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Reading Sports in Palestine: The Early Days of Sport Reports in the Hebrew Mandatory Press

HAIM KAUFMAN and YAIR GALILY

The political, economic and cultural basis of Israel's contemporary Jewish society was formed during the period of British rule¹ between 1917 and 1948. Ideologically motivated by Zionism, the Jewish community in the Land of Israel developed social and political institutions which exercised authority without sovereignty, with every echelon mobilized towards consolidation and growth. Sport reports in the Israeli press started to appear at the time of the publication of Hebrew daily papers (*Ha'aretz*, *Doar Hayom*, and *Davar*) during the 1920s. This article describes and analyses the beginning of sport reports in the Hebrew press and in the journals of the sports associations with reference to the various components of the journalistic reports.

The analysis sheds light on the attitude of the press to sport in general and highlights the low status of sports reporting in particular. The 1920s were the years during which politicization started to emerge in the sport of pre-state Palestine: the articles, reader's letters, the news items that gained extensive coverage, and even the organs of sports associations, gave more voice to the ideological controversies between the sports associations than to descriptions of sporting events. Moreover, there is a strong link between the broader structure of (political) relations in the area at that time and the way in which the Hebrew sports movement developed in Palestine.

It is therefore clear that journalistic reporting was inadequate in its early years and made things difficult for those who wished to know about sporting events of that time. Nevertheless, some phenomena which characterize current sports reporting, appeared already in the early years of the Hebrew press, in particular as far as reports from football games are concerned.

THE EMERGENCE OF HEBREW NEWSPAPERS DURING THE BRITISH MANDATE

Israelis are avid readers of newspapers.² Until the 1960s the printed press was the primary provider of news since 'Kol Israel', Israel Radio—the only

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station in those days—broadcast only two or three newscasts a day. The newspapers in what was then Palestine also served as ideological commentators on current events. In 1919, a group of Jerusalem writers began publishing a daily paper called *Hadashot Ha'aretz* (News of the Land). There was a large turnover among its first editors; however, in 1923 the paper moved to Tel Aviv and Dr Moshe Glickson was appointed chief editor (a post he held for 14 years).

At *Ha'aretz* (the name had been shortened from *Hadashot Ha'aretz*), most of the editors and journalists were of Russian origin and espoused a liberal-democratic tradition. The paper had no political patron and it tried to adopt a conciliatory role in the acrimonious political feuds that erupted in the Yishuv (the Jewish population of Mandatory Palestine). *Doar Hayom* (which from the outset was intended to emulate the famous British paper from which it had borrowed its name, the *Daily Mail*), in contrast, took a militant and nationalist stand. At the end of 1928, Ze'ev Jabotinsky became its editor for a brief period during which the paper was the organ of the Revisionist Movement, which he headed.³ The political left in Palestine did not have a daily paper of its own until 1925, when *Davar* (which can be translated as 'event' or 'word') was founded by the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labour. Its editor, Berl Katznelson, was one of the leaders and ideologues of the Labour movement in Palestine. Katznelson devoted much work and thought to his paper and its Friday literary supplement attracted contributions from some of the most important writers and poets of the period.⁴

Davar signalled the next stage in the evolution of the Hebrew press in Palestine: the party political press. True to the political tradition of Eastern Europe the Yishuv had atomized into a large number of parties. Each of them considered it a sacred duty to establish its own paper, believing that, as had been the case in Eastern Europe, a daily newspaper was the most effective means to advance the party's interests and ideology and ensure that its followers received the 'correct' educational guidance.⁵

THE IMPORTANCE OF REVIEWING SPORT REPORTS

In recent years the origins of the *Ha'aretz*, *Doar Hayom* and *Davar* newspapers have been explored,⁶ yet none of these studies refer to their sport reports. An analysis of the revisionist newspaper *Hatzafon*, appearing in Haifa in the years 1926–1927, made a brief reference to the sports section.⁷ The only research to date, referring to the sports section, is a short article whose primary objective was to portray the archaic mode of sports reporting.⁸ The organs of the sports associations that started to come out in those years too have not been referred to in studies until now. An examination of sport reports is worthwhile for several reasons.

The Status of Sport in Eretz Israel

The notion of the 'muscular Judaism' contains a number of concepts central to the Zionist national consciousness: the need to change the image of the Jew with the 'ghetto mentality'; the need to fight anti-Semitism; the need to develop martial skills; and the need to develop the 'authentic' Jew who works the land in Eretz Israel.

Despite the centrality of these concepts, sport in Eretz Israel suffered from an attitude of indifference on the part of various bodies. The national institutions offered sports associations little assistance and the concept of physical education in schools faced numerous obstacles. The reasons for this attitude, which has repercussions for the status of sport even today, are deep-rooted in the nature of the Yishuv leadership, most of whom came from East Europe and had no past involvement with recreational sport, as well as in the fact that the notion of 'muscular Judaism' gained wider significance than merely dealing with sport.⁹ As such, this examination of sports reporting is intended, among other things, to answer the question of whether the Hebrew press, in its beginning, also adopted the general tendency of undermining sport.

