so many American Jews have great affection for – stirred the interest of an energetic, sports-mad Moriah College schoolboy. **Gavin Fingleston** went on to claim a silver medal at 2004 Athens Olympics. His ascension to the Olympic podium wasn't without sacrifice, as *Michael Puterflam's* chapter explores.

Like the AFL, Australian basketball clubs have benefited from the tenacity and acumen of Jewish business leaders. **Mike Wrublewski** and **Larry Kestelman** made timely interventions in the 1990s and 2000s to rescue two failing clubs. *David Sygall* and *Adam Gurwitch* examine their lasting impact on basketball in Australia.

Boxing today is synonymous with ego and riches. But there was an era in which passion and humility reigned supreme. **Leon** and **Henry Nissen**, **Sol Spitalnic** and **David Oved** were part of that generation of Australian boxers. *Russell Jackson* brings their compelling stories to light.

Entering the family business can sometimes prove unavoidable – especially when your parents are world champions. **Jessica Fox**, a third-generation canoeist, was well placed to succeed when she started paddling. Now, at the age of just 24, canoeing (slalom) has brought her two Olympics medals, world championships and still more to come. *Carly Adno* gets familiar with the Fox family business.

Tragedy is a theme woven throughout the collection. How could it not? Australia has the highest number of Holocaust survivors per capita outside Israel. Several of the book's subjects are survivors and others are the children or grandchildren of survivors of the Holocaust, which casts a long shadow over their lives. The capital T tragedy that the book's subtitle refers to, is the 1997 **Maccabiah bridge collapse**. What should have been a triumph of Jewish sport and national pride, became anything but. Two decades on, *Timna Jacks* tracks down the families of the victims to discover that their pain and grief endure.

Few clubs have meant more to Melbourne's Jews than the AJAX Football Club – Australia's only all-Jewish senior football team. In 2017, the club stunned footy observers Australia-wide by acquiring the services of AFL premiership coach **Mark Williams**. *Adam McNicol* pays a visit to AJAX to capture the spirit inspired by the arrival of "Choco".

The late 1970s ushered in a new era in Australian cricket. It was the biggest sport of the day and members of the Australian Test team were its rock stars. And for one summer, **Julien Wiener** was part of it all, opening the batting for his country and living the dream. He and *Mark Fine* have an engaging conversation about those glory days.

Few sportspeople of the last decade have aroused the affection and interest of Australian Jews, like **Michael Klinger**. The Mount Scopus alumnus broke records as a teenage cricket prodigy before going on to dominate domestic cricket. His persistent exclusion from national honours dumbfounded everyone who watched him bat. It brought *naches* to the community in 2017 when he was finally picked to play for Australia. *Ronny Lerner* brings us a close encounter with the man they call "Maxy".

Not all Jewish sporting accomplishments are on fields and in arenas. In fact, some records have been captured in snowstorms and white-outs. **Cheryl** and **Nikki Bart** are a unique mother-daughter team who have climbed the Seven Summits – the highest mountains of each of the seven continents. Their dreams to conquer mountains were whipped up at home in the comfort of eastern suburbs of Sydney. *Lexi Landsman* explains what motivates this formidable duo.

Who hasn't wiled away a few late nights with mates in a dingy pool hall, thinking how great it would be to make a living from cue sports? **Robby Foldvari** did just that, progressing from his backyard garage to the great tournaments of the world, and across multiple disciplines. *Simon Morawetz* recounts his story.

Lawn bowls is not a sport well known for athletic prowess. But grit and resilience are hallmarks of the game's greats. *Dashiel Lawrence* introduces the story of one of them, **Denese Brick**, a South African

migrant who arrived in Australia in the late 1980s and went on to play for her adopted country and claim countless state and national titles. Her journey from apartheid Johannesburg to the bowling greens of suburban Melbourne makes for a fascinating tale.

In 1994, Channel Nine entrusted a young, fresh-faced product of Melbourne's Yeshivah College with creating the new live-television program *The Footy Show*. Somehow, it worked. The show became an institution and decades on it's still going. This is *Harvey Silver's* intimate, first-hand account of those heady days.

Data is increasingly driving excellence in sport. From its Melbourne headquarters, Catapult is at the cutting edge of data collection and wearable technology in sport. **Adir Shiffman**, an unconventional businessman with a lifelong passion for new ideas, is helping take Catapult to the world. *Jason Frenkel* shares his close encounter with the irrepressible Shiffman.

The Olympic Games elevate new and inspiring sports stories into the public consciousness every four years. At the 1960 Rome Olympics, a young Melbourne man, **Daryl Cohen**, represented his country in weightlifting. More than half a century later, Australia paused to watch as nineteen-year-old **Steven Solomon** of Sydney took on the world's best sprinters in one of the premier events of the Olympics, the 400 metres final. *Aaron Fetter* reports.

