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*The Beginnings of
Team Torah u-Madda:
Sports and the Mission of
an Americanized Yeshivah,
1916-1940*

The earliest students at the Talmudical Academy (TA, founded in 1916) were an idiosyncratic bunch. A mere handful of teenagers, enrolled at this country's first yeshivah high school, they differed in many essential ways from their fellow second generation American Jews. In an era when most of their contemporaries demonstrated a decreasing interest in upholding the ways of their ancestral past, both daily and on the Sabbath, these religious pupils showed an uncommon commitment to Orthodox practices.¹ If some of them were not fully dedicated to what their parents and their faith dictated, at least they were amenable, or respectful enough of their parents' demands, not to break openly with the ancestral laws while they were yet adolescents at home.² Moreover, at a time when their fellows received little, if any, formal Jewish education, these boys were schooled in a program that augured to raise up a cadre of learned, youthful disciples of the Law.

At the same time, these very-Jewish high schoolers harbored many of the same goals and ambitions as others born on these shores. They desired to succeed professionally and advance economically in this new

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world of opportunity. And the ticket to meeting and competing effectively with both Jews and gentiles in the marketplaces and emporia of America was the possession of a first-rate secular education—certified through a Regents high school diploma. Accordingly, they wanted—or their parents urged and guided them towards—training that would be different both from that of American public school graduates and of their own fathers. If their elders had been the recipients of advanced schooling, it was most likely solely in the religious realm and at an Eastern European yeshivah where secular knowledge was either withheld or grudgingly imparted.³

Even as they trod down their own distinctive educational path, these youngsters also strongly desired to be deemed “regular guys,” as “with it” as all other American kids. For this generation of yeshivah students, there was no better way to prove that they were in league with this country’s way of life and on par with their compatriots than to evince an interest and a proficiency in the culture of American sports. This drive towards normalcy underscored reports that appeared annually in the Talmudical Academy’s student yearbook (the creation of which also bespoke a tendency towards acting like all other secondary school students). There it was proudly observed that “although the students of the Yeshivah are deeply in earnest in all their work they do not overlook the need of a sound physique.”⁴ And, to be sure, it was not Maimonides’ admonition to medieval couch-potatoes that “if one leads a sedentary life and does not take exercise . . . even if he eats wholesome food and takes care of himself in accordance with medical rules, he will throughout his life be subject to aches and pains and his strength will fail him”⁵ that motivated that statement. Rather, it was the teachings of the American public school and settlement house world—the creed that “the physical efficiency of . . . boys and girls . . . [promotes] ideals of courage, honesty, courtesy and strength . . . for their own happiness and the welfare of the State,” not to mention the ethos of informal street games that permeated urban neighborhoods and resonated among students within the house of the Torah.⁶

So disposed, these same student yearbooks contained page after page of reports on intra-mural tilts in baseball, football, basketball, handball and wrestling. TA boys trumpeted that “athletics secured . . . a stronghold in the Yeshiva life.”⁷ Moreover, in every yearbook’s section reserved for graduates’ pictures and brief biographies, most students listed among their achievements membership in one or more varsity or intra-mural teams or leadership in the pupil-run Class Athletic Council.

For example, in 1923, of the twenty-five boys who graduated that spring, fifteen were credited as having participated in some sort of sports extra-curricular activity. The athletes included class president William Berman, also known as “Kid Geff.” The ditty that appeared next to his graduation picture went: “William Berman is our President. A baseball star—oratorically bent.” Rhymed kudos were also extended to his classmate, Morris “Grilly” Grilihas. Of him, it was said: “Grilihas appears to be quite dark. But as an all-around athlete he toes the mark.”⁸

In a similar vein, Talmudical Academy journalists did much to immortalize their own in-class rivalries with the prideful assertion that sports in no way detracted from “their achievement in the ‘mark book.’”⁹ Their only repeated complaint was that the school did not have adequate sports facilities. Enconced as they were in a small building on the Lower East Side, the students used “public parks” for outdoor activities and “class rooms for indoor work.” Sometimes, they would rent out space at the Hamilton Fish Park’s gymnasium for intra-mural battles.¹⁰ In 1926, student scribes noted the particularly annoying drawback to the sports program of having always to play on the road. There “would have been a punchball tournament,” they reported, “if the Hamilton Park policeman had been in good humor. However, the life of a policeman is no ‘bed of roses,’ and a punchball tournament cannot be held according to the grouchy moods of a policeman.”¹¹

