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**▲ Kramer**

from Page 5

Goldman was excited and energized by the opportunity to visit the sites that he'd only read about or seen in pictures. He won a gold medal for his efforts in what Jason said was probably his last tournament.

I also met recent Cornell graduate Zachary Hammond of Mays Landing soon after a highly contested match. (He went on to win a bronze medal in the heavyweight class.) Zachary was surrounded by members of his family, all of whom were really enjoying their adventure in Israel. Zach was very happy to compete on the same level as his Russian and Israeli competitors. The Russians are among the world's best wrestlers and nearly all of the Israeli wrestlers are immigrants from Russia. Even more impressive than Zach's medal in free style was his performance in Greco Roman wrestling, a style in which leg holds are prohibited. Despite



Maccabiah opening event, kicking off the 18th rendition of the games, one of the world's largest athletic events.

never having wrestled Greco Roman before, Zach won the bronze medal.

We attended the men's basketball semifinal games in the fabulous gymnasium at Ra'anana's MetroWest High School. America and Israel easily defeated Canada and Argentina, respectively. (The gold medal was won the next day by America in an exhilarating overtime finish.)

After the two men's games, we were treated to an exciting, close contest between the American and Israeli women. The lead went back and forth until Israel pulled ahead in the last few minutes to take the gold medal.

Among the most exciting events was swimming, held at the Wingate Sports Institute near Netanya. Exhibiting the true spirit of the event, 33-year-

old Jason Lezak skipped the World Swimming Championships to take part in the Maccabiah, where he won gold in each of his four events.

Jason said, "This is a decision I made which is as much about giving back to the Jewish community and exploring my heritage as it is about the performance on the world stage. I'll be representing my country and my heritage as a Jewish athlete and I'm very proud of that. I hope to be a role model to a lot of the Jewish athletes growing up and hopefully I can make a difference."

Jason is partnering with the Maccabi USA team to create

the MUSA-Lezak initiative. Its purpose is to raise funds for a nonprofit organization using sports to strengthen Jewish identity and create strong bonds with Israel. This is precisely what the Maccabiah is all about. Though no world records may be set, just by attending, all the participants will have had a gold medal experience!

*Stephen Kramer resided and worked in the Atlantic City area until 1991, when he moved to Israel with his wife, Michal Langweiler, and two sons. He can be reached at Sjk1@jhu.edu.*

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