



INJURY DOESN'T STOP BASKETBALL ALL-STAR

Pointing to tradition, Yeshiva basketball player balances tenets of being an Orthodox Jewish Woman, and Lady Mac basketball star

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Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents, which, in prosperous circumstances, would have lain dormant. –Horace

NEW YORK — Shayna Greenwald's passion for basketball and commitment to Judaism embody her identity, and her tenacity to overcome adversity has landed her all-star honours playing for Yeshiva University after experiencing what could have been a career-ending injury. Two years ago, Greenwald suffered a torn knee ligament that might have brought her basketball career to an end. But she bounced back and her dedication to her country, her sport and her religion culminated in 2003, when the five-foot-one point-guard helped lead Canada to a silver medal at the 10th Pan-American Maccabi Games in Santiago, Chile.

"Some people write a book or speak. Sports is a way that I can express myself and my Jewish culture. To represent Jewish Canada was truly rewarding," said Greenwald, a native of Toronto. "The energy in the gym, for every game – it was the most intense basketball I've ever played. People were playing their hearts out. Everyone was stepping it up to a higher level. You either played your best, or you were embarrassed on the court."

From an early age, basketball has been an integral part of Greenwald's life. Yet, when she hoped to join a league at the Toronto JCC, she found there were no leagues for girls. Undeterred, Greenwald joined the boys' league.

"For a lot of girls, that could have stopped someone's career. While there were not very many opportunities, she overcame that," says Sy Herling, head coach of Maccabi Canada's women's basketball team, who also coached her as a youth. "Shayna didn't see anything wrong with playing with the guys. She was as good as or better than many of the boys, capable of a lot of things that they were. More girls became involved with basketball in the JCC, and we created girls leagues. Shayna was a big part of that."

After two successful seasons as the point guard for Neptune Day School, Greenwald went on to Ulpanat Orot, a Hebrew high school that did not have a basketball program. Greenwald made the decision to transfer to CHAT, where she could resume playing basketball as a junior.

However, during a JCC Maccabi tournament in West Orange, N.Y., Greenwald partially tore a

ligament in her knee and then re-injured it the following year.

“I knew that I had torn my ACL and my basketball season was over. I was upset,” recalls Greenwald.

She used that as motivation, making it back in time to play Grade 11 volleyball and softball. As a senior, she finally made it onto the basketball court.

“She was desperate to play in her senior year to make an impact. She’s the type of girl not to let up. That’s what set her apart,” said Aubrey Zimmerman, her coach at CHAT.

Greenwald, who was named CHAT’s athlete of the year, was among the team leaders in scoring, assists and steals, and hit the biggest shot of the season, a game winning buzzer-beater to win the CHAT Israel Becker Invitational.

“CHAT had never won a tournament. Everyone went nuts. Ramaz was a huge rival and she broke their backs.” said Zimmerman. “She had a lot of fire about her. You need that. Shayna was a leader.”

After high school, Greenwald spent a year in Israel and then enrolled at the University of Toronto. College basketball games often conflicted with the Sabbath, so Greenwald’s commitment to her Jewish faith forced her to make a difficult choice.

“I couldn’t play on the university team. Without my Judaic studies as the driving force, what would be the point?” explained Greenwald. “I was not fulfilled.”

Instead, she decided to attend Yeshiva University in New York, which offers a Division III basketball program.

“Shayna and basketball are synonymous. She loves the game,” said Karen Greene, head coach of the Yeshiva Lady Maccabis. “Shayna is tenacious in reaching her goals.”

Last year, Greenwald earned an All-Hudson Valley Conference selection and this year, she was named player of the week twice, along with MVP of the Betty Shabazz Tournament, when she hit a game winning three-pointer with three seconds left.

While she will remain in New York to work for Lehman Brothers as a financial analyst, Greenwald’s heart is in Canada. She’ll likely be part of Team Canada for the 2005 Maccabiah Games in Israel.

“I love being a Canadian, I love the game and I love Judaism,” she said. “I just hope there is another guard out there who is not going to settle but also take a chance to play and shine.”