Politicization of Sport in Eretz Israel

The initial years of the Mandatory press were also the years in which the politicization currently existing in Israeli sport started to emerge. The political tension in Eretz Israel accompanying the development of the 'Civil Camp', the formation of international working class sport and the economic crises which created unemployment among the workers—all these brought about the formation of the Hapoel sports association, as well as frequent confrontations with Maccabi, the national non-political sports federation, which was the only one operating until that time.¹⁰ The question that arises in this context is how sport reports reflected the state of mind of that time, and how they gave voice to the politicization of sport in Eretz Israel.

The Status of Sport in Today's Press

Sport nowadays makes up a central part of the daily press and sometimes gains similar coverage as politics and economics. The objective of this article is not to review the circumstances which led to this state of affairs but to examine which of the characteristics of current sports reporting can be found in the era when sports newspapers first appeared.

The Press as an Historic Source

Current researchers who wish to investigate past sporting events in the Land of Israel rely for the most part on press cuttings from that time.¹¹ Looking up information in the Mandatory press is a rather difficult task.

These papers are not found in most libraries, archives or computerized data banks, and there is no index or key to either general or sports articles. Most of it is microfilmed and great difficulty exists in tracking down an article or even searching for a specific event. Hence, it is of importance to make this material more accessible to the readers.

As such, the goals of the article are derived from all of the above:

- To examine the question whether the Hebrew sports press in Eretz Israel was indifferent to sport in its early days, as was the case with the national institutions.
- To examine the way that sport reports mirror the general state of mind of that time.
- To examine those characteristics that the Mandatory sports press handed down to the sports press in the State of Israel.
- To make key information about sports reporting in the early twentieth century accessible to readers of our time.

For the purposes of this pioneering research all the sport reports appearing during the 1920s and early 1930s have been scanned. This included the scanning of the established press: the daily press—*Davar*, *Ha'aretz*, and *Doar Hayom*, and the weekly *Hatzafon* in Haifa which was published for two years (1926–1927). Also scanned were the organs of the sports associations, *Uzenu* of the Hapoel and *Maccabi* of Maccabi.

The article addresses various aspects of this journalism from news items to specific sports reporting to ideological articles and opinion pieces to readers' letters. Each section in the article deals with one of these. The intention is not to analyze the historical data emerging from the various reports but to set out the framework in which this data appears. Thus recording and describing sports reporting by the Hebrew press is the objective of this article.

THE NATURE OF SPORTS NEWS

The Location of the Sports News Items and their Scope

Prior to the appearance of sports sections, sports news items were released randomly. They were very short, appeared usually on the margins of the news and were printed in small letters across the paper. In *Davar*, sports news items could be found typically within the scope of the sections containing news about different places ('in Haifa', 'in Tel Aviv', etc.). *Ha'aretz* released, from time to time, sports news items under the heading 'In the Sport'. However, this was not a regular section. News items were not released systematically. At times, many days would pass without any reporting of sports events; even when items were eventually released, it

would be a few days after the event itself, without the signature of the writer. Sports news items were not illustrated, due to the marginal space they captured compared to other fields, and also because the press, in general, in those days, was hardly ever illustrated.

The Content of the News Items

Reports of football scores: Most of the sports news items included reports about the scores of football matches. The British occupation and its influence on sport in Eretz Israel and the visits of the Hacoach Vienna football team in the years 1924–1925 resulted in a sharp rise in the popularity of football, to the extent that in 1928 a football association was established in Eretz Israel.

In the 1920s, no regular national league or cup existed. On the other hand, league matches were held locally—for example, the Haifa League (*Ha'aretz*, 3 March 1925), the Jerusalem Municipality Cup (*Davar*, 27 April 1929), the Tel-Aviv Regional Cup (*Davar*, 14 February 1929). Apart from the teams formed by Maccabi and Hapoel, there were local active youth teams (Hagibo, Allenby, Balfour, Hatzvi), which merged subsequently into the big associations. For example, Allenby merged into Hapoel Tel Aviv (*Davar*, 30 March 1927) and Hagibor into Maccabi Haifa (*Ha'aretz*, 16 December 1925). The teams competed against each other and against Arab teams, as well as against numerous football teams operating within the framework of the British army. At a later stage the downsizing of the military forces by High Commissioner Plummer in 1927 resulted in a reduction in the number of British football teams in Eretz Israel.¹² This was possibly the reason for the Jewish initiative to establish a football association the following year.

Sports news items in the local press were deficient and related primarily to the scores of football matches and to the locations at which they were held. Now and again some details were added, such as: 'big crowd arrived despite the terrible weather' (*Davar* 13 December 1925); 'the Tzvi team was invited to a cup of tea after the match' (*Ha'aretz*, 3 January 1926); 'the match was nice, however, the crowd should be told to maintain order and not interfere' (*Davar*, 14 March 1926). Often, violence was reported between the fans of two teams (*Davar*, 20 November 1927; *Ha'aretz*, 25 December 1928; *Doar Hayom*, 6 April 1926).

The reader who wished to know the scores of all the various league matches was only able to find a limited number of results. A typical example of incomplete information is the reporting of the first Eretz Israel cup match held in May 1928. The match ended with the victory of Hapoel Tel-Aviv over Maccabi Jerusalem 2–0, yet the association decided to share the cup between the two teams. The newspaper *Davar* dedicated quite a large space to the story, but failed to mention the sharing of the cup between the teams and the reasons for this decision. We learn about it only

from a manifesto of Hapoel Tel-Aviv (*Davar*, 2 July 1928), which also fails to clarify the reason for the decision.