Long-time school principal Dr. Shelley Safir, an American Orthodox layman, enthusiastically supported the sports scene at the Talmudic Academy. A graduate of New York public schools, City College of New York, and Columbia University, he came to TA in 1919 from Stuyvesant High School—then already a first class city public school—with the commitment to produce well-rounded American boys. He and his staff of both Jewish and gentile teachers encouraged the youngsters to edit the aforementioned school publications and to organize clubs, debating societies, student councils, and sanitary and discipline squads. They proudly reported that “aside from their truly remarkable scholastic achievements” such as scoring high on Regents and other standardized tests, “students are also doing their fair share in activities pertaining to their social, civic and physical well-being,” including “various types of athletic activities.”¹²

Fellow CCNY grad Mr. M. Schoenbrun, the school’s first staff gym teacher, “licensed to teach physical training in N.Y.C. schools,” may have been the high school boys’ earliest faculty athletic role model.¹³ Moreover, Safir and the other academics did not hide their own interest and

prowess in the athletic realm. In fact, they got a chance to strut their stuff in the annual student-faculty baseball game, held appropriately on Lag ba-Omer. The principal, himself a tennis buff,¹⁴ played center field in the 1923 tilt. Biology teacher Charles Gramet patrolled right field that day under a “cloudless azure sky,” while Reuben Steinbach, from the English Department, flanked Safir in left field. The highly regarded English chairman Joseph T. Shipley along with Joseph Lookstein, a young rabbinical student, handled the pitching chores. “[G]ood fortune” smiled that day only on the student varsity team as it irreverently “scalped . . . the faculty . . . 13-4 . . . amid enthusiastic cheering and facetious remarks of a large number of spectators.”¹⁵

Dr. Bernard Revel, who grew up and received his rabbinical training in Eastern Europe, had no personal affinity for, or experience with, sports activity. Where he came from—the world of Torah of the Kovno and Telshe *yeshivot*—athleticism certainly was not honored, and often was not even countenanced. Within his traditional community, reverence and concern for the head, for the intellect, was where the emphasis lay, possibly to the exclusion of the cultivation of the body. The heroes of his Jewish street, the *sheineh Yiddin*, were those lucky and knowledgeable enough to engage in full-time study. Arguably, Dr. Revel, a reputed precocious “*illui*” (genius) whom his family raised to be a scholar, was one of these Jewish “beautiful people,” trained to work with his mind and not with his muscles.

That rarified status, accorded to this budding Torah luminary, was a reality for only a tiny minority in Eastern Europe. Most men had calluses on their hands from their labors as butchers, bakers, porters, and coachmen. If they were strong, it was not from sports training. It is possible that, in keeping with Jewish tradition, Dr. Revel may have participated in outdoor games on Lag ba-Omer as a child, but it is certain that while in Lithuania, he never heard talk about the value of Jews producing well-rounded scholar athletes.¹⁶

Upon arriving on these shores, Dr. Revel, an uncommon wide-ranging intellect, was a quick study. If he came off the boat—like most Jewish newcomers to America—unaware and uncomprehending of the power that sports held over the lives the children of immigrants, by the time he established the TA as a branch of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), he realized that American boys loved sports.¹⁷ He understood that to deny them this healthy pleasure would not aid his cause of breaking the public schools’ hold on the Jewish community. At that time in America, almost all immigrant Jewish boys, including the

sons of Orthodox rabbis from the most observant homes, and 100% of the girls attended these bastions of assimilation.¹⁸ Strategically speaking, Dr. Revel reasoned that there were many bright young men in his community who would avail themselves of his school's intensive Torah study program before they pursued secular careers, but he knew that they would only enroll if they could be convinced that TA graduates would not be disadvantaged when they went up against public school graduates academically, socially and culturally. To rope in these potential students, Dr. Revel's recruitment pitch was that his institution could produce youngsters ready to take their places within the "public life of the community" on an "equal footing" with those schooled within the so-called "Temples of Americanization." As one of Dr. Revel's backers boasted, the TA "renders the student as broad-minded and as liberal in his views, though he remains thoroughly observant as a Jew, as the best product of our public school." In the end, these students, it was said, would not only feel comfortable with all others, but would win in their battles for slots and spots within this country's economy and society.¹⁹

Thus, while Dr. Revel certainly had no interest in participating in a school sports event—even the idea of throwing out a ceremonial first-pitch at a Lag ba-Omer game was foreign to him—the yeshivah head did have a sense, in keeping with his reading of Jewish tradition, that the promotion of physical fitness was part of a school's job in molding an integrated American Orthodox personality. Thus, he wrote in 1926 that

the ultimate aim of [Jewish education] is not the mere acquisition of knowledge or skill or the mere preparation of an individual for a particular task in life, but the building of character and the harmonious development of man's physical, mental and spiritual faculties.

