

Maccabi Games lack quality, but not spirit

I've been spoiled. The recent Olympic games in Los Angeles turned me on to volleyball and absolutely captivated me in the fine art of gymnastics. It didn't matter that the Russian athletes and their cohorts weren't around.

The competition was chilling and I lost at least two hours of sleep by tuning into ABC's late-night coverage.

Since LA didn't make my travel itinerary this year, I thought I was doing the next best thing by waiting for the second Maccabi Youth Games for Jewish athletes which are in progress this week in West Bloomfield.

I was disappointed.

I put in a full day of watching volleyball, basketball, racquetball, swimming and tennis Monday at the Jewish Community Center, West Bloomfield High School and Orchard Lake Middle School. I was told before hand the Mac-

cabi "Games" would provide some fine entertainment.

I think that's why I was expecting better quality and more intense athletic competition.

I REALIZE the Olympic-style competition is for youngsters from 13 to 16 years of age. And I know we're not dealing with all world-class athletes.

But it's hard to get excited about watching volleyball players who don't know how many points constitute a match and who don't know it's necessary to win each match by at least two points. There were basketball players who found it a mild chore to dribble and swimmers who couldn't turn without slamming their legs up against the pool's deck.

In all fairness, there were a few top-



Marty Budner

flight athletes performing. Table tennis player Michelle Mantel of Southfield, tracter Natalie Greenspan of Birmingham and tennis player Nicole Rivul of Bloomfield Hills are local athletes who pop immediately into mind.

Generally speaking, though, the overall quality was subpar considering athletes from across the United States

and five other countries — Mexico, Australia, Israel, Venezuela and Canada — were present.

It took Ira Hametri, vice president of the Israeli Sports Federation and chairman of the Maccabi Games in Israel, to put the "Games" in proper perspective for me.

HAMETRI explained it's not really competition that's important at worldwide Jewish athletic event like this. It's camaraderie that's essential, he said.

In other words, as the cliché goes, it's "the spirit of the games" which really do count. The Jewish people have had a rough history. The idea is to get the young athletes together and keep that proud Jewish heritage intact.

"It's very important to bring Jewish kids together like this and make them feel like they belong to something," said Hametri, who headed a delegation of 53 Israeli athletes.

"We came here because it was our pleasure. We didn't come to win the whole games. We wanted to be with children from other countries. They are here from Australia and from Israel... that's what important."

"Just to bring Jewish kids together is a great experience," he said.

The very best athletes from these Games will probably be invited to compete at the 1988 Los Angeles Maccabiah Games in Tel Aviv. It might be proper to note that such Olympic stars as swimmer Mark Spitz and gymnast Mitch Gaylord have participated in these Games.

So, there must be something to that cliché, "Spirit of Competition."

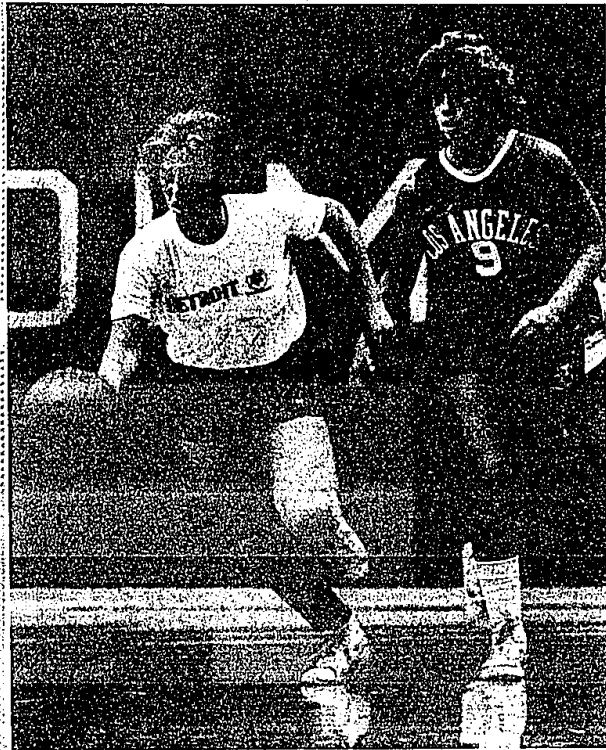


photo by GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Tracy Cohen of West Bloomfield brings the ball upcourt during an early-round girls basketball loss Monday to Los Angeles. Cohen is a member of the Detroit De-

legation at the second Maccabi Games which will conclude this weekend at various sites around West Bloomfield.

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