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Partisanship and Sport: The Unique Case of Politics and Sport in Israel

Nurit Reshef and Jeremy Paltiel
University of Alberta

Israel represents a unique case of an immigrant society formed on the basis of an ideological movement. This has had a profound impact on the development and organization of sport and has led to the institutionalization of sport within a highly politicized framework. The purpose of this paper is to show how the formation and development of each sport organization is intertwined with Israeli political evolution. In addition, the impact of politics on the organization of sport and the recent movement away from partisan sports organizations are discussed.

Sport in Israel was first assimilated into the ideological framework of Zionism, then Zionist parties appropriated sport clubs as tools of partisan competition. Eventually sport became a metaphor for politics, and marginalized groups used sport loyalties to demonstrate disaffection from the political establishment. Where sport is explicitly political, fan support can become a measure of political disaffection and a significant element in the process of political realignment.

Our discussion will be divided into several periods to show how the formation and development of each sport club serves as a paradigm of Israeli political evolution. We will begin with the relationship between Zionist ideology and sport in the formation of the Maccabi movement. In the second stage we address the partisan politicization of sport by Hapoel under the political hegemony of labor Zionism. The third stage follows the establishment of the state of Israel, when this political hegemony invited a backlash from marginalized groups: Some shifted allegiance to Likud and its sport association, Beitar, while the religious groups used sport as a target for protests against the secularization of Israeli society. Yet, despite fierce rivalry between competing partisan clubs, sport associations act together as a cartel to limit formation of politically unaffiliated sport clubs. The sport establishment, like the political establishment, is frozen into a pattern of political affiliation from a previous era. Today, however, with Israeli society becoming increasingly middle class and less organized ideologically, there are signs of evolution away from partisan sport organizations.

Nurit Reshef is a doctoral student in the Physical Education and Sport Studies Department at the University of Alberta. Jeremy Paltiel is with the Department of Political Science, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alta. T6G 2H9 Canada.

Historical Background

Israel presents an example of the fragment thesis advanced by Louis Hartz (Hartz, 1964). As with all immigrant and settler societies, the development of Israeli society was profoundly influenced by the social context and ideological currents of the place of origin of its founders, East Central Europe. Sport, like so much else in Jewish life at that time, became a part of the complex social and political changes associated with a Jewish national revival, an aspect of the reaction of Jews to the national and revolutionary movements that surrounded them.

Zionism was one solution to what was termed the "Jewish problem": Following the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century, the ideas of nationalism and of universal citizenship spread rapidly throughout Europe. Jews were a minority scattered throughout Europe but concentrated principally in the Russian Empire and in the Polish part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On the heels of their own enlightenment movement, the *Haskalah*, Jews also wanted to participate in the broad movement of European culture. However, even those Jews willing to assimilate into the majority culture faced hostility from nationalists who saw them as alien. Jewish communities eventually divided into those who retained their traditional cultural and religious identity (the orthodox), those who engaged in various degrees of assimilation, those who believed in a radical transcendence of nationalism through international socialism, and those who responded to European nationalism with a national revival of their own, the Zionists. Zionism replicated this spectrum of ideologies—religious, secular, militant nationalist, and militant socialist.

Zionists took the symbols of the 19th century national revivals in Eastern Europe and applied them to the Jews. Where Central European nationalists romanticized peasantry and the soil, Zionists tried to create a new type of Jewish farmer-pioneer, the *Halutz*. Zionists wanted to replace the bookish, reclusive and insular Jew of the ghetto with the activist, vigorous pioneer. Physical culture became an expression of the new culture of activism and a symbol of the rebellion against the narrow confines of the ghetto and the East European *Shtetle* (Jewish township).

The first public discussion over the establishment of Jewish sport organizations originated at the second Political World Zionist Congress in 1897. Dr. Max Nordau, an eminent Jewish leader, spoke of discarding the "shtetle mentality" and developing "muscular Jewry": "We forgot to exercise and stand straight. We shall renew our youth, we shall develop a wide chest, strong limbs and a courageous look... Let Hebrew sport clubs grow and flourish" (Nordau, cited in Abiram, Benaiahu, Gil, & Penon, 1966, p. 457).

Maccabi

The first Jewish sport organization, Maccabi, was founded in 1902. It was modeled after a similar Slavic nationalist sport organization of East Europe, the Sokol. In creating a separate Jewish sport organization, the Zionists were at once tapping the frustrations of secularized Jews who were excluded from participation in Gentile sport organizations and who were therefore denied participation in an important aspect of secular leisure. In the United States, for example, Jews were not accepted into Christian community centers such as the YMCA. In Germany, sport club members were asked to eat pork and potatoes, thus preventing Jews, who are not allowed to eat pork, from joining. Russian sport organizations, such as the Sokol and the Poteshnye, had an underlying "great-power" ideology that

was explicitly pan-Slavic and anti-Semitic and that frequently banned Jews from membership in Russian sport clubs (Riordan, 1977). Zionism turned discrimination into a new revolutionary impulse.