Todd Greenberg's climb up the ranks of sports management in Australia has been impressive. From Stadium Australia (now ANZ Stadium) to the Canterbury Bulldogs and now the National Rugby League, Greenberg has provided sturdy leadership at times of crisis and change. He generously gave his time to *David Weiner* for a fascinating profile.

Every so often a player, neither blessed with talent nor work ethic, inspires the adulation of a generation of fans. Their personality wins out. **Ian Rubin**, a Ukraine-born migrant, was that figure for the National Rugby League in the late 1990s. *Nick Tedeschi* pays tribute to the Adonis from Odessa.

Mention the **Rosenblum** name to rusted-on rugby aficionados

and their eyes light up. First **Myer** and then **Rupert** left their mark on the game. *Michael Visontay* sat down with Rupert to learn more about the player with a unique talent for ball kicking and his playing record at “The Birthplace of Australian Rugby”, Sydney University Football Club.

At crucial times in Australian soccer’s history, one man emerged to change the course of the code. Sir **Frank Lowy**, one-time president of powerhouse Hakoah Sydney City, returned to soccer leadership in the early 2000s to establish a new national body and competition. Several years later he played a key role, taking the Socceroos to the 2006 World Cup. Now in his twilight years, he reflects on his latter-day contribution with *Daniel Garb*.

There is only one table tennis player in the Sport Australia Hall of Fame. **Suzy Javor** dominated her sport like few others, and her career is now officially celebrated alongside some of the all-time greats of sport in this country. *Josh Kay* charts her incredible achievements and years of domination, back from her days as an emerging player in post-war Hungary.

Our collection concludes with the story of **Eva de Jong-Duldig** – an athlete whose sporting talents transcended into other domains of Jewish achievement – arts, writing and business. Tennis was Duldig’s first love. It was her ticket to integration in post-war Melbourne and ultimately a quarter-final appearance at Wimbledon. *Judith Buckrich* honours a stellar career.

These 26 chapters form the basis of our book. But we know for every story included, there is another worthy of being featured.

The glaring omission is **Tal Karp**, and we accept that. She was a star in the old National Women’s Soccer League and played for the Matildas 27 times; we desperately wanted to feature her in *People of the Boot* because she is a genuine Australian Jewish sports champion. But complications at both ends meant that we couldn’t interview her before our deadline. It’s unfortunate, but rest assured, she will be included in any second volume.

As we write this, the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics have

been run and won, and front and centre in the Australian team is **Geoff Lipshut**, the chief executive officer of the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia. Impressive title. Impressive achievements in sports management. And Jews love their skiing. We'll put our hands up for that omission as well.

The 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth are also done and dusted. **Jemima Montag** and **Matthew Levy** made an entire community burst with pride with their gold medals - Montag in the 20km walk, Levy in the Men's S7 50-metre freestyle finals. Alas, it all came too late to feature them in the book, but we hope there will be ample opportunities to celebrate their feats in the future; the same with **Alexandra Kiroi-Bogatyreva**, who claimed a bronze medal in the ball final of the rhythmic gymnastics.

There have been some great Jewish cricketers that we didn't feature. Among them **Ruth Buckstein** who played one Test and 16 One Day Internationals for Australia as an opening batter in the 1980s. She was a handy softballer too.

David Horwitz has played centre for the Waratahs in Super Rugby and from 2018 will play for the Rebels. He is one of the brightest Jewish sports stars of all, but his story hopefully has a way to go and we'll tell it next time.

Mark Shulman, who played half-back for St George in the 1977 New South Wales Rugby Football League premiership team and who captained the Dragons in 1978, politely declined an interview to recap his fine rugby league career.

There have been ten Jewish AFL footballers, but this is not the place to profile them all. And neither is this the place to celebrate the champions of our community who dominated for Maccabi clubs around Australia. Yes, Maccabi is central to Jewish sport in Australia and we would argue one of the most effective community organisations in cultivating Jewish life and identity. But it turned 90 a few years back and staged several outstanding events, which included a commemorative book of its own.

People of the Boot was not created to be the encyclopedia of Australian Jews in sport. Instead, the collection celebrates those who achieved in Australia and on the global stage, on and off the ground and above and beyond Maccabi.

In conceiving this book, we wanted to continue the great Jewish tradition of celebrating triumph. But we also wanted to cast aside well-worn assumptions and stereotypes. We wanted to introduce new ideas about Jewish experience and identity. People of the book they are. But they are so much more.

The stories gathered here are remarkable, affecting and deeply thought-provoking. And thanks to our contributors, they are particularly well told.

We hope you enjoy them.

Dashiel Lawrence & Ashley Browne
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