A yeshivah in this country was now in the business of raising up all-American Orthodox young men. Athletics could be part of the message of "synthesis" that Dr. Revel always preached. In a word, Yeshiva could have within its midst what I will call "Team Torah u-Madda."²⁰

We do not know whether Dr. Revel ever had to defend this novel part of his modern yeshivah program to those within, or without, his faculty who might castigate athleticism as a waste of time—*bittul Torah*—unfitting for true students of the Torah who should be with the Law day and night. But it is certain that there was at least one visitor and potential *Rosh Yeshivah* at RIETS who would not have been pleased with these goings-on at the institution.

Interestingly enough, we are aware of this guest's disbelief at the possibility that sports could be countenanced in a Torah institution from his visit to an American yeshivah that did not subscribe to a "Team Torah u-Madda" orientation. Reportedly, in the late 1920s, R. Shimon Shkop, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Sha'arei Torah Yeshivah in Grodno, Poland, visited Mesifta Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. There, he was troubled to see that during "recess time . . . the boys were playing a game of baseball in the [school] year." When the esteemed Eastern European guest saw the event in progress "he was astounded and full of wonder and did not want to believe his eyes." He was chagrined that "students of the yeshivah, who study God's Torah, could spend their time in such folly."²¹ And this activity was at a school that, under R. Shrage Feivel Mendlowitz, set out to avoid the "strategic retreats and compromise" that in his view undermined Dr. Revel's Torah institution. (However, it is evident that they, too, made their own accommodations to the reality that as much as their students were *frum* boys, they were also Brooklyn boys. Like their counterparts in Manhattan, these youngsters loved the street games that were irresistible in the American environment.)²²

What would R. Shkop have thought and said of the more formal embrace of sports at the Talmudical Academy, within its home base of RIETS? Had this visitor or any of Dr. Revel's permanent Talmud faculty members raised their eye-brows about this deviation from the received religious opinion of the Old World, he had at least one esteemed colleague on-board and one rabbinic exhortation from back in Eastern Europe in his corner.

In 1922, Dr. Revel scored a coup when he convinced Polish-born R. Solomon Polachek, known as the "*Meitsheter Illui*"—the "Genius from Meitshet"—to join his faculty.²³ It was a wise move to bring in a talmudic luminary to shore up the reputation of the school as a Torah center even as the yeshivah was making modern moves. As far as we know, during his seven years in New York, R. Polachek was silent on the importance of gyms and teams within the school, but he reportedly harbored a positive view of *yeshivot* encouraging students' physical fitness. While still in Eastern Europe, or so the story goes, R. Polachek and his friend, R. Mayer Berlin, once happened upon some youngsters from a gymnasium-school in Brisk, Lithuania, and observed them running and jumping around happily in athletic activity. R. Polachek apparently remarked "with sorrow, why didn't we have this [activity] when we were youngsters. It would not have hurt our ability to study if we permitted ourselves some time every day to run and jump around."²⁴ It was this

Maimonidean-style point of view that Dr. Revel could have counted on if he were ever challenged regarding what was going on in his Torah school.

R. Polachek's senior and greatly-esteemed contemporary, the Hafez Ḥayyim (Rabbi Israel Meir ha-Kohen Kagan), went even further in expressing sentiments that Dr. Revel could have found useful. Using his own life experience as a model, R. Kagan once publicly regretted that he had not devoted enough time in his youth to physical fitness. A sounder body, in his view, would have helped him become an even greater scholar. Too many hours at his books had weakened his eyesight. As an adult, he was obliged to abstain from reading for two years. Speaking in 1893 to his disciples in the yeshivah of Radin, R. Kagan said:

Do not study overmuch. Man must preserve the body so that it is not weakened, so that it does not fall ill, and for that it is crucial to rest and relax, to breathe fresh air. A walk should be taken toward evening, or sit at home and rest. When possible, a swim in the river is good for strengthening the body. Overindulgence in study is the advice of the evil inclination, which counsels working too hard in order to weaken the body, after which the person will be obliged to refrain entirely from Torah study, so that in the end his reward is his loss.²⁵

Perhaps Dr. Revel never had to hard sell this part of RIETS' *raison d'être* to those around him. For all of their affinity for Old World yeshivah values, he and most of his religious faculty members were also colleagues or disciples of R. Abraham Isaac Kook. At the very time when the American yeshivah was changing, the famous Chief Rabbi of Palestine was advocating the value of physical fitness, and even of sports, among Orthodox Jews.