The name "Maccabi" is associated with the historical hero, Judah the Maccabi, who fought against the imposition of Hellenic customs on Jews in Israel in 165 B.C. The name thus connotes power, pride, and self-esteem (Alouf, 1973). The worldwide Maccabi organization became formally associated with Zionism only in 1921. However, ever since its introduction into Palestine in 1911, Maccabi imposed stringent nationalist requirements on its members. For example, they were to speak only Hebrew even though it was not yet the vernacular. Consistent with their goal of physical culture, they also fought for Jewish labor. In 1913, Maccabi joined with other social associations to boycott the games held by the Jewish settlement of Rehovot, thus protesting the hiring of Arab labor by local farmers. Consequently these games lost their significance for the Jewish community.[1]

Hapoel

Before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Zionist settlers in Palestine (the *Yishuv*) brought with them the ideological allegiances of their origins. In keeping with the ideological atmosphere of late 19th-century and early 20th-century East Europe, many settlers were inspired by socialism. Indeed, the ideas of nationalism emphasizing people and soil and the socialist emphasis on labor were combined. The earliest consequence of this came just before the First World War in the fight for "Hebrew labor." Originally, Zionist settlement followed the pattern of European colonies in Asia and Africa—raising commercial crops for export using hired native (Arab) labor. This ran counter to the ideology of the labor Zionism, the ideals of return to the soil and "redemption through toil." Not only did it undermine the self-sufficiency of the Jewish community but it also involved exploitation of an alien labor force. In order to enforce their concept of Zionist colonization, labor Zionists founded the Histadrut trade union, the General Federation of Workers in Israel.

In an effort to realize the goal of a self-sufficient economic entity, the Histadrut grew to become a multifaceted and highly articulated set of institutions creating enterprises, providing health insurance, and acting as a trade union (see Figure 1). Before 1948 the Histadrut provided the Jewish community with all institutions and services needed to maintain a community (Merhav, 1980). As the importance of the Histadrut to the Jewish community in Palestine grew, so did the political importance of the Labor Zionists. By the 1930s, labor had achieved a dominant political position in the Yishuv. When immigration restrictions were gradually applied by the British authorities in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Jewish Agency for Palestine—an arm of the Zionist movement—allocated immigration permits to representative Jewish parties in proportion to their strength in the Yishuv. Political parties and their associated institutions thus became more than agents of political representation since they were directly involved in the selection and absorption of potential immigrants. At the same time, they operated as a cartel in managing the institutions of the protostate.

To counteract the perceived negative political effect of Maccabi, the Histadrut and the labor bloc created a new sport organization called *Hapoel* (the worker) in 1927. Hapoel members believed in the synthesis of Jewish nationalism with a socialist blueprint for a better society; they believed that a Jewish state

