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## Maccabi Basketball Team Edges Out Israelis

October 26, 2006 - [Jared Shelly](#)

When Igamal Ayali lined up at forward during a recent basketball game in Philadelphia, the 17-year-old Israeli concentrated on shooting with perfect form. He thought about muscling his way into a better position for rebounds. He focused on different ways to defend his opponent.

But perhaps the last thing on his mind was his small village near Nahariya. He and his family sat out part of this summer in bomb shelters during the war.

"It makes me forget and not think about it, and just have fun and play basketball," said Ayali, whose team of 16- to 18-year-olds from northern Israel spent Oct. 9 to Oct. 15 playing teams from Philadelphia; New York; and Princeton, N.J. Sponsored by the America-Israel Friendship League, the Israelis traveled to the St. Joseph University campus Oct. 12 to face off against a team of Philadelphia high-schoolers who've competed in Maccabi competitions.



*A Philly player inbounds during a game against visiting Israeli all-stars.*

In their blue-and-white uniforms, the Israelis seemed to have solid team chemistry, shooting well and playing hard-nosed defense. The game remained close into the second half, when the Philly boys used their speed to create fast-break opportunities, and eventually gain a 64-56 win.

"Too many balls got lost, and we missed too many shots," said Ayali, "but we didn't get to practice in the summer."

Mitchell Kates, a 16-year-old point guard for Philadelphia, proved to have too much speed for the Israelis to handle as the game wore on -- possibly the product of a long day of touring the city. He called participating in the exhibition an "honor."

"It was a very competitive game," he said. "Since we played them in Israel, it was nice for them to play us in America."

Bryan Cohen, 17, a senior who has the size and the shot to be a top college recruit, felt that the Israelis "played really hard, and played real well as a team."

Accompanying the Israelis on their trip was Tal Brody, who led Maccabi Tel Aviv to six European Cup championships. His declaration that "we are on the map" after defeating a



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top-ranked team from Moscow has made him a recognizable name among Israeli sports fans.

"Ninety percent of these guys haven't been out of Israel," said Brody of the team that officially plays its season for Nahariya, but is made up of players from all over the north. "It's a nice experience. They really deserve it after what they experienced, when they couldn't practice basketball after being in the shelters during the war."

Aside from giving the boys the opportunity to visit a foreign nation, the trip also allowed them to get back to competition after too much time off the court.

When not playing ball, the team visited the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building in New York. Here, they checked out the Liberty Bell and even did a "Rocky" impression by running up the art museum steps.

Right before tip-off, Brian Schiff -- coach of the Philadelphia basketball team and chairman of the U.S. Junior program for Maccabi USA Sports for Israel -- stressed that while the Americans look forward to college, the Israelis face their army service.

"They are worried about survival," described Schiff, "not just basketball, the mall and the movies."

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