Other sports news items: When reading the newspapers of that time it seems as if the main sporting interest was in football, though, as far as we know, this was not the case. From the reports of Hapoel it appears that a significant percentage of its members were engaged in gymnastics and athletics and even in volleyball, cycling and handball.¹³ However, information on these activities or competitions in these fields can hardly ever be found in the press (*Davar*, 13 January 1927, 19 September 1927). Water sports were mentioned now and again (*Davar*, 27 December 1928; *Ha'aretz*, 5 September 1928), as was boxing which began to develop in Eretz Israel in the late 1920s.¹⁴

Many sports news items were in fact announcements or reports given by the associations themselves. The Hapoel association made much use of *Davar* as a platform to deliver information about the activities of the association, and the difference between journalistic items and announcements became blurred (*Davar*, 14 October 1925; 31 May 1926).

The large number of items about football activities is particularly notable given the scarce information about worldwide sports in general and Jewish sport in the Diaspora in particular. Jewish sport was covered from time to time, mainly in *Doar Hayom* (9 September 1925, 2 November 1925). Major world sporting events such as the Olympic Games in Paris (1924) and Amsterdam (1928) are almost never referred to in the press of those years.

The examination of sports news items appearing in the daily press points to a similarity that all these items share: little reporting (compared to any other field); brief reports appearing irregularly and unsystematically; reports which ignore worldwide sporting activities almost totally. The daily press which was in fact a major source of information for the whole Yishuv (as Jewish Radio began only in 1936), fitted into the general trend of placing sports low in the order of priority. Nonetheless, the press could not overlook the growing popularity of football in Eretz Israel, and the majority of reports referred to news in this field. Therefore, the origins of the phenomenon prevailing today—of dedicating the predominant part of sporting reports to football while barely referring to other sports—can also be seen at the beginning of sports reporting in Eretz Israel. Since the press is a reflection of the public state of mind, and shapes it too, it seems that the press itself became a source for growing interest in football.

The Hebrew press, by and large, was still in its initial stages and had not yet developed its standard procedure, as is the norm today. Hence, it is of no surprise that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between a news item and an opinion piece or a press announcement. Various institutions (such as the Histadrut), used the press for their own ends, as did the sports

associations. Given that sports news items were brief and referred mainly to sporting events, the politicization of sport in the press in Eretz Israel found less expression. This dimension rather stands out compared to the situation in other sections, including news articles and readers' letters.

SPORTS SECTIONS

Sports sections started to appear in newspapers in the middle part of the 1920s. The following provides the main characteristics of the sports sections in each of the newspapers.

The Sports Section of Doar Hayom

Doar Hayom was the first newspaper to dedicate a section to sports news items. On 16 October 1925, sports news items appeared under the heading 'News from the World of Sport in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora'. Two weeks later the name was changed to 'Of the World of Sport', and two months later the section appeared under the name 'The Sport Section'. Despite the existence of the special section, most of the sports news items came out at random, not within the scope of the section, which ceased to exist after a short while.

In October 1926 sports news items returned under the heading 'In the Sport'. However, this section also soon ceased to appear, and the reports were published occasionally within the scope of local news ('Haifa—in the Sport', 'Tel Aviv—in the Maccabi', etc). As of the beginning of 1927, the 'Sport Section', which was unique in bringing sports news from the outside world, reappeared. Sport inside Eretz Israel was almost never reported in this section. In 1928, the sports news came out every now and then under the heading 'In the World of Sport', however this section too did not appear regularly.

It seems a difficult task to characterize *Doar Hayom* as the pioneer of sports sections in the Hebrew press in Eretz Israel. As mentioned earlier, the section came out under various names and had no unique character—in terms of content or graphics, location, or caption—to indicate that it was indeed a separate section. It is not clear who wrote the news and apart from a section heading there was no difference between sports news items which were, as before, presented in a vague manner in the news section. The change occurred in December 1928. From this date onwards (possibly under the influence of *Davar* and *Ha'aretz*), a section named 'In the Sport', started to appear nearly every day. Each time, the name of the writer or his initials (S.S., Z.S. and S. Reznic) was given. Unlike the sports sections of *Davar* and *Ha'aretz*, the section had no personal character (perhaps this is the reason for the signing by initials). It brought sporting news only and contained primarily descriptions of football matches.

The Sports Section of Davar

The first daily newspaper to include a proper sports section was *Davar*. About a month following the appearance of the newspaper (24 June 1925) it published the following: ‘On demand of members, the editorial board of *Davar* has agreed to launch a sports section’. Sport reports appeared occasionally in the paper under the heading ‘In the Sport’, however the ‘demand of members’ was met only a year and a half later: a section named ‘In the Sport’, written by Shimon Samet, started to appear in the newspaper on 25 December 1927. The section came out usually once or twice a week, on irregular days, always bearing the signature of the writer. The section, which had clear identifying marks, bore the personal imprint of its writer too. Samet supported the notion of working class sport, and his section contained articles favouring Hapoel, alongside sports news items from Eretz Israel and sometimes even from the outside world.