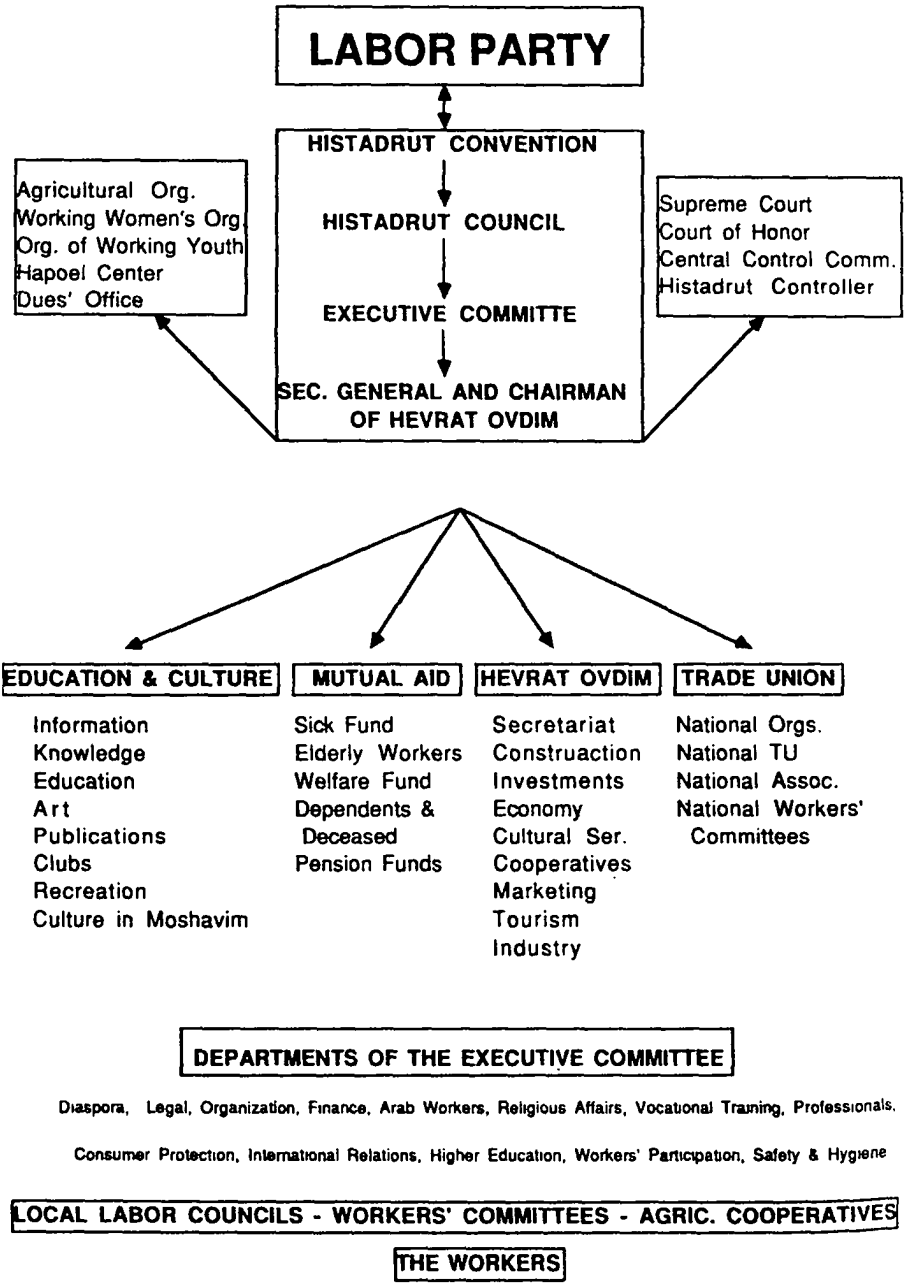

Figure 1 — The general federation of workers in Israel (adapted from Friedman, 1976).

would be built upon Jewish labor and that the individual Jew would be redeemed through physical work (Isaac, 1981). Seeking to create a mass movement, Hapoel leaders recruited both women and men as well as European ("Ashkenazi") and Afro-Asian ("Spharadi") Jews. To give these various groups and individuals a sense of belonging to one movement, Hapoel leaders encouraged them to participate in mass political events, such as May Day, which Hapoel celebrated with sport festivals and red-flag rallies.

The Hapoel organization advocated sport without competition. Their major slogan was "Alafim [thousands] and not Alufim [champions]." Indeed, during Hapoel's first few years competitions were held without publishing the winners' names. In 1935 that slogan was modified to declare that sport was now for "Alafim" *as well as* for "Alufim," meaning that champions should be sifted out from thousands of competitors.

Given the hegemony established by the Histadrut and labor Zionism generally, Hapoel was able to build up its infrastructure of facilities and, because it had preferential access to new immigrants, had the largest potential pool of recruits. By contrast, Maccabi, though older and better established both inside and outside Palestine, was handicapped and marginalized by its lack of association with any large political bloc within the Yishuv. It survived because of its tradition and the great influx of middle-class supporters and professionals from Germany and Austria escaping Hitler in the 1930s.

Beitar

At the other end of the political spectrum, the Revisionists, followers of the militant nationalist Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, and later his successor Menachem Begin, operated their own clubs. The Beitar organization was founded as a youth movement in Eastern Europe in 1923. The name is an acronym that stands for "Covenant of Joseph Trumpeldor," who was a national hero. Beitar leaders strongly believed that the Zionist idea could be implemented only by Jews who had undergone military training and that the people would be redeemed only through "blood and fire."

Beitar maintained a close relationship with its founding party, Herut (liberty, now the core of Likud). One sign of the ideological difference between Beitar and Hapoel was that Beitar promoted the sport of boxing whereas Hapoel rejected it as inhumane. As a minority current within the Yishuv, Beitar lacked the facilities or institutional support that its rivals benefitted from. Nevertheless, it did establish itself as a credible force in the most popular spectator sport, soccer, in the major urban centers.

