

Maccabi's unique place in Australian Jewry

VIEWPOINT

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For 90 years, Maccabi has been a “maker” – a maker of history, of great memories, of lifelong friendships, of family tradition, of sporting legends and of communal leaders. Maccabi is an organisation that has brought our community together, connecting us through sport and so much more.

It is for these reasons that I am so proud to hold the position of president of Maccabi Australia as we celebrate this great milestone.

In working to bring these current celebrations together, it has been great to look through old photos, hear the stories from people who have been involved with Maccabi for half-a-century and more, and be reminded about just how wonderful this organisation truly is.

First Maccabi in Queensland and Western Australia had their celebrations.

Last weekend in Melbourne, the St Kilda Town Hall was packed with memorabilia from years gone by, and the more than 300 people had a wonderful time reconnecting with the Maccabi family.

And this weekend Maccabi NSW current and former players and volunteers will gather at the Double Bay Bowls Club to reminisce and tell a few stories, most of which will be true.

But these two weekends in the major states haven't been entirely social.

In Melbourne, the Interstate Sports Challenge took place, with elite junior and senior teams from Victoria and New South Wales taking part in soccer, basketball and netball.

These were serious sports competitions, with not just state pride on the line, but also the first step towards selection for the 2017 Maccabiah Games in Israel.

The Masters competitions will take place this weekend in Sydney, again with more than state bragging rights on the line.

These sporting challenges are critical to the future of the Maccabi movement in Australia. With more than 6500 members across Australia, playing for more than 40 clubs, we are not only the largest grassroots Jewish organisation in Australia, but also one of the largest sporting clubs in the world.

Over the organisation's 90 years, this has remained at the core of Maccabi – the desire for Jews to intermingle through sport and social pursuits.

But going forward, we at Maccabi want to offer more than that.

We want Maccabi clubs to be the first choice for Jewish athletes who are serious about their sport.

We want to provide the Jewish community with first-class training and playing facilities and access to the best coaching available. We want



Barry Smorgon speaking at the Maccabi Australia 90th reunion in Melbourne.

Photo: Peter Haskin

our sporting events such as the Maccabiah, JCC Games, Pan Am Games, European Games to be something our athletes young or old will aspire to.

It is why the Hakoah/White City development is so critical for Maccabi in Sydney.

In Melbourne, you'll soon be hearing much more about Maccabi Victoria's Pathways program, as well as a centralised, more efficient process of funding for the state bodies and clubs.

We think the Australian Jewish community will be genuinely excited about our future plans when you hear what we have in store.

These projects and our focus on building grassroots sporting activity through to hosting key sporting

events are essential to ensure the long-term growth of Maccabi in Australia.

The forward from the program of the very first Sporting Carnival in 1925 notes that: “For the first time in the history of Australian Jewry, the representatives of two states will meet officially in Melbourne.

“For the first time in the history of Australian Jewry, representatives of NSW will visit Victoria for the purpose of sport.

“And for the first time, the representatives of one state will intermingle and come into close social contact and familiarity, with the co-religionists of the other.”

It is hoped that through these weekends of sport, together with the reunions and gala dinners around the country that people will recon-

nect with Maccabi, recognising and celebrating the significance that Maccabi has played in their lives – fondly recalling their Maccabi experiences with pride and joy.

Maccabi serves two unique purposes – it connects our community through sport, while being a major conduit for connections with the general community, working to reduce negative stereotypes, provide reasons to halt the growth of assimilation and reducing anti-Semitism.

Maccabi holds a unique place among Australian Jewry.

You would be hard pressed to find a family who does not share some history with Maccabi, whether it be through a local club, Senior Carnivals, Junior Carnivals, Maccabiahs, or other international Maccabi tours. Some have spilt blood and broken bones for Maccabi, while others have cut the half-time oranges or marked the lines.

To know and be part of an organisation that has so intrinsically helped to shape the Australian Jewish community is something of which we can all be proud.

I hope and trust that Maccabi's place in and contribution to the rich tapestry of the Australian Jewish community is recognised and celebrated, not just for the remainder of our 90th anniversary celebrations, but also for many generations to come.

Barry Smorgon is the president of Maccabi Australia.