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## Sisters qualify for Jewish Olympics

By John T. Miller



Samantha and Sydney Bell, sisters at Acalanes High, have qualified to compete in the 20th Maccabiah - also known as the Jewish Olympics - this summer in Israel. Samantha, a senior, will join the United States soccer team in the Open division, while Sydney will play tennis in the Junior division.

The sisters will represent Maccabi USA at the games in Jerusalem that run from July 4-18 this summer, with opening ceremonies slated for July 6. Samantha will report on June 25 to train with her team in Jerusalem and Sydney arrives three days later in Haifa. Participants from all over the world will then have a week to travel and tour Israel to view historic sites and experience the Jewish culture.

From left, Samantha and Sydney Bell.

Samantha, a team captain on the Acalanes soccer team, is also president of the Jewish Club on campus. This fall she will attend the University of Texas at Dallas on an academic scholarship, majoring in Global Business and playing soccer for the Division III team.

Two years ago she qualified and competed in the Maccabi Pan American Games in Chile. Although she was young enough to be on the Junior team, she played in the Open division and helped her team to a gold medal. She looks forward to playing again with some of the same friends she met there.

"Being on that team was a special experience," says Samantha, "but I'm really looking forward to my first visit to Israel and making the connection with being Jewish."

Sydney, who has been playing tennis since kindergarten, competed as the No. 2 singles player for Acalanes and earned second-team all-league this year -- a great achievement for a sophomore. Her inspiration comes from her great grandmother, who was still playing tennis at the age of 92. She is also active in the Jewish Club at Acalanes.

She traveled to New York for a two-day tryout and was one of six girls to qualify for the Junior team. Sydney also looks forward to visiting Israel, saying, "I'm excited to meet Jewish people from all over the world and see all the important sites."

The Maccabi World Union is the largest and longest running Jewish sports organization, involving more than 60 countries, 450 clubs, and 400,000 members. Their signature event, the Maccabiah Games, which began in 1932, takes place in Israel every four years. This year's event will draw about 10,000 athletes.

According to Dakota Marine, a marketing and communications associate for Maccabi USA, the program "develops, promotes and supports international, national and regional athletic-based activities and facilities to provide Jewish athletes the opportunity to share their heritage and customs in competitive athletic settings."

Many Olympic gold medalists, world champions and world record holders have competed in the Maccabiah, most notably Mark Spitz in swimming and Kerri Strug in gymnastics.

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