Elitzur

The smallest and least significant of the politically affiliated sport organizations was Elitzur, which was founded in 1939 as a reaction to the militant youth movements of its secular rivals. Attached to the Orthodox Zionist movement, the Mizrachi, Elitzur was handicapped by ambivalent purposes and the limited support it could receive within the religious community. Orthodox Zionists were a minority not only among Zionists but also among the religious, who were largely traditionalist, anti-political, and anti-Zionist prior to the formation of Israel. The

Zionist movement tended to be militantly secular in both its right and left wings. When one adds to this the restrictions on physical culture and sports imposed by the Jewish religious code, the *Halachah*, there was little scope for expansion by this small movement. Nevertheless, its very existence testifies to the salience of ideological and political currents in the establishment of sports organizations in Jewish Palestine.

To recap, from the very origins of the Yishuv, sport was intimately connected to political movements so much so that there was never a clear distinction between the activities of the parent political movement and their subordinate sport organization. It is noteworthy that all these sport organizations played an important role in the underground movement prior to the creation of Israel. Sport clubs often provided a cover for underground activities, preparing youngsters for security and defense assignments. Those activities glorified the sport clubs far beyond their achievements in sport (Oren, 1973).

Sport, Politics, and the Formation of the State

Created in May 1948, the new state of Israel faced enormous challenges. The Zionist movement had to organize itself into coherent and unified state institutions in the midst of a desperate fight for survival. At the same time, the Jewish population of Israel nearly doubled in less than 2 years (Segev, 1984, p. 105). The various political parties[2] hastened to absorb as many immigrants as they could into their own institutions so as to prevent the dilution of their political support. However, the demography of immigration changed dramatically as a result of, first, the Holocaust, which decimated the Jewish population of Europe, and second, large numbers of Jews emigrated or were pushed out of the Arab lands in the wake of Israel's War of Independence. Many spent years in ramshackle "transit camps" before being allocated permanent housing and finding regular jobs. These difficulties were compounded by cultural estrangement from the institutionalized community of Israel. These new immigrants lacked the European ideological influences and tended to be less secular and more traditional in their identity as Jews. They did not readily subscribe to the ideology of redemption of the soil and redemption through toil that labor preached as a national creed. These immigrants entered Israeli society at the bottom. Ironically, they came to see the socialist establishment of the Israeli state as elitist aristocracy that took care of its own (Amir, 1984). As shown below, these ideological and demographic changes affected the balance of power between sport organizations and their relative influence in succeeding years.

Hapoel

When the state of Israel came into being in 1948, some of the Histadrut's functions were transferred to the state. However, the Histadrut retained control of its economic enterprises, mutual aid institutions, and sport organizations (Reshef & Fried, 1986). Hapoel retained its close affinity with the labor bloc, now the Labor Party. This organization was intended to provide only sport services; however, it served additional functions. Hapoel members were mobilized toward athletic parades and mass gymnastic displays as well as for political missions. During the 1950s, for example, the percentage of voters for the Labor Party in Haifa was always higher than the national average in elections. As a result of the political supremacy of the Labor Party, Hapoel was also dominant (Lissak, 1969). Con-

sequently, the party's secretary general and long-time mayor of the city, Abba Hushi, was able to establish powerful "sport companies" to protect labor political rallies and provoke havoc in opposition conferences.

The Labor Party, which ruled Israel until 1977, directly supported Hapoel regional centers until the end of the 1950s. Later, support from the Labor Party became more indirect, and currently, the Histadrut mediates between Hapoel sport clubs and the Party (see Figure 2).

Beitar

Despite significant efforts to integrate new immigrants into the institutions of labor Zionism and the Hapoel sport organization, many immigrants from Arab lands (collectively referred to as Orientals or Sepharadim) came to identify with the counterelite[3] of Herut (later known as the Likud bloc). On the surface this was a marriage of convenience between two marginalized groups—the Sepharadim, marginalized socially and economically, and Herut, marginalized politically. In Israel's system of strict proportional representation, no political party has gained a majority in the Israeli Knesset (parliament) since the inception of the state. Labor formed the core of every coalition from 1948 until 1977. Until the formation of a short-lived national unity government on the eve of the Six-Day War in 1967, Herut had never been invited to join any of the coalition governments.

