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## The Sabbath sport controversy.

The following article by [Rabbi Raymond Apple](#) appeared in the Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society in June 2009, Vol. XIX, Part 3.



Australians as a sport-loving people seem to need their weekends and public holidays more than any other nation. The climax of the week for so many people is either playing sport or watching it. Even Australians abroad can hardly live without news of Collingwood or the cricket. Aussie Rules and the Ashes are high on the agenda wherever you hear an Australian accent. And the Jewish community is no exception.

Someone – it may have been me – once remarked that when Australian Jews read the *Jewish News*, they start at the back with the sports pages because reading Hebrew from right to left is a habit they cannot break. Jokes aside, sport created one of the few occasions in Australian Jewish history when there was a tug-of-war between being Australian and being Jewish. The issue was that of Sabbath sport.

In Britain it is reported that [Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler](#) was once asked whether children might swim on Shabbat. His succinct answer was, “They may swim, but I would like to think they had *davened* (prayed) first”. Even in Britain, it is not certain

that he gave a fully correct ruling in terms of *halachah* (Jewish law), but in Australia where the weather is consistently better and sport is far more evident on the Jewish scene, the problem created a number of major controversies.

This particular paper looks at an episode in Melbourne in the late 1920s and early 1930s when the Judean League was developing into a major force in the community and the rabbis became so embroiled in the issue of Sabbath sport that the problem crossed the seas and even involved [Rav Kook](#), the chief rabbi of the Holy Land, and is said (not entirely correctly) to have unseated one of the rabbinic protagonists.

But first some background. Though Jews as individuals played sport and some achieved fame, such as the [boxer Daniel Mendoza](#) in 18th-century England, European Jews were generally urban dwellers, with little contact with nature and few opportunities for physical exercise. Their health and appearance were unimpressive, and they rarely had the physical stamina to defend themselves against antisemitic attacks. Attempts to improve their physical condition were dubbed “Muscular Judaism”, a phrase coined in 1900 by Max Nordau, who urged, “Let us continue our ancient tradition of being heroes with deep chests, nimble limbs and fearless looks”.

Nordau was probably exaggerating to some extent, but it is true that the ancient Israelites were a hardy, energetic people with their athletes and sportsmen. The Bible mentions physical activities as diverse as running, archery, ball-playing, dancing, swimming, weight-lifting and sling-shooting. Jacob won a wife because he was able to lift a heavy stone; David slew Goliath because of his skill with a sling. After the Biblical period other sports became popular. They ranged from gladiatorial combats – Resh Lakish was a gladiator in his youth – to juggling: Rabban Shim’on ben Gamli’el juggled with eight burning torches during the celebrations on Sukkot. The Talmud advises every father to teach his child to swim. The Roman historian Tacitus, who was no admirer of Jews, remarked that “the bodies of the Jews are sound and healthy, and hardy to bear burdens”.

Yet rabbinic attitudes to sport became increasingly disapproving. Despite the many teachings that advocated bodily health, there was strong opposition to the way in which young men gained their exercise. Some sports undermined Judaism, since sporting contests were accompanied by idolatrous worship. Others offended against Jewish morality when they entailed immodesty (“gymnasium” is from “gymnos, naked”) or acts of cruelty. Some threatened Jewish identity: when Jewish athletes played games naked, they sometimes resorted to clumsy attempts to conceal their circumcision. Sports also, like the circus and theatre, often diverted young men from Torah study.

As the centuries went on, there developed a decided preference for intellectual pursuits, for mental rather than physical gymnastics. One of the few “approved” recreations was chess, which required mental more than physical effort. Nonetheless sports prowess continued to develop. The many rabbinic discussions about whether ball games may be played on Shabbat suggest that Jews enjoyed their sports. From at least the 14th century, young Jews competed in running, jumping, bowling, throwing and horse

riding, and some ghettos had a public square where rudimentary sports carnivals took place.

One sport which was always bitterly opposed was [hunting](#), which was seen as causing cruelty to animals. There are many stories of people who mistreated animals being told, “You can’t really be Jewish!” There was also opposition to [boxing](#), which often involved injury to other human beings, though this did not prevent a number of Jews becoming famous boxers. In many places, however, Jews lived in such cramped conditions that there was no space for sport. Sunshine, green grass and flowers were rare, and life was too serious for recreation, other than on Purim and sometimes on other festivals.

Max Nordau’s vision of the athletic potential of young Jews proved prophetic. In many communities, even to some extent