R. Kook's religious-Zionist stance regarding physical fitness was a response to Max Nordau's hard swipe, some years earlier, at the sedentary and decidedly non-competitive life-style of religious Eastern European Jews. In 1898, Nordau, a secular Zionist, had called upon the Second Zionist Congress to raise up a new "muscular" Jew and Judaism. He had prayed that his movement would enlist proud, athletic Jews who would help their people fight against all comers and earn for them respected places within the modern world. Nordau's new Jewish physical man was lionized as Judaism's best. Indeed, his very buff appearance was contrasted with "the underdeveloped and frail body of Jewish men . . . produced by the experience of studying in a yeshiva."²⁶

For R. Kook, it was a fundamental article of faith and a life-long point of emphasis that Orthodox Jews had to take part in the incipient political revival of the Jewish people. As he saw it, to ultimately bring

libertine Zionism under the rule of the Torah required that Orthodox Jews—even the most intellectually-inclined yeshivah student—had to develop sound bodies to complement their bright minds and holy souls. “Our spiritual emphasis” he wrote,

ignored the sanctity of the body, physical health and vigor. Let us remember that the Jew possesses a Divine body no less than a divine spirit. Our regeneration entails a synthesis of the spiritual and physical, vibrant flesh and blood, sturdy organs, and a glowing spirit sustained by firm muscles.

For R. Kook, the “physical-mental restoration . . . [of] frail Torah scholars . . . represents a cardinal religious obligation.”²⁷

R. Kook’s activist views did not sit well with most of Palestine’s old-line Orthodox rabbis. He also had more than his share of outspoken detractors back in Eastern Europe and even in America. R. Shkop is one example of an opponent of his ideology. R. Kook’s call to athletic arms, however, should have received a respectful hearing in Dr. Revel’s realm. Precisely at that point, in the early 1920s, that sports was gaining a firm toe-hold at the Talmudical Academy, the yeshivah’s president was linking his school institutionally with the nascent American branch of Mizrachi (Religious-Zionists). In fact, for a while, in the late 1910s, R. Mayer Berlin had been a temporary head of RIETS at a time when Revel was away from the yeshivah tending to pressing family business woes. So, R. Polacheck’s old walking partner, R. Berlin, had a history with Revel’s Talmud faculty.

For the record, Revel never did acknowledge publicly any affinity for this part of R. Kook’s Torah, even if the Palestinian rabbi’s works were read with pride, interest, and devotion within his school’s circles. But Revel’s building activities, as we will see, suggested a kinship with R. Kook’s physical fitness message. Later on in Yeshiva’s history, R. Kook’s teaching would be explicitly invoked to support the expansion of sports’ presence at the New York Torah institution.²⁸

The moment the yeshivah’s athletics enthusiasts hoped for seemed to have arrived in 1928 when Dr. Revel finalized plans not only to append a college to the Talmudical Academy, but to move the entire operation to a commodious campus in Washington Heights in northern Manhattan. With this move, his grand design reached full maturity. Now it would be possible for Orthodox men to stay within their own religious environment through their college years, keep up with their Torah learning, and acquire advanced secular training, just like so many other Jews were obtaining at neighboring CCNY fifty blocks south on

St. Nicholas Heights. They could do it all academically without having to put up with challenges to their faith and practice. At that time, even a predominantly Jewish school like “City” made no accommodations for those who missed late Friday afternoon classes—or a sports practice or game—to keep their Sabbath. Left unsaid from official school sources, but clearly implied to students, was the notion that only at Yeshiva College could Orthodox Jewish boys be real college men. There alone could they experience a full-extra-curricular campus life.²⁹

A “physical culture building” was actually among the eight structures contemplated for the new uptown venue. Had this vision become a reality, it would have been possible for these Orthodox undergraduates—both future rabbis and the well-grounded laymen—to while away some time exercising on the parallel bars or still rings or shooting some baskets in the gymnasium.³⁰