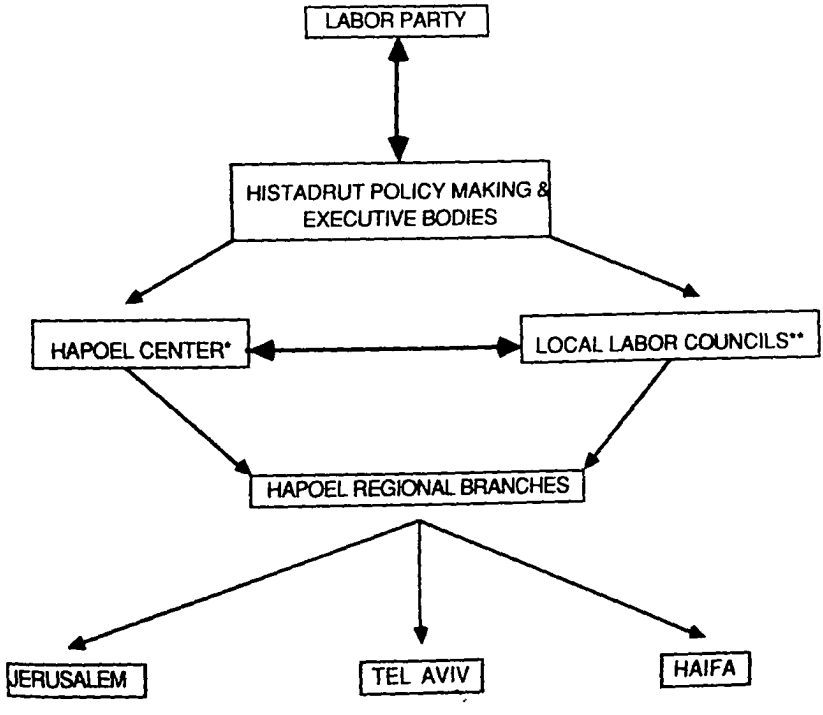

Figure 2 — The organizational structure of Hapoel. *Controls all Hapoel clubs and regional branches. **Political bodies that represent the interests of Histadrut members in every city in Israel.

There were powerful reasons for Likud to mobilize the socially disadvantaged Sepharadim. With labor dominant in political and social positions, there was little chance for the grievances of Sepharadim to be channeled in a socialist direction. Additionally, directed against the Arabs, the militant nationalism of Herut appealed to Sepharadi Israelies of whom Arabs were the erstwhile persecutors. Herut leaders, especially Menachem Begin, were no less East European than their labor rivals, but Likud was the available counterelite within the Israeli power structure, so it provided a focus for Sepharadi grievances. Ironically, despite the apparent affinity between the Sepharadi grievances and the politics of Likud, it was the sport organization of Beitar that became the vehicle for the realignment of the Israeli political balance.

The growing attraction of the Sepharadic community to the Beitar sport clubs could also be attributed to the phenomenon of the disadvantaged seeking out and identifying with symbols of power and strength (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1983, p. 199). The militant ideology of Beitar could substitute and compensate for the feelings of powerlessness felt by the marginalized Orientals facing an entrenched establishment. It was fortuitous that Beitar concentrated its activity in the very sport that had the greatest mass appeal in Israel, soccer. As fan support for the teams of Beitar increased among the Sepharadim, so did their success. Greater gate receipts made their teams better able to attract top-notch players. Nowhere was this more evident than in Jerusalem, where the Hapoel soccer team saw its support base and its quality deteriorate while Beitar's steadily rose. The following examples clearly illustrate the close identification of sport with politics in the rivalry between Beitar and Hapoel: In a game against a Hapoel team in the early 1970s, Beitar fans burned down the stadium while shouting anti-labor/Histadrut profanities. In the second example, when a Beitar fan opened a restaurant in Jerusalem, local Beitar fans boycotted his restaurant because he had covered the tables with red tablecloths, the color identified with labor (Morgenshtern, 1987).

Beitar became a vehicle for the national political realignment that culminated in Likud's electoral triumph in 1977. Long before a massive shift occurred at the polls, Beitar became a means by which the Sepharadim were acculturated into the politics of Likud (Lissak, 1969).

Elitzur

The Elitzur organization, connected to the National Religious Party (NRP), provides an outlet for orthodox Jews who wish to engage in sport. By so doing it prevents secular sport organizations from attracting orthodox youngsters away from religion (Bennett, Howell, & Simri, 1983). For example, Elitzur arranges that all competitions involving religious sport clubs take place on weekdays rather than on the Sabbath, thus enabling religious athletes and fans to enjoy sports without desecrating the holy day.

Historically, Israel's religious parties have always worked to associate the state with religion (Luz, 1985; Schiff, 1977), thus parties like the NRP try to shape the life of all Israeli Jews according to the Bible's commandments. Like its secular counterparts, the NRP has used its sport organization to influence the larger Israeli society (Eisenstadt, 1985), though with limited success. First, while most Elitzur members are orthodox youngsters who support the NRP, there are orthodox athletes who prefer joining secular organizations that have better facilities for training and competition. Second, the apparent conflict between religious values

and the values of physical competition in sport have ensured that this organization remains much less prominent in Israeli social life. Indeed, for the extremely religious, Elitzur is a relatively secular institution; they do not join any sport organization and generally avoid sport altogether.

