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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday August 16, 2024 ~ Parsha: Vaetchanan

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### **We Are Good at Sports Too!**

There are all kinds of jokes about Jews and sports. Remember this classic clip from the movie [Airplane?](#)

I remember those days when you could make a simple joke like that without the fear of lawsuits, being cancelled, or being labeled for life as a bigot.

This joke, like so many others, reflected the belief or the stereotype that Jews weren't good athletes. We were great at physics, we've won a [disproportionate](#) (and I mean really disproportionate) number of Nobel prizes, and are overrepresented in the arts, entertainment, academia, business and in politics. We should be proud of that.

Despite tremendous setbacks and the ever-present reality of antisemitism, Jews in the modern era have achieved amazing success. The readers of this Shabbat message certainly know that with few exceptions, your parents, or grandparents, or great grandparents came to the United States as poor, if not penniless immigrants fleeing poverty, antisemitism, and lack of opportunity in the country of their birth. Yet within two generations, they or their offspring entered the middle class, with all the benefits that came with it. Many achieved the American dream, or at least some version of it. We are often overrepresented in prestigious areas of American life. But not sports. Americans love sports, and athletes hold a special place in society. We are proud of Jews who have made amazing contributions to America. But we tend to revere top professional athletes. We came close to having a “member of the tribe”, Governor Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania, on this year's Democratic ticket. But I'm sure if given a choice between an opportunity to meet him, or LeBron James, most people would choose a legendary basketball player over the politician.

Last week, the Olympic games in Paris came to an end. Now I have all kinds of issues with what the Olympics have become over the past generation. But I want to put that aside for a moment to simply marvel at some of the tremendous athletic achievements that captured the attention of even those who are not normally interested in these types of things. I especially want to highlight the tremendous achievement of Jewish Olympians in the recent games. 21 Jewish athletes representing the United States, Australia and Israel took home 25 medals, including Israel's second ever gold medal. They are:

**Gold:** Jessica Fox (2), Australia, Canoe Slalom | Noemie Fox, Australia, Canoe Slalom | Jackie Dubrovich/Maia Weintraub, USA, Fencing | Amit Elor, USA, Wrestling | Tom

Reuveny, Israel, Windsurfing

**Silver:** Sienna Green, Australia, Water Polo | Inbar Lanir, Israel, Judo | Raz Hershko, Israel, Judo | Sharon Kantor, Israel, Windsurfing | Artem Dolgopyat, Israel, Artistic Gymnastics | Adar Friedman/Diana Svertsov/Ofir Shaham/Romi Paritzky/Shani Bakanov, Israel, Rhythmic Gymnastics | Claire Weinstein, USA, Swimming

**Bronze:** Nick Itzkin, USA, Fencing | Sarah Levy, USA, Rugby | Peter Paltchik, Israel, Judo | Jemima Montag (2), Australia, Athletics

It is not fully known exactly how many Jewish athletes participated in the 2024 Olympics. I have seen several sources, and the best estimate is 24 or 25. But here is a fun fact for you. Jews are about 0.2% of the world's population, which roughly accords with the percentage of Jewish Olympians, but they won almost 2.4% of all Olympic medals this year. Though not exactly comparable to our Nobel prizes, this number is still pretty good. And amidst a culture that celebrates athletic achievement, that is something to be proud of.

At a time of rising antisemitism and the persistence of even harmless stereotypes, these Jewish Olympians, like others before them, disprove the falsehood that Jews "don't do sports." We certainly do, and we are as good and talented as everyone else.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner