



The Thrill of Peoplehood

Adam Morris

As a young sports fan in the 1970s and 1980s, before the access-to-everything-all-the-time era of today, ABC's *Wide World of Sports* offered me a way to explore sports around the world. Each week, host Jim McKay's voiceover would remind us of the potency of sport to engage, uplift, and challenge us. It exposed us to the full spectrum of experience that rested between 'the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.' The proposition — that sports offers the participant and spectator a potential portal into the range of human experience — still rings true today.

As the Camp Rabbi at the URJ's 6 Points Sports Academy, I am responsible for the consideration, care, and cultivation of the Jewish experience for the entire camp community. From the use of Hebrew to the integration of Jewish values to the active inclusion of Jews from around the world, 6 Points offers so many of the dynamic elements that we associate with Jewish camping that contribute to enhancing a sense of Jewish peoplehood. But it begs the question of how the frame and lens of a sports-focused Jewish summer camp would distinctively play a part in the expression of and development of that experience.

The framework of a sports experience offers instructive exercises that, while not "Jewish" on the surface, teach us essential understandings that underlie the framework of peoplehood. Peoplehood is threatened when individuals or individual groups are unable to understand or feel they are a part of a larger entity. Peoplehood weakens when literal or figurative walls or silos are constructed based upon physical, cultural, or ideological differences. Peoplehood gains meaning when individuals or groups can see how the elements that ground and move them in one part of their world can live and flourish in every part of their world.

At Jewish sports camp, sports teaches us that as important as our particulars may be to each of us, there's something larger and deeper that connects us. Sports teaches us the value of seeing joy and perspective beyond the intricacies and intimacies of our own concerns. Sports teaches us that the lessons and love we experience on the field, court, or pitch can be planted and grown in every aspect of our lives.

At 6 Points Sports Academy, each camper chooses a sports major that they spend a considerable amount of their camp time pursuing. It offers an opportunity for great focus and growth and creates camaraderie and connection within each sports major. This arrangement also creates a natural dividing line that could segregate and inhibit the fullness of the camp community, but instead it creates an opportunity for deeper belonging and unique identity development. The inherent wisdom of sport teaches us something different about what we experience at camp and what we seek to experience as a Jewish people.

There are many moments at camp that are emblematic of these exercises and their lessons. We can see it in how we take the focus, skill, and energy that each sport requires and translate it into every aspect of camp life - how we clean our rooms, how we sing our songs, and even how we pray. There is one moment for me that fundamentally captures this ability to fully embody the thrill of being special and distinct while being part of a dynamic, embracing whole.

On the last Thursday of each session of camp, the cheer and dance majors present and perform their routine for the rest of camp. In the larger world, the general understanding and acceptance of cheer and dance as a legitimate sport are often questioned. On that Thursday night of each session, it's clearly not the case at 6 Points. The audience in the auditorium that night is not made up of swimmers and soccer players and basketball players. It is made up of athletes there to revere and celebrate other athletes - and they do so with great passion. The athletes, our values, and our community are celebrated with an energy and focus that each camper and their coaches bring from their own athletic experiences. We come together to bear witness and reinforce the values we all share and commit to at camp: *Pride/Ga'avah*, *Intention/Kavanah*, *Teamwork/Avodat Tzevet*, *Leadership/Manhigut*, *Growth/Tzmicha*, *Sportsmanship/Sportivuyut* and *Kindness/Chesed*.

It would be foolish to suggest that sports are of greater or larger historical, ideological, or philosophical impact than Judaism. And yet, the best of sports gives us an indelible tool toward deepening our understanding of, and fuller participation in, Jewish peoplehood. Sports are a pervasive and central presence in the lives of so many Jews in the 21st century. It provides us an opportunity to learn about the agony of defeat, the thrill of victory, and everything in between — maybe even teaching us something about the power and magic of Jewish Peoplehood.

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