Maccabi

Maccabi, which started as an international athletic association for Jewish youth, has never been formally affiliated with any political party. According to its constitution it aims at fostering physical education, promoting the Jewish heritage, and working actively toward rebuilding the Jewish nation (Hanak, 1973). Apart from its Zionist platform, Maccabi has remained the least partisan sport organization and as a result has opened its doors to everyone regardless of political affiliation. While Maccabi has not been affiliated formally with any political party, it became "sympathetic" to the Liberals (a small middle-class party now absorbed within Likud) after 1948 (Yadlin, 1974). Maccabi is closest to the familiar model of a nonpartisan, middle-class, commercially minded sport organization.

The Impact of Politics on the Organization of Sport

The close relationship between sport and politics in Israel leads to a tight control of sport by politicians. Generally, all sport branches are dominated by several political bodies: the government, the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Israeli Sport Authority, and the Israeli Sport Federation (ISF). Between 1948 and 1970 the number of representatives on the ISF from each of the four sport organizations—Hapoel, Beitar, Maccabi, and Elitzur—was proportionate to the size of its party's parliamentary seats. For example, if the Labor Party captured 40% of the seats in the Knesset, Hapoel enjoyed 40% of the representatives in the ISF. Today, however, additional factors such as the number of registered athletes determine the representation of each organization on the ISF. Each representative serves as a chair or president in a sport branch appointed by his or her respective political party. Since Hapoel has always been the largest organization in the ISF, its representatives control the most popular sport branches such as gymnastics, soccer, and basketball (see Figure 3).

The close relationship between politics and sport has provided rich opportunities for political patronage. Since appointments to major positions in the governing sport bodies are underlain by political considerations, sport in Israel is controlled to a large extent by politicians. Politicians do not necessarily possess any expertise in their jurisdiction; in fact the experts are often found only at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy.

Sport clubs get their financial support from four sources: the Israeli Sport Authority, a sport lottery, local municipalities, and membership fees. Since this support alone is very modest, clubs go to their political parties for additional funding. This in turn further increases the parties' intrusion into the clubs' decision-making machinery, which thus becomes highly centralized. Politicians, for example, decide which teams should excel in a given sport and/or which athletes should be on a specific team. Resources are allocated accordingly.

As the largest organization with the most resources and political influence, it could be expected that Hapoel teams and athletes would outperform the other organizations. Surprisingly, this is not so. Over the years Hapoel has grown into