Apart from the regular sporting news that continued to appear in the newspaper, the section consisted of relatively long descriptions of football matches. Samet also showed in his articles clear sympathy for Hapoel teams. For example, following a detailed description of a victory by Hapoel Tel Aviv in the Cup, Samet wrote on 30 May 1928: ‘This is a victory which requires continuity. The sympathy of the public for Hapoel necessitates a moral and professional stature for the honourable flag under which they take shelter—the Histadrut’. A noticeable characteristic of his section was the lack of distinction between news items and views, facts and their interpretation.

The section continued to appear even after Samet stopped editing it in 1931 (from 1932 Samet started to write for the *Ha’aretz* sports section). In 1936 it was changed to an extended weekly sports section, appearing on Fridays under the name ‘In the Sport, here and in the World’.

The Sports Section of Ha’aretz

As in the case of *Davar*, *Ha’aretz*’s sports news items were also called occasionally ‘In the Sport’. Nevertheless, there was no special section dedicated to sport. As of 6 May 1928, a regular sports section started to appear under the title ‘In the World of Sport’, and its writer, who called himself Yavne (and sometimes M. Yavne), was Meir Benayahu, a member of Kupat Holim (the Health Insurance Association—part of the Histadrut) serving also as a member of Hapoel. The section did not appear regularly, less frequently than its competitor in *Davar*—usually once every fortnight.

The structure of Benayahu’s section was very much like Samet’s section: personal opinion mixed with descriptions of football matches and world sports news. As a member of Hapoel, Benayahu was also committed to the notion of working class sport, and expressed this more than once in his articles. However, contrary to Samet, he gave a greater voice to sporting

activities in the Jewish Diaspora and dedicated an exclusive place to it in his section. It is of interest to point out that Benayahu and Samet, both Hapoel sympathizers, would later write in *Ha'aretz*, which did not support the same position.

The Sports Section of Hatzafon-Haifa

The first comprehensive sports section in the Eretz Israel Hebrew press of the period appeared in a local weekly. From February 1926 to August 1927 a revisionist weekly by the name of *Hatzafon-Haifa*, edited by Avraham Vinshel, appeared.¹⁵ The weekly was published on Fridays and contained an extended regular sports section, carrying no signatures of any particular writers. The fact that *Hatzafon* was a revisionist weekly also shaped the nature of the sports section. The section keenly opposed Hapoel and this hostility, as will be described below, even brought about a legal action by Hapoel against the newspaper for slander. This sports section focused on what was going on in sport in Haifa. Indeed, the hostility between the Haifa associations provided a lot of this section's material.¹⁶

Despite this local focus, this section was a pioneer in sports reporting. It was the first time sport was given such wide coverage and the paper provided long and detailed descriptions, along with a 'professional' interpretation of the matches (for example, 'The Haifa people were not used to such a narrow pitch... However, in the second half of the match they managed to exercise self-restraint'; 'Hapoel lost hope... its legs gave way and could not score even one goal').

Following the brief and random sport reports appearing in the early days of the press, it was the appearance of sports sections which drove the press to change its attitude to sport. All the same, it is worth noting that the sporadic sports news items continued to appear next to the sports sections, and represented the lion's share of sports reporting in the press.

Despite the uniqueness of each sports section, some similarities can be found between them: the sections were personal and carried the editor's mark; they had no clear distinction between a news item and an opinion piece; they had an unmistakably clear political character and reflected the view of the section's editor. Samet in *Davar* and Benayahu in *Ha'aretz* supported Hapoel, while the section editor of *Hatzafon* opposed Hapoel and sided with Maccabi. The established sports section of *Doar Hayom* was unusual. It appeared later on, which was possibly the reason that, in contrast to its counterparts (the section was not written by one editor), it provided strictly sporting information and mostly refrained from discussing political aspects, which were dominant in the other newspapers.

The sports sections indeed represented a certain improvement in the attitude of the press to sport, yet it was still not possible to view it as different from the general state of mind: the sections appeared irregularly

and by and large only once a week; they were spread over two columns at the most, and did not contain much information.

These sections were characterized by a focus on football (as remains the case today in sports journalism): they contained detailed descriptions of football matches as well as analysis and interpretation of the games. Indeed, some of the journalists who shaped sports journalism in the State of Israel, such as Nechemia Ben-Avraham, began as junior reporters in these sections during the Mandate.¹⁷

IDEOLOGICAL ARTICLES AND READER'S LETTERS

As pointed out earlier, the 1920s were years of extremely high political tension and numerous confrontations inside the Zionist movement in the Yishuv. The politicization that took place in the sport in Eretz Israel when Hapoel was founded was the product of these processes. The press of that time was characterized by many lengthy ideological articles, which dealt with relevant problems and with the various responses of readers (much more than is the case today). The politicized press (the Histadrut's *Davar* versus *Doar Hayom*, *Ha'aretz*, and the revisionist *Hatzafon*), provided a major platform for public arguments. The political confrontations between Maccabi and Hapoel also found expression in these papers, and even overshadowed the reports from the pitch

Ideological Articles

Political confrontation: Until 1924 there was only one sports federation in Eretz Israel—Maccabi. However, even at this stage it was difficult for workers to integrate into its framework. A typical example of this can be found in an anonymous article in *Doar Hayom* appearing on 17 February 1921 under the headline 'On the Development of Sport in Eretz Israel', in which the writer calls for the avoidance of 'spiritual activity' inside Maccabi, in order to prevent 'a partition between farmers and workers'. Three years later, on 3 September 1924, an anonymous article under the heading 'The Question of Youth in Eretz Israel' cried out against insufficient spiritual activity inside Maccabi.

Hapoel was established in 1924, at the same time as the political polarization inside the Yishuv between the workers' camp and the 'civil' camp was crystallizing.¹⁸ The confrontation among the Jewish sports associations was a major theme in numerous articles dedicated to sport. The fact that the journalists of the sports sections in the two leading newspapers, *Davar* and *Ha'aretz*, were Hapoel people gave them a 'media edge'. The articles by Samet and Benayahu gave voice to the ideology of a working class sport, and criticized Maccabi. In their opinion, Maccabi represented bourgeois sport which was inclined to 'professionalism', and whose entire purpose was promoting the winning and achievements of

individuals at the expense of society as a whole (see, for example, *Davar*, 15 March 1928, 30 August 1928; *Ha'aretz*, 30 October 1928). On the other hand, the articles in *Doar Hayom* and in the *Hatzafon* were more sympathetic to Maccabi and Hapoel was in these papers seen as favouring class interests over national interests (*Doar Hayom*, 4 June 1926, 21 June 1926, *Hatzafon*, 18 June 1926). This hostility between the sports associations came to light more than once in football matches, and the sports articles discussed the issue extensively. Each side blamed their political opponent for stirring up the violence (*Davar*, 8 May 1929; *Ha'aretz*, 4 June 1926).

Articles of another kind dealt with various aspects (historical, national and professional) of sport and physical education. For example, *Ha'aretz* ran a series of articles published under the title 'Sport and the War in the Lives of the Hebrews' by Menashe Polak (4 January 1929, 18 January 1929, 14 February 1929); an article about sport and art by Binyamin Heler (18 July 1928) and a series of articles about physical education in Tel Aviv by Lipa Livyatan (in January 1929). On 8 February 1926, *Ha'aretz* published a critical letter by A. Gordon, directed at Maccabi, which protested against sending members to further studies in physical training abroad contrary to the national goal of placing youngsters in agricultural work.

Letters to the Editor

The press of the period under examination frequently made it possible for its readers to express themselves. Many readers responded to issues related to sport through letters addressed to the editor, and their themes were similar, to a large extent, to those raised in articles. The political confrontation between the associations captured a predominant place, and it seems that the difference between letters and articles can be found, first and foremost, in the harsh expressions used by writers of letters (who often signed by way of nicknames such as 'sports fan', 'Yehoshua', 'sportsman').

Reader 'A' described Haifa, where an attempt to establish the nationwide association Hapoel was made, as 'a nest for any new trouble that may come about' (*Ha'aretz*, 12 August 1925). The behaviour of Hapoel fans at one football match was called 'loathsome terror' in a letter by the chairman of the Maccabi Tel Aviv association to *Ha'aretz* (13 August 1928). Similar behaviour was described as a 'pogrom' in *Hatzafon* (9 April 1926). The letters page was also used by sports associations as a means to present their arguments in a newspaper which did not take their side, and to respond to accusations made against them. This was done by Hapoel officials in *Hatzafon* (3 July 1925) and by Maccabi officials in *Davar* (29 July 1928).

One aspect of letters to the editorial board is in their critical tone, mainly against the explicit preoccupation with football, and it came to

light mainly in *Davar*. On 9 June 1926, the reader Ben-Shevah complained in *Davar* that workers had no time for ‘something which is in press and under study’, and instead of dealing with it, they wasted their time watching football matches. His decisive conclusion was that ‘whoever kicks the ball, our kicking of him should be a kick of—away with him’. The criticism of the exaggerated preoccupation with football stemmed also from the view of this occupation as contradicting the idea of a ‘working class sport’, for this was a game that encouraged winning and violence and which crowds of people watched instead of engaging in activity of their own (*Davar*, 1 August 1928).

The editorial articles and letters of readers were a sign of the state of mind of that time, especially of the influence of the political struggle over the sport in the Yishuv. Nonetheless, the treatment of sport was twofold: as long as it was just about sporting events, the newspapers settled for short news items or brief weekly sections. When the theme was political and offered room for wrangling with an opponent, it was given a broader place in the newspaper. As such, current readers find more information about political arguments and confrontations between the associations or inside them than about the sporting events themselves.

This has nearly ceased to exist today. On the other hand, it is noteworthy to point out that the ‘specialization’ of modern sports journalism led to a situation where there are almost no articles today dealing with the historic and cultural areas of sport, even in comparison to the period under discussion.

SPORTS EVENTS THAT GAINED EXTENSIVE COVERAGE

Numerous sporting events took place in the 1920s in Eretz Israel: the establishment of Hapoel; the development of Maccabi; the establishment of the football federation; the birth of the football cups; the setting up of the gymnastics teacher’s federation to name but a few. It is therefore worth examining which of these (and other) events gained extensive coverage in the press. Below are the events which gained the most coverage.

