

# GETTING ISRAEL TO THE RUGBY WORLD CUP



July 2023

# THE MISSION

Israel in the 2031 Rugby World Cup

Israel in the 2032 Olympics 7s

"If you will it, It is no dream"  
... Theodor Herzl



# PURSUING THE DREAM

To reach the RWC and Olympics, Israel Rugby and the Tel Aviv Heat have joined forces to launch the "Bridges Through Rugby" program, a multi-year plan to:

- Offer a professional, high performance environment for Israelis to train and compete year-round
- Attract elite professional players to live in Israel and build eligibility to represent Israel internationally
- Grow the game in Israel with programs designed to inspire the next generation of players



# STARTUP NATION RUGBY

Founded in March 2021, the Tel Aviv Heat is Israel's first professional rugby team. Within a shoestring budget, the Heat has leveraged innovation and networking to disrupt the rugby world by pulling off the impossible. . .

- Reaching the Final of the Rugby Europe Super Cup in season 2 and the Semifinal in season 1
- Beating the Saracens in London in November 2022
- Building partnerships with leading rugby clubs in South Africa, England, France, NZ, and the USA
- Attracting world-class players with prior experience in Rugby World Cups and Olympic gold medalists



# MAKING HISTORY, NOW



For the first time in history, the Israeli National Team finished the 2022–23 season **Champions of the Rugby Europe Conference 1 South**, benefitting from experience playing with the Tel Aviv Heat in the Rugby Europe Super Cup, on Heat tours to South Africa, UK, and the USA, and with clubs in France, Australia, and Ireland



# THE PATH AHEAD



# GETTING TO THE RWC & OLYMPICS

To get Israel to the Rugby World Cup and the Olympics we need to build and sustain a high-performance Pathway Program that builds local capacity and imports elite talent

- Support international players making Israel their year-round home for 5 years
- Launch a new International Club Competition in Israel to develop Israeli talent, engage Pathway players in Israel, and demonstrate resolve and resilience in the face of challenges posed by BDS, SARU and anti-Semitism



# OPPORTUNITIES TO COMBAT BDS

- In August 2022, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) invited the Tel Aviv Heat to compete in the 2023 Mzansi Challenge (Currie Cup First Division)
- On Feb 3, 2023, SARU withdrew its invitation, capitulating to the South African BDS Coalition who labeled the invitation an "overtly racist move" and threatened SARU: "if this apartheid Israeli team comes to play in South Africa SARU will have blood on its hands."
- Support a sustained campaign of outreach, goodwill events, and communications that counter BDS propaganda and threats



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIYAH

- Support rugby players with Jewish heritage anywhere in the world to **make Israel their home through Aliyah**
- Pictured: Thomas Berman, age 24, made Aliyah after representing South Africa in the Maccbiah Games in 2017 and 2022 and **playing two seasons professionally** with the Tel Aviv Heat
- In the Heat offseason, Thomas plays for Hadarim rugby club and **coaches their youth and senior men's sides** and helped build a new rugby program at the nearby American International School in Even Yehuda
- By 2027, Thomas will be **eligible to represent Israel** in international competition



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISRAELIS ABROAD

- Reverse Rugby Birthright programs for existing and aspiring Israeli National team players to develop skills and rugby IQ through immersion in international high performance environments
- Facilitate player/coach exchanges through partnerships with professional clubs, unions, and academies in South Africa, UK, France, USA, and Georgia
- Pictured: Ori Abutbul represents Israel in both 15s and 7s, drawing on valuable experiences in South Africa at the Stellenbosch Academy of Sport and with Roodepoort Rugby Club in Johannesburg and in the USA at the RugbyTown 7s tournament in Colorado



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR RUGBY IN ISRAEL

- Attract elite International players who want to live in Israel and play for both the Tel Aviv Heat and with local amateur clubs
- Sustain a year-round pathway for players to earn eligibility to represent Israel after 5 years
- In 2023, six contracted Tel Aviv Heat players stayed in Israel to play with local clubs, and help coach youth rugby
- Pictured: Sebastiaan Jobb, who played for the Tel Aviv Heat and Kibbutz Yizre'el before being selected to join the South African 7s Blitzboks



# BUILDING A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

- Expand the ability to inspire and connect with rugby players, teams, and passionate rugby supporters to build a global community of supporters of Rugby Israel
- Create meaningful connections between the Israeli and global rugby communities through clinics, friendly fixtures, tours, tournaments, overseas academies, and player/coach exchanges
- Pictured: Semi Kunatani, member of Fiji's 2016 Olympic Gold Medal-winning 7s team, former Harlequins player, leading a Tel Aviv Heat youth clinic in Israel





# FRIENDS OF ISRAEL RUGBY (FIRU)

FIRU members support Rugby Israel deliver on its mission to maximize social impact through rugby:

- Enhance grass-roots exposure to rugby values through schools, clubs and regional and national junior tournaments.
- Support robust high-performance programs and national teams for men, women, and juniors
- Ensure that rugby remains accessible to all members of society by covering participation and travel fees for those most in need

# THE ASK

Sponsorship opportunities for critical components of the long-term strategic plan include:

- Naming rights for the new international club competition to be hosted in Israel: \$500k p.a.
- Naming rights for the Israel Rugby Academy: \$500k
- Sponsorship of international player living and playing year-round in Israel: \$100k p.a.
- Lead Sponsorship of high-profile international matches: \$50k per event
- Other opportunities available upon consultation

# WHY NOW

- Professional high performance environment established by world-class coaches
- Global investment group led by seasoned entrepreneurs and rugby innovators
- Proven demand for partnerships from top pro clubs and elite international players to live/play in Israel
- Tight integration between Rugby Israel, the Tel Aviv Heat, and global Maccabi rugby communities
- Heightened targeting of Israeli Rugby by BDS



# LEADING THE PROGRAM

Implementation of the "Bridges Through Rugby" program is led by Kevin Musikanth

- With +20 years of coaching experience in South Africa, Kevin made Aliyah in 2018 and currently serves as Technical Director of Rugby Israel
- Kevin was instrumental in the formation of the Tel Aviv Heat and serves as its Director of Rugby
- Highlights of his coaching career include leading the University of Cape Town to the Varsity Cup title in 2014, covered in his book "Always Believe in Magic"







# A HIGHER PURPOSE

By staying dedicated to the core values of rugby – Solidarity, Passion, Integrity, Discipline, Respect – Rugby Israel and the Tel Aviv Heat are living proof of Nelson Mandela’s philosophy:

*“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the **power to unite people** in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.” – N. Mandela*

# CREATE A LEGACY

Help us transform the dream into an enduring legacy  
Support "Bridges Through Rugby" through tax-deductible donations

For more details, go to [www.rugby.org.il/en/firu](http://www.rugby.org.il/en/firu) or  
[telavivheat.com/bridgesthroughrugby](http://telavivheat.com/bridgesthroughrugby)