As fate would have it, when Yeshiva College opened its campus’ doors uptown in 1929, it was without a gym. Seven of the eight buildings for the envisioned complex were not built; when the Great Depression hit America that year, Dr. Revel and his followers found that they barely had sufficient funds to complete even one structure. The “temporary gymnasium” situated in the basement of the lone school building, notorious for its low ceiling and poor ventilation, would long be the locus for the courses in physical education required of college freshmen and sophomores. A generation would pass before the financially strapped institution would even begin to think of constructing a first-rate gym.³¹

Still, student interest in sports at the Talmudical Academy and Yeshiva College continued unabated. Indeed, “Team Torah u-Madda”’s athletic “program” took a major step forward when two sister schools began fielding inter-scholastic and inter-collegiate teams in the 1930’s. Followers of the Blue and White basketball squad were enormously proud when their high-schoolers defeated clubs like the Tremont Young Israel, Eastern District Evening High School, the Pawnees Athletic Club, or the American Zionist Association outfit.³² On the college level, a group of “students got together and started a movement of forming teams to represent . . . [their] Alma Mater” as early as 1931. Basketball was the flagship sport, but varsity tennis also had its devotees, as did baseball. In 1935, Dr. Safir made known his interest in the college promoting tennis, and there was talk on campus of establishing a swim team. There was no pool facility in the offing, however.³³

In any event, 1931, the first year of Yeshiva College sports, witnessed the basketball team beat a club team called “The Flashes,” a local church

group from Saviours Atonement, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America's squad. The latter match-up must have resembled a Yeshiva alumni game. Not only did many of the student-athletes from the Conservative institution come from Orthodox backgrounds, but a high percentage of these rabbis-in-training had been pupils as high-schoolers at Dr. Revel's schools. This Jewish inter-denominational rivalry would continue for another generation.³⁴

Three years after this first noteworthy tilt, the Orthodox club stepped up in class when it took on the City College Evening Session. The most memorable and enjoyable win in 1936 was against the "highly touted Central Jewish Institute courtmen." This was, once again, an instance when the Orthodox school played against another significant Jewish educational institution, possessed of its own different approach to synthesizing "Americanism and Judaism."³⁵ For the record, Moe Krieger's "freak shot in the closing seconds clinch[ed] the game for good Ol' Yeshiva."³⁶

Even when Yeshiva lost to more quality clubs like the junior varsities of LIU and Manhattan College, Yeshiva students were proud of their team; the very existence of their competitive squads evidenced to the world that they—second generation American Orthodox students—were regular guys. In 1935, the editors of the student newspaper, *The Commentator*, spoke for many on their campus when they declared that "more than any other college organization, the Yeshiva College basketball team has been instrumental in uprooting [the] misconception . . . that Yeshiva College . . . is an eastern anachronistic product transplanted artificially to a soil totally inimical to it." They were so proud that "time and again in its intercollegiate encounters, the stands were amazed at the presence of a Yeshiva team." Two years later, student sports columnist Abe Novick chimed in that "the value of an athletic program . . . is the demonstration that there is no inherent quarrel between the cloistered academic life and collegiate sports. The fact that a Yeshiva is not necessarily an old-worldly anachronism withdrawn from reality is what counts." And, in 1938, Jacob Goldman, Novick's successor as writer of the "On the Sidelines" column, added similarly that "there can be no doubt that the basketball team has been in a large measure responsible for the attainment of the goal we have been striving for the past ten years. . . . No longer are you met with queer gazes of wonder and ignorance when you explain that you attend Yeshiva College." The "Team Torah u- Madda" concept was coming of age, and at least for students, helped define their modern yeshivah's mission.³⁷

Indeed, for a decidedly low-key program, Yeshiva's sports activities received some noteworthy national exposure. At first, the Boston *Jewish Advocate* was amused by reports that Yeshiva College was fielding sports teams. It predicted that headlines like "Rabbi Cohen intercepted a pass from Ziffkovich . . . may soon be seen on the sporting pages." The *Advocate* also reacted to the news that "next spring it is planned to have a baseball and track teams, and ultimately a football team," with the facetious expectation of "sitting in the rooting section of the Yankee Stadium to cheer the first Yeshiva College football team. Rah, rah, Yeshiva."³⁸