The Visits of Hachoach Vienna to Eretz Israel

The Hachoach Vienna football team was considered in those days to be one of the best football teams in Europe, and in 1925 it even won the first professional championship of Austria.¹⁹ The team was invited to Eretz Israel by Maccabi, and in January 1924 it played three matches there. A year later, the team paid another visit, during which it played two matches. The Hachoach Vienna games were regarded as an exceptional sporting event and inspired great enthusiasm. As such, both daily newspapers *Doar Hayom* and *Ha’aretz* (*Davar* had not yet appeared), provided wide coverage in both January 1924 and in January 1925 of the

team's visits. *Doar Hayom* also issued a special edition following the first match in 1924 (9 January 1924).

The Court Case of Hapoel versus Maccabi in Haifa

The process of establishing the Hapoel association actually started in Haifa and was accompanied by heated confrontations with the local Maccabi association. Following a long period in which Maccabi boycotted Hapoel in Haifa, the associations reached a settlement determining also the arrangements of income distribution in matches between them (*Davar*, 21 May 1926). The settlement did not ease the tension, and on 5 June 1926 a football match was discontinued after the Maccabi players left the pitch as a protest against a referee's decision. The crowd demanded its money back, but Maccabi's treasurer had taken half of the ticket receipts, according to an agreement which had been determined earlier. Since the Maccabi players were accused of disrupting the match, Hapoel filed a claim in the Hebrew magistrate's court in Haifa for the return of the money taken by Maccabi's treasurer.

The press showed great interest in the case, perhaps owing to the legal aspect, and also possibly due the handling of the case at the Hebrew magistrate's court, which was a part of the autonomous legal system of the Yishuv, rather than the Mandatory courts of law. In June and July of 1926 the press was full of relatively long reports of the case. The court ruled that Maccabi had to return the money. Maccabi did not follow the ruling and was reprimanded by the court, which had in fact no power of enforcement.

The Court Case of Hapoel Haifa versus Hatzafon Newspaper

Another legal affair, which caught the public attention, was the slander lawsuit of Hapoel against *Hatzafon*. It has been earlier mentioned that *Hatzafon* took a hostile stand against Hapoel in Haifa. The Haifa association, the most senior of the Hapoel branches, which relied on a strong workers' council in 'Red' Haifa, could not come to terms with the aggression of the revisionist newspaper against it. On 3 December 1926, *Hatzafon* accused the Haifa workers' council of attempting to attract players from Maccabi for money; this was strongly denied in *Davar* (16 December 1926). On 8 May 1927, *Hatzafon* published a news item according to which Hapoel asked a Greek football team not to take on Maccabi because it was a professional team. As far as Hapoel was concerned the newspaper went too far and it seemed that the organization was more disturbed by being accused of 'informing' than by the content of the accusation. A slander lawsuit was filed against *Hatzafon* at the Hebrew magistrate's court.

The newspapers of August–September 1927 contain detailed reports of the case and it was evident that connection of the case to the press itself

resulted in much of the coverage. *Doar Hayom* dealt with the case more than the other papers, and published the verdict in its entirety (2 October 1927). *Hatzafon* was found guilty of ‘causing an insult’ and was required to pay for the trial’s legal costs to the amount of £150. Nonetheless, it was not found guilty of slander due to a lack of ‘bad intent’

The Journey of Maccabi-Hagibor Haifa to the United States

The football team of Maccabi-Hagibor Haifa was invited to play in the US, and in order for the team to be able to compete properly, a representative of the team went to Hungary to recruit Jewish players there to join the tour. It was clear for Hapoel that these Hungarian players would get financial rewards for joining the team, a fact that led to fierce criticism as Maccabi was accused of going professional (*Davar*, 5 April 1927, 27 April 1927). Maccabi rejected the allegations, and argued that it had been decided not to pay the players, but that ‘it is self-evident that the players will get some amounts for expenses’ (*Ha’aretz*, 11 May 1927).

The Maccabi-Hagibor visit to the US lasted from June to August 1927 and was described at length primarily in *Doar Hayom* (this comes as no surprise as it was sympathetic to Maccabi). The team’s manager published enthusiastic articles on the successes of the team, and his reviews more than once made the front page headlines of the paper. These were the only sports news items to make it to the headlines! The tour report, which was also published in *Doar Hayom* (6 September 1927) by the team manager, totally contradicted the realities of the visit as the number of spectators was much smaller than reported and some of the players remained in the US.

Of the four events discussed above, only the Hachoach Vienna visit can be defined as an a-political sporting event. It should be borne in mind that the team’s visits were held in 1924 and in 1925. In these years Hapoel was still not in existence, *Davar* had not been established, while the fourth Aliya (immigration wave) that led to the development of the ‘Civil’ camp and to subsequent political confrontations was only in its initial stages.

ORGANS OF THE SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS

Daily or weekly newspapers dedicated only to sport did not exist in those days, however the sports associations issued their own organs: Maccabi issued *Hamaccabi* and Hapoel issued *Uzenu*. Below are the principal contents of these organs.