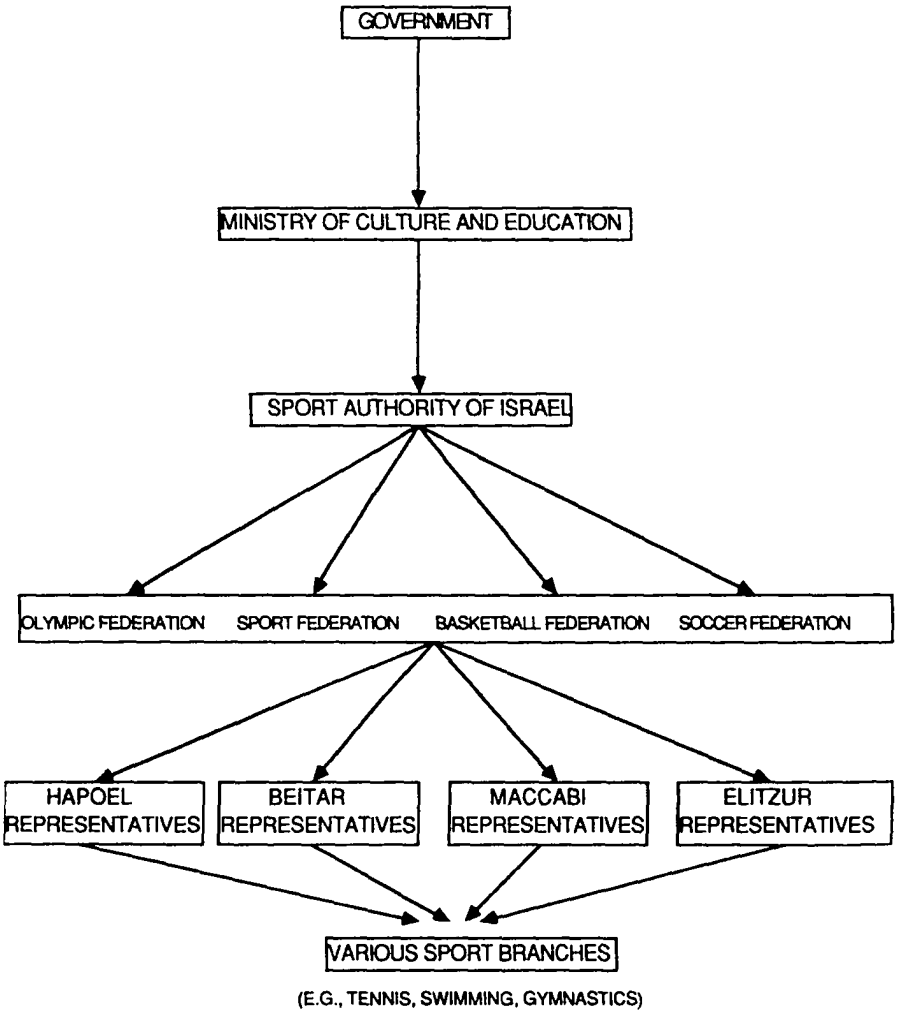

Figure 3 — The Israeli sport system.

a bloated bureaucracy fraught with political disputes and overburdened by political patronage. Consequently, political interests rather than pure sport considerations tend to prevail in the Hapoel decision-making process.

By contrast, Maccabi, a smaller organization that is not formally affiliated with any political party, has made great achievements in sport. Many of Maccabi's athletes are members of Israeli national teams. For example, while Maccabi has only 8 swimming clubs compared with Hapoel's 36, some 40% of the athletes on the national swimming team are Maccabi members. In addition, the Maccabi Tel-Aviv basketball team and Maccabi Haifa soccer team often finish at the top of the national league.[4]

Israeli religious parties draw immense political power from the fact that each of the two major political blocs (labor and Likud) needs them to obtain a majority in the Knesset. Being such power brokers, the religious parties have managed to instill religious laws into Israeli society. Accordingly, these parties have had some success in ingraining their way of life into sport.

In their effort to protect the holiness of the Sabbath, the religious parties have tirelessly campaigned to convince secular sport organizations to avoid playing on the Sabbath. Concessions may or may not be granted, depending on players' party membership, general good-will, monetary or other incentives, whether matches can be rescheduled, and so on.[5] They have, for example, convinced a few soccer teams to play on Friday rather than on Saturday, compensating them for any financial loss the teams claimed to have suffered. Overall, the religious parties have been able to change a few administrative regulations: They changed the basketball competitions from Saturday to weekdays and prevented the construction of a large stadium in Jerusalem that would have been next to an orthodox neighborhood.

Toward a Separation of Politics and Sport in Israel

There is growing evidence that Israel's traditional model of the political/sport relationship is shifting toward a new model, characterized by growing independence of sport vis-à-vis the political system. Political parties no longer conceive sport as a socializing agent. Until the end of the 1960s, sport club members were socialized into the political ideology of a particular party. This practice has weakened as the parties have realized that (a) the present generation of athletes has been socialized into Israeli society and politics by traditional socializing agents such as family and school; (b) the number of participants in competitive sport is relatively small, thus the parties' political influence is not significant; (c) the period of mass immigration is over; and (d) the standard of living has grown to the extent that the population no longer feels dependent on state or quasi-state institutions for leisure needs.

Since the early 1980s there has been a persistent effort to establish sport clubs that are not affiliated with any political party. Similar attempts failed during the 1970s. A group of immigrants from Russia, for example, established a politically independent bicycle club in the north of Israel. The organization quickly spawned new branches in cities such as Nazareth, Afula, and Carmiel. Naturally they insisted on competing in national events, which had been open only to members of the established organizations. Public pressure and outcry notwithstanding, they were granted permission to compete only as outsiders. They then competed and won, but without any formal recognition. Similarly, they never represented Israel in international games. Given that participation in international events is among the foremost rewards Israel can bestow upon its athletes, especially in a less popular sport like cycling, the organization phased out after 8 years of intensive activity. The athletes joined the four recognized organizations.

Two recent successful efforts to establish nonpolitical sport associations are The Golden Gloves Association (a boxing club) and The Israeli Tennis Association. These two associations maintain no relationship with any political party. Interestingly, The Golden Gloves survives because it does not encroach upon the Hapoel's jurisdiction—Hapoel simply does not have boxing clubs.

Believing that boxing should be excluded from the domain of sport because of its aggressiveness, Hapoel, the most powerful sport organization in Israel, nevertheless has not opposed an independent boxing club. The Tennis Association, on the other hand, has gained its independence by being a very wealthy association. It is controlled and managed by business people and does not need financial help from political parties. Thus a combination of professional managers, who by virtue of their economic position enjoy high political influence, and a sound financial base has helped bring this about.