However, in December of 1935, the *Advocate's* observations took on a more serious tone when it reported on what appeared in *The Commentator*. Expecting to see "the paper devoted to solemn and somewhat involved treatises on Talmudic law, with occasional admonitions towards adherence to traditional Judaism," it was pleased to leaf through a student organ "full of pep, dash and gossip." The "rabbinical student sports editor" was extolled for "master[ing] sports language" as he "narrat[ed] the exploits of the Yeshiva College basketball team" and reported on intense intra-mural tussles. For these outsiders, it was "a most revealing paper indeed," as it signified the passing of the "days when the orthodox rabbi was characterized by long beard, 'payeth' [sidelocks], and complete withdrawal from everyday life. Today our young rabbis-in-training attend smokers, play basketball, study embryology, and are just as collegiate as students of engineering, law or business administration." And, from the *Advocate's* point of view, this change was very welcome. "Our rabbis," it continued, "are now in addition to being learned more human and [are] more understanding of human problems. The requirements of their office are such as to demand wide contacts, as well as Talmudic erudition."³⁹

For Yeshiva youngsters to maintain their glowing reputation, the Blue and White's players and their growing legion of fans had to deport themselves with the manners and perspective befitting men of the Torah when they took on gentile and other Jewish opponents in Orthodoxy's home. Back in the 1920's, TA student leaders had boasted that they and their classmates "were different." They "know just where to stop." Now, fears were expressed that Yeshiva hoopsters and their supporters did not know their limits and were getting caught up in emulating a dark side of competitive inter-collegiate sports. They were adopting a "win at all costs" attitude that engendered ill will between opponents. Sometimes, the varsity was criticized for subtle social oversights, like the time student editorialists complained that "it's too bad Yeshiva has no officially recognized cheer. The varsity boys were at a loss as to what to use for a

cheer after the game.” They finally resorted to the old familiar “‘three cheers’ for the visitors.”

Sometimes, there were real and troubling goings on that were roundly criticized. For example, in 1939, student journalists were outraged that “visiting teams” were reportedly subjected to “poor refereeing, unsatisfactory timekeeping, excessive roughness and poor sportsmanship on the Yeshiva court.” That small, inadequate gym was turning into a snake pit. The word was out to “teams coming to Yeshiva . . . that they would be faced with a set of undesirable conditions that would be a handicap to them.” Intense players—and, one can imagine, fans as well—were reminded that “basketball as an extra-curricular activity finds its *raison d’être* in the sportsmanship and clean fun exhibited in the keen rivalry of two well-trained and equal teams, rather than in an excessive desire to win games.”⁴⁰

What critics were saying now was that, if not handled properly, athletics at Yeshiva might cross into the foul territory of constituting a *hillul ha-Shem*, a desecration of God’s holy name. Zealousness for sports—this secular creed that placed the highest premium on victory, often at all costs—augured to elevate the world of fitness and fun and games to unconscionable heights, inimical and detrimental to the teachings of Judaism. Here, as in so many other aspects of modern life, once Orthodox Jews chose to embrace the best of the outside world, they had to develop the right guidelines for their continued participation.

By the early 1940s, Yeshiva sportsmen had their marching orders. They could have teams like all other colleges demonstrating to the public that “Yeshiva was not a relic of the middle ages.”⁴¹ A cheering squad could even back the ball clubs outfitted in white cardigan sweaters, with a large blue Y on their chests. These boosters, an all-male squad, could “tumble, jump and holler as they presented a pop-eyed view of Yeshiva’s spirit in sports.”⁴² That is, if the players and the “program” maintained their perspective as Orthodox student-athletes.⁴³ Moreover, if they made all the rights moves, on and off the court, they not only showed the Jewish, and the wider world, how Americanized they and their school had become; those on the team who were Orthodox rabbis-in-training also developed a social skill that could help them relate to their future youthful congregants, just like the Jewish Theological Seminary fellows whom they regularly were beating on the hardwood. Indeed, in subsequent decades, Yeshiva players would be taken out “on the road” as institutional standard bearers.

Beginning in the late 1940s, these athletes would do more than per-

sonally refute canards about the alleged orientalism of their school. Moving from a defensive to an offensive stance, they would project Orthodoxy as a faith to which the masses of American Jews could relate in the battle that would begin after World War II for the next generation of Jews.