Hamaccabi

The organ *Hamaccabi* first appeared in March 1913, about half a year after the federation of Maccabi in Eretz Israel was established (up to 1936 the organ used only the Hebrew dates and the first issue was dated Adar,

the Hebrew month, and Taf-Resh-Ain-Gimel, the year 1913). The first issue came out as a circular from the Maccabi federation, and in April 1913 the second issue came out. Afterwards there was a long break in its appearance (due to the war) until October 1923. During the years 1923 and 1936 it was issued randomly, at various times and in various formats. It was even defined in the beginning as a 'monthly magazine for physical education affairs'.

Despite the changes the organ underwent it did not change its character in a significant way. It usually contained information about events in the Maccabi federation in Eretz Israel and about the organizational and sporting activities in the various branches and occasionally about Maccabi in the world. Moreover, various announcements to members were released and professional training was advertised. It also contained many pragmatic articles in the fields of Jewish national sport and physical education. It became a monthly magazine in October 1929.

Many of the principal sportspersons in Eretz Israel saw *Hamaccabi* as a means for expressing their views, and so it is possible to find in it articles written by Tzvi Nishri (November 1930), by Yosef Yekutieli (October 1926), by Yehoshua Aluf (March 1936), and by Imanuel Simon (April 1934). The worldwide Maccabi heads—Alexander Rozenfeld (May 1930) and Heinrich Loveh (October 1925)—also wrote in the paper occasionally. It was also possible to find articles written by intellectuals or well-known public figures, such as Yosef Kloysner (December 1924), Yehuda Burla (August 1934) and Menahem Usishkin (December 1925). In the 1920s, *Hamaccabi* often acted as a means of arguing against establishing Hapoel—in accordance with the tendency then prevailing in the general press. Yosef Yekutieli dealt with it often (for example, in the December 1926 and September 1927 issues). In the 1930s this tendency almost disappeared altogether, although now and again one could find it (such as in the criticism of the second conference of Hapoel in the September 1931 issue).

The academic-theoretical dimension in the *Hamaccabi* overshadowed the rest and the paper placed less emphasis on description than was usual in the daily press at this time.

Uzenu—*The Hapoel Organ*

Hapoel, like Maccabi, published an organ of its own—*Uzenu*. The first issue of *Uzenu* came out in April 1927, and it had only the Hebrew date on it—Nissan Taf-Resh-Peh-Zain. This issue is the only one to be published in the 1920s. In subsequent issues, the foreign date was added. In the 1930s it reappeared and was published in various forms: as a bi-weekly from October 1933 to April 1934, and as a weekly from January to April 1935, and even as a monthly from March to September 1935. In the 1940s, the paper was published annually.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1920s just one issue was published and its content was typical of the spirit of those days. The lion's share of the issue was dedicated to ideological articles discussing aspects of working class sports and the ideological justification for the existence of Hapoel. Another section was dedicated to wrangling with Maccabi on issues on the agenda (such as the merger of the football team of Allenby with Hapoel Tel Aviv and the visit of Maccabi-Hagibor to the US). The paper did not, in fact, give any information about sporting events, even those that were linked to activities in Hapoel!

It was only in the 1930s that *Uzenu* published more information about sporting events by focusing on the branches of Hapoel in Eretz Israel and in the Diaspora. In these issues, too, the scales were tipped in favour of the pragmatic articles, though issues relating to professional training were also highlighted.

There is a remarkable similarity between *Maccabi* and *Uzenu*. Both perceived themselves as ideological organs rather than providers of sports information. They served as an educational instrument, whose purpose was to identify with the goals of the organizations in order to promote the national or class consciousness of the members in these organizations. It was not their job to provide the members with sports information and as such emphasis was placed on the achievements of the organization or alternatively on the 'failures' of its ideological opponent's teams. Here there is a similarity between the organs of the associations and the sport reports in the general press which also emphasized ideological concerns more than events on the field of sport.

THE OPINIONS OF READERS OF SPORT REPORTS

The press of those days was not open to criticism. As such, no information was given as to the opinion of the readers about the nature and size of the sporting information provided. As noted earlier, *Davar* acknowledged a short while after its establishment that a demand existed on the part of members to launch a sports section (24 June 1925), although the newspaper met this demand only a year and a half later.

In spite of this, sports sections were gradually added to the press and descriptions of football matches and other sport reports were extended in the 1930s—all of which demonstrates beyond a doubt that the requests of readers for more sports coverage were addressed

Lipa Livyatan's Article

The dissatisfaction with sports coverage in the first years of the press found expression in an article by Lipa Livyatan, 'Sport in the Daily Press in 1929', published in *Hamaccabi* in March 1930. This article deserves special mention by virtue of being the only one of the era to represent the state of

mind of the readers towards the sporting information given to them. The view of Livyatan in his preface underlines the dissatisfaction of the readers with sports reporting:

The editorial boards of the newspapers emphasized that large numbers of the readers were interested in the issue of physical culture and asked for sport information—and had to meet this demand. However, what has been arranged is insignificant. According to our situation the sports information has unique importance. Under such circumstances the systems are not allowed, of course, to settle for one restricted spot once a week or every fortnight.

In his article, which is mainly dedicated to a comprehensive summary of all the sports lists in the daily press in 1929, Livyatan criticizes those reporters who write about sport: ‘A young fellow, who was just yesterday among those “attending school” and has no clue about the physical culture, writes about sporting matters and criticizes them.’ He continued to protest against the fact that a substantial space in the press is set aside for football and complains about the politicization of sports coverage. To his mind ‘to the critics, who lack the elementary knowledge of sport, or look at it through their political spectacles—I would suggest they give up the professional criticism’.