Next, there has been a growing awareness that Israel performs poorly in international sport events not only because of a meager economic infrastructure but also because of an extensive party involvement in sport. Recently the parties agreed to establish a new sport committee that is not affiliated with any political party. Its members are sport professionals who aim to develop successful national sport teams.

Finally, since the early 1970s an increasing emphasis on domestic and international sporting success has led to increasing professionalization in Israeli sport (i.e., paying athletes). Basketball clubs were the first to sign foreigners, mainly Americans, to lucrative contracts. Local basketball players used the newcomers' contracts as a reference point for their case and a new era of salary negotiations dawned on Israeli sport. More and more athletes in a growing number of sports are paid for their performance.

Concomitant with a flourishing sport labor market, Israel has been facing an ever-growing economic crisis. Consequently it has become difficult, if not impossible, for the political parties to allocate the money needed to sustain successful sport clubs. The cost of having a good soccer team is so high, for example, that the Labor Party and the Histadrut are no longer ready to support their biggest team, Hapoel Tel-Aviv. This is perhaps why financially struggling Hapoel Tel-Aviv in 1989 lost its place in the first soccer division, for the first time in its history. Currently, the Histadrut is negotiating to terminate its involvement with the Hapoel soccer organization.

These recent developments may indicate a new era in sport organization in Israel. Perhaps the established model marked by a close relationship between sports and politics is giving way to a new model characterized by a growing autonomy of the sport system vis-à-vis the political system.

Conclusion

The relationship between Israeli political parties and sport organizations is an unusual phenomenon in the Western democracies. It stems from the basic characteristics of the political structure and culture of Israeli society. Four basic characteristics distinguish the political system of Israel from other political systems: (a) a large number of political parties, (b) a multidimensional conception of the functions and spheres of the party's authority, (c) a centralistic interparty structure, and (d) a high degree of ideological articulateness (Lissak, 1969).

These four characteristics are the direct result of the conditions contributing to the establishment of the pre-1948 political parties. Briefly, these conditions can be summarized as follows: Due to the lack of political independence and the lack of a central political authority for the allocation of resources, the political parties stepped in to fill the vacuum. Consequently, they concentrated the scarce resources in their own hands for distribution among their members and sympa-

thizers. The parties provided legitimacy for their organizational distinctiveness by regarding themselves as organizational and social prototypes of the future society. However, the uniqueness of Israel's political scene manifests itself mainly in the extensive sphere of their functions. Israeli political parties have been involved in an unusually wide scope of activities including schools, youth movements, cooperatives, housing projects, sick funds, various economic enterprises, newspapers, and sport organizations.

From their inception, sport organizations have been an indispensable organ of the parties by providing concrete expressions of the respective political ideologies. The parties have used sport as a powerful weapon to increase their political influence. With the foundation of Israel, when Zionism was transformed from a vision into an institution, these organizations rather than losing their political coloration have had it reinforced in the competitive arena of Israeli politics.

The Israeli case illustrates a situation in which sport was used as a tool of mass political mobilization. In this respect Israel approaches the standard model in Communist countries, and to some extent the model of the fascist countries in the 1930s. However, the Israeli model has been consistently pluralistic and, as we have seen, sport competition has been integrated into the lively political competition of the Israeli system. Yet the Israeli political system has long since passed the mass mobilization phase. Sport is increasingly viewed as an aspect of leisure activity for participants and spectators alike. In some sports such as tennis, political clubs are already being displaced by commercial clubs that cater to wealthier sectors of the population. In this context the Israeli public no longer views sport as one aspect of an identity rooted in political affiliation. Nevertheless, the institutional structure of Israeli sports still reflects a political cartel. It is worth asking whether this structure is appropriate to the current demands of the Israeli public, and whether its continued existence handicaps sport both at the mass level and the elite level. For now it is important to point out how the structure and organization of Israeli sport reflects the political origins and development of the state. It remains to be seen whether the sports community will be able to establish its autonomy from the political system.

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Notes

[1]Personal communication with Uriel Simri of Wingate Institute of Netania.

[2]For further information on the Israeli political system, refer to Arian (1985), Eisenstadt (1985), Fein (1967), Isaac (1981), and Yanai (1981).

[3]For the concept and function of counter-elites, see Dahrendorf (1959).

[4]The structure of Soccer and basketball in Israel is based on the system of the English national league. The lowest finisher in the division drops to the next division and the top finisher in the lower divisions advances. There are between 12 and 16 teams in each division.

[5]It should be noted that Israel still has a 6-day workweek with Saturday the only day of rest. In other words, the prohibition of matches on the Sabbath all but precludes daytime games on the weekend.

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