In sum, in the period 1915-1940, under Dr. Bernard Revel's direction, a degree of reverence for the body—an exalted Maimonidean principle—was deemed appropriate for a modern Orthodox student. Beyond that, the idea of an Orthodox scholar-athlete of whom the institution could be proud—a Torah-Madda possibility—was affirmed. A foreign cultural phenomenon that had previously been largely unknown, if not definitely un-welcomed, among Orthodox Jews, had become part of a modern yeshivah's life and mission.

Notes

1. For a full consideration of the patterns of non-observance among large segments of American Jewry who attended Orthodox synagogues of that time, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Twentieth-Century American Orthodoxy's Era of Non-Observance, 1900-1960," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 9 (2000): 87-107.
2. For the story of a Talmudical Academy student who broke personally with his family's Orthodox religious values, in part because of his interest in American sports, see the biography of Louis J. Yager in Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter with American Sports* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2005), 79-82.
3. For a history of the founding and mission of the Talmudical Academy, see Seth Taylor, *Between Tradition and Modernity: A History of the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy* (New York, 1991).
4. *The Elchanite* (1925): 40.
5. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot De'ot*, 4:1. On Maimonides' attitude towards physical activity, see Meir Baskhi, "Physical Culture in the Writings of Maimonides" [Hebrew], in *Physical Education and Sports in Jewish History and Culture: Proceedings of an International Seminar*, ed. Uri Simri (Natanya, Israel, 1973), 11-18, 50.
6. See J. Thomas Jable, "The Public Schools Athletic League of New York City: Organized Athletics for City Schoolchildren, 1903-1914," reprinted in Steven Riess, *The American Sporting Experience: A Historical Anthology of Sport in America* (New York, 1984), 234. On the importance of informal, unsupervised games in the lives of the children of immigrants, see Cary Goodman, *Choosing Sides: Playground and Street Life on the Lower East Side* (New York, 1976).
7. *The Elchanite Jr.* (January, 1926): 9.
8. *The Elchanite* (1923): 15, 17.
9. *The Elchanite Jr.* (January, 1925): 43.
10. See Safir's report on athletic facilities, "[Report to] The University of the State of New York, The State Department of Education, Albany" (May, 1921) (Norman Abrams Collection, Yeshiva University Archives).

11. *The Elchanite* (1928): 88.
12. The Academy's first principal, Solomon Hurwitz, died in 1919 after only three years in his position. Safir served from 1919-1963. Regarding Safir's goals for the school and its students, see Shelley R. Safir, "Our Next Step," *The Elchanite* (June, 1925): 13-14.
13. On the qualifications of M. Schoenbrun, see "Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of Talmudical Academy for the School Year Ending July 31, 1919 to the University of the State of New York" (Norman Abrams Collection, Yeshiva University Archives).
14. See *The Commentator* (March 18, 1935): 4.
15. For a report on the faculty-student ball game, see *The Annual Elchanite* (1923): 86.
16. For retrospective studies of the socialization and education of children in nineteenth century Eastern Europe, see Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York, 1952), 74-77, 341-43, 353, 391, Emanuel Gamoran, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education* (New York, 1924), 112-13 and Diane K. Roskies and David G. Roskies, *The Shtetl Book* (New York, 1975), 150, 158, 211 and *passim*. For another vision of Jews as non-sportsmen in Eastern Europe, see Chaim Bermant, *The Jews* (New York, 1977), 180. See also Cary Goodman, "(Re)Creating Americans at the Educational Alliance," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (Winter, 1979): 19-20. See below in text for a discussion of Max Nordau's biting critique of the lack of physicality of yeshivah students.
17. For a raconteur's vision of the hold sports had over children of immigrants and of the immigrants' lack of comprehension of this powerful, foreign force, see Irving Howe, *The World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York, 1976), 182. For a newspaper editorialist's understanding of the difficulties immigrants had with their children's new avocations see "Adjusting to the New World," *Readings in Modern Jewish History*, ed. Eliezer L. Ehrmann (New York, 1977), 371.
18. For a superior study of the immigrant Jew's relationship with the transformative public school system, see Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (New York, 1986).
19. For a supporter's views of Dr. Revel's plans, see Isaac Rosengarten, "Order Out of Chaos in Jewish Education," *Jewish Forum* (November, 1920): 520.
20. See Bernard Revel, "Jewish Education," *Jewish Forum* (March, 1926): 10-11. For more on Revel's views of "harmonization" or "synthesis" as a goal of education at his modern yeshiva, see Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva: Orthodoxy, Higher Education and American Judaism* (New York, 1988), 90-91 and *passim*.
21. For a brief biography of R. Shkop, see Aaron Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Philadelphia, 1972), 119. Rothkoff notes that R. Shkop was in America from 1928-1929 and almost became a *Rosh Yeshivah* at RIETS. On the report on the Eastern European rabbi's visit to Torah Vodaath, see D.B. Schwartz, *Arzot ha-Ḥayyim* (Brooklyn, 5752 [1992]), 16b, noted in Aaron Ahrend, "Physical Culture in Rabbinical Literature in Modern Times," *Korot: The Israel Journal of the History of Medicine and Science* 15 (2001): 61.