He further recommends that:

The daily newspapers should elaborate on the sport. All that is happening in the world of sport, especially in our world, should be given publicity in the daily press. Once a week, or at least every fortnight, the press should dedicate a whole page to the sport section . . . and then the physical culture would permeate into the public.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above description and analysis of press reports on sport in the period under examination:

- The press of the 1920s reflected the general tendency to place sport low in the national order of priorities. The press played down sports reports and even when sports items appeared they were usually brief and lacking focus. The appearance of sports sections somewhat improved the status of sport in the press, yet the sections themselves were brief and appeared on average only once a week. The dissatisfaction of newspaper readers possibly resulted in a certain change taking effect in the 1930s.
- The Hebrew press from its beginning indulged in the politicization of sport. The accounts of the political disputes filled a much larger

space than the descriptions of the events linked directly to sport. This was primarily evident in articles and in letters to the editor. The sports sections too, which seemed for the most part more personal, also expressed the views of their writers towards political disputes between the sports associations, such as the legal conflicts of Hapoel with Maccabi in Haifa and the *Hatzafon* newspaper.

- Some of the characteristics of sports journalism in our time are embedded in processes whose beginning can be seen in the early years of the press. Already from its early days, the Hebrew press focused primarily on football and for the most part ignored other sports altogether. Some of the football matches were described in detail with analysis of, and commentary on, the various games and a similar emphasis exists today. Indeed, it is possible that the preoccupation of today's Israeli press with sporting events is an inheritance of developments in the early days of the Hebrew press.

NOTES

1. In July 1922, the League of Nations entrusted Great Britain with the Mandate for Palestine (the name by which the country was then known). Recognizing 'the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine', Great Britain was called upon to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine (Eretz Israel).
2. Elihu Katz, Hadassa Hass and Michael Gurevitch, 'Twenty Years of Television in Israel: Are there Long-run Effects on Values, Social Connectedness, and Cultural Practices?', *Journal of Communication*, No. 1 (1997), pp. 3–20.
3. The hegemony of Labour Zionism in the land of Israel at that time (especially from the 1930s onwards) did not go unchallenged. The other major contenders for power were the Revisionist Zionists led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who espoused a more liberal economic structure and a more zealous defence policy than the Labour movement. Jabotinsky believed that there was an inherent conflict between Zionist objectives and the aspirations of Palestinian Arabs. He called for the establishment of a strong Jewish military force capable of compelling the Arabs to accept Zionist claims to Palestine.
4. Menuha Gilboa, 'The Beginnings of Davar', *Kesher*, No. 16 (November 1994), pp. 80–91.
5. Tal Ronen, *The Israel Review of Arts and Letters*, Jerusalem, 1999, pp. 3–4.
6. Aharon Even Chen, 'Itamar Ben Avi and Doar Ha'Yom', *Kesher*, No. 1 (May 1987), pp. 55–64; Uzi Elyada, 'The Revisionist Doar Hayom', *Kesher*, No. 17 (May 1995), pp. 73–78; Mordecai Naor, 'From "News from the Holyland" to Ha'aretz 1918–1923', in Mordecai Naor (ed.), *From Herzl to Ben-Gurion*, Tel Aviv, 1996, pp. 214–241.
7. Yosef Kister, 'Hatzafon: The First Local Newspaper in Eretz Israel', *Kesher*, No. 7 (May 1990), pp. 50–62.
8. David Melamed, 'Three Beirutian Bombs and the Fasten Tel-Avivian', *Et-Mol*, No. 65 (February 1986), pp. 65, 19–20 (Hebrew).
9. Haim Kaufman, 'The National Ideas of the Term "Muskle Judaism"', *Movement*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (May 1996), pp. 261–282.
10. Haim Kaufman, 'The Establishment of Hapoel Sport Association', *Cathedra*, No. 80 (June 1996), pp. 122–149.
11. Uriel Simri, *Gymnastic and Sport Clubs in the Land of Israel prior to the First-World-War*, Wingate Institute, 1968; Uriel Simri, *Physical Education and Sport in the Land of Israel 1917–1921*, Netanya, 1971.
12. Ben Zion Dinur (ed.), *The History of the Hagana*, Vol. B, Tel Aviv, 1973.
13. Haim Kaufman, 'Hapoel in the Mandate Period', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Haifa, 1993.

14. Gil Trayser, 'The Development of Boxing in the Land of Israel', in Gil Emanuel (ed.), *Golden Path: In Memory of Zvi Nishri*, Netanya, 1979, pp. 87–112.
15. Kister, 'Hazafon'.
16. Kaufman, 'The Establishment of Hapoel'.
17. Haim Kaufman, 'Nehemia Ben-Avraham (1920–1979); Pioneer Israeli Sportscaster and Sportswriter', *Kesher*, Vol. 20 (November 1996), pp. 87–92.
18. Kaufman, 'The Establishment of Hapoel'.
19. Egon Polack, *Impressions of a Footballer from a Five Continent Journey*, Netanya, 1976.