

News

International hockey federation reverses ban on Israel ahead of youth world championships

By Jacob Gurvis

(JTA) — The International Ice Hockey Federation has reversed its decision to ban Israel from a world championship in Bulgaria.

In a statement, the federation announced that it will have “the safety and security support needed” to allow Israel to take part in the tournament, which brings together the under-20 teams of six countries and begins on Jan. 22.

The ban was not the first time Jewish or Israeli athletes had been penalized as fallout from the Israel-Hamas war — and it sparked international backlash.

Israel won the silver medal in its division at last year’s tournament and was originally supposed to host a portion of the competition this year. But following Hamas’ invasion of Israel on Oct. 7 and the ensuing war, the games were moved to Bulgaria.

Last month, the federation took matters a step further, announcing that due to “concerns over the safety and security of all participants in the Championships,” Israel would be excluded from the federation’s competitions “for the time being.”

The NHL weighed into the controversy, saying in a statement that it had “significant concerns” about the IIHF’s decision, adding that “we also have been assured that the decision is not intended to be a sanction against the Israeli Federation.”

But that did not assuage Israelis’ concerns. Mikhael Horowitz, the CEO of the Ice Hockey Federation of Israel, told the Canadian Jewish News that his association was informed of the ban only 24 hours before the announcement. Horowitz said Israel had accepted the IIHF’s decision to move part of the tournament out of Israel due to the war, but that its removal of Israel from the tournament altogether was unacceptable.

“We see this as discriminatory and against the Olympic Charter and it will not be accepted by Israel,” Horowitz said. “There was no attempt to take the risk assessment, and together with us or on their part, find solutions.”

Paul Shindman, a Canadian-Israeli and the Israeli hockey federation’s founder, also slammed the removal of Israel from the tournament. He said that the ban, on the heels of the Oct. 7 attack, makes Israelis “victims twice over.”

“Israel’s sportsmen and women deserve the support and embrace of their friends in the international hockey world, not to be excluded,” he told the Canadian Jewish News.

Israeli officials weren’t the only ones protesting.

An editorial in the Toronto Sun on Jan. 12 called the ban “spineless” and “a shameful act of cowardice.” The piece argued that the decision set a dangerous precedent for Israel’s participation in future international sports tournaments, including the 2024 Paris Olympics, and referenced the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre, when 11 members of Israel’s Olympic delegation were murdered by terrorists at the Munich Games.

“Fast forward to 2024, and Israelis are being punished — for defending themselves once again against Palestinian terrorists,” the editorial said.

Five days later, the International Ice Hockey Federation reversed course, lifting the ban on Israel. In its reversal, the federation said it would continue to review Israel’s participation in upcoming international tournaments on a case-by-case basis.

Yael Arad, chairwoman of Israel’s Olympic committee, told the Jerusalem Post that the country was “very excited” to participate in the tournament.

Happy Tears

By Lauren Sachs

Lauren holds a bachelor’s degree in English and Psychology, and a Master’s Degree in Social Work, from the University of Michigan. After completing advanced clinical training at Yale University, Lauren worked as a therapist and consultant in a variety of settings. During her time in Jewish Toledo, Lauren has received the Harry Levison Young Leadership Award and the Shining Light Award, and is currently a board member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo. Lauren is also the author of a forthcoming book about her late husband, his joyful approach to life and work as an oncologist, and how examining his life helped her better cope with her grief.



My daughters and I sit in our family room at full attention, hearts racing while our eyes stay fixed on the fast moving images on the television screen. Every few minutes, we yell and shout, sometimes in unison, cheering on the college basketball team that has become so beloved in our home. While this scene may sound typical for any sports-obsessed family during the height of the college basketball season, our family ritual has a

different energy and origin than most. Long before my husband died in August of 2020, he had introduced all of us to his alma mater’s basketball team and helped instill a love not only for the sport but also for his team in particular. Ironically, given that he was a two-time alumnus of Michigan State University and I am a two-time alumna of the University of Michigan, this allegiance to the MSU Spartans means that I am frequently rooting against my own alma mater. As I like to tell anyone who is understandably confused by this surprising fandom, my late husband thoroughly brainwashed all of us.

During Brad’s lifetime, we cheered on the Spartans as a family to show our love for his team. Now we continue to root on his team in honor of his memory. Since Brad died in the early days of the pandemic, many of the regular routines of daily living were on hold at that point. When college basketball began months later, I think we all craved some of the normalcy and distraction that sports can provide. I distinctly remember how excited I was for the start of the Spartans basketball season that year. Every time the team made a great play or won a tough game, we felt as though they were doing it for Brad. My girls and I soon realized that rooting for “our” team had taken on a new meaning, one that felt both nostalgic and deeply personal. I have found that cheering on Brad’s team helps us feel close to him. We often talk about Brad during these games, recollecting stories of visiting the Breslin Center or wondering aloud how he might have reacted to a new player on the team.

After spending almost two years in my spousal loss support group, I have heard innumerable stories of love and loss. I have learned that finding ways to keep our loved one’s memory alive honors them but also helps us move along the path of healing. In our family, we have found many means of remembering and honoring Brad: from helping to replant the garden beds at our local cancer center to donating funds to the organizations he held dear; and from dedicating a bench to him along a metropark trail to looking through old family photos. One of the best parts of our basketball fandom is that it provides us with an entire season in which to express our affection and simultaneously deepen our emotional intimacy with one another and with him. Commemorating Brad is a bittersweet act but one that feels meaningful and necessary. Despite the complexity of our feelings, we will certainly continue to honor him in this way. If you happen to see me during basketball season and want to bring a smile to my face, be sure to help me cheer on his team with the familiar call and response: “Go Green, Go White!”



Israeli players celebrating a goal during the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship match between Israel and Georgia, April 17, 2023, in Madrid. (Borja B. Hojas/Getty Images)