22. For the best introduction to the history and outlook at Mendlowitz's school in the period between the First and Second World Wars, see William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (New York, 1982), 26-51. For discussions of Mendlowitz's agenda by his followers, see Yonoson Rosenblum, *Reb Shraga Feivel: The Life and Times of Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, the Architect of Torah in America*. (New York, 2001), 78, 90. For a discussion of sport's "irresistible force" upon second generation American Jewish youth even within this Brooklyn community, see Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter*, chapter 7.
23. On R. Polachek's experiences at R. Revel's institution, see Rothkoff, 65-73.
24. On the Berlin-Polachek relationship, see Mayer Bar Ilan Berlin, *Mi-Volozhin ad Yerushalayim* (new edition, Tel Aviv, 1971).
25. See R.P. Mankin in *Sha'arei Ziyon* (Tammuz-Elul, 5694 [1934]) quoted in Ahrend, "Physical Culture," 63.
26. Max Nordau, "Muscular Judaism," in *Max Nordau: Zionist Writings* (Cologne and Leipzig, 1909), 390.
27. Zvi Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook* (Jerusalem, 1991), 104-7.
28. For a discussion of ideological and political opposition to R. Kook's views on sports see Ahrend, "Physical Culture," 73-77. See Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva*, 67-81 for the history of the integration of the Mizrahi-initiated Teachers Institute within Dr. Revel's American yeshivah community.
29. On the problems Orthodox students of the 1920s had in balancing religious values and college educational policies, see Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva*, 85-88.
30. See *The Yeshiva College: What It Is And What It Stands For, A Challenge and a Promise to American Jewry* [1927?] (pamphlet on file at the Yeshiva University Archives) for discussions and artist's rendering of the proposed eight building campus.
31. Yeshiva College was established in 1928 and was housed in temporary quarters until the opening of the campus in 1929. See Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva*, 82-89 on the founding of Yeshiva College. Information regarding course offerings in physical education at the College and where the courses were given can be found in the *Yeshiva College Catalogue* (1928-1929): 9, 31, (1933-1934): 36.
32. *The Elchanite* (1938): 82.
33. Basketball, then generally the most popular sport played by Jews in America, was similarly the flagship sport at the Talmudical Academy and Yeshiva College. Baseball teams, as well as the discussed swimming and tennis teams, would have to meet away from Washington Heights; Yeshiva had no pool or tennis facility. On these "minor" sports, see *The Elchanite* (June, 1938): 82; *The Commentator* (April 8, 1935): 3.
34. For a study of graduates of Dr. Revel's institution who went on to continue their Jewish religious studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary, see Gurock, "Yeshiva Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary," *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 1, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York, 1997), 473-513.
35. On the founding of the Central Jewish Institute, its mission and range of activities, see "Dedication of the Central Jewish Institute," *American Hebrew* (May 26, 1916):78 and Joseph Epstein, "The Early History of the Central Jewish Institute: The Emergence of a Jewish Community School Center," (unpub-

- lished M.A. thesis, Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, 1978).
36. For college basketball schedules, results, and the highlights noted, see *Masmid* (1931): 35; (1933): 64; (1934): 62; (1938): 66-67 and *The Commentator* (March 1, 1935): 3.
 37. See *The Commentator* (December 19, 1935): 2 for editorial support for the importance of the basketball team, Abe Novick, "On the Sidelines," *The Commentator* (April 7, 1937): 3 and Jack Goldman, "On the Sidelines," *The Commentator* (September 24, 1938): 3.
 38. See Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel*, 137 for the fanciful report about a Yeshiva football team.
 39. See *The Commentator* (December 19, 1935): 2 for the *Advocate's* quotation about sports at Yeshiva.
 40. *The Commentator* (September 1, 1939) : 4, (January 4, 1939): 4
 42. See *The Commentator* (February 19, 1942): 5.