

THIS (JEWISH) GIRL CAN



More than 100 women a year take part in Community Netball Day

Sportswomen jump at the chance to compete

BY NEIL TAYLOR

JEWISH WOMEN are known for many things. Chutzpah. Business savvy. Great cooking. Fabulous dress sense. But not, on the whole, for being sporty. However, the male-dominated sporting landscape is changing.

Recent figures released by Sport England have shown an increase in the number of women playing sport across the country. Viral and media campaigns such as “We Can Play” (for women’s and girls’ football) and “This Girl Can” (for all sports) have contributed to a greater awareness of female sports participation and an empowerment of women to lace up and take part.

These changes are reflected in the Jewish community as well. Maccabi GB, the key provider of Jewish sport, health and wellbeing programmes in the UK, has noted a significant rise in female applicants for the 20th Maccabiah Games in 2017 compared to the same event four years earlier. For the Maccabiah in 2013 there were 174 female applicants across all sports and age categories. For next summer’s event, Team GB already has 191 female applicants after launching a recruitment drive just under five months ago.

And sportswomen have had a major impact at this competition. In 2013, Great Britain’s junior and open netballers won gold and bronze respectively, while Manchester sprinter Ellie Edwards became the world’s fastest Jewish junior girl by winning gold in the 200m on her way to a hat-trick of medals.

Maccabi GB has always encouraged

Jewish women and girls to play sport. It has launched a number of female-only events, including annual dance-a-thons and community netball. The latter has always been popular, with more than 100 participants each year. It will be a case of history repeating itself this month when Maccabi GB teams up with International Women’s Day and This Girl Can to host the Community Netball Day 2016.

The day will welcome a number of women’s health experts – including a personal trainer, a nutritionist and a wellness coach. Any type of netballer can join in – on previous occasions, women who competed in the sport every week have lined up alongside those who last played in primary school. Jewish women are signing up in droves every year, underlining the desire for women’s sport within the community.

It is not just on the track or court where Jewish sportswomen shine. Maccabi GB has noted a rise in the number of female footballers aged 18 and under playing the beautiful game. The organisation’s girls’ football development sessions have doubled in popularity and it now holds fortnightly meets for girls in school years five to eight, with attendance in double figures. The same is true of teenage players – at a recent get-together for potential Team GB junior girls, 25 footballers showed up to take part. The culture of Jewish sport is becoming more gender-equal. Long may this continue.

Neil Taylor is Maccabi GB head of sport. For more details of Maccabi GB’s Community Netball Day on March 13 and to enter a team, see maccabigb.org/communitynetball

Demand has soared for girls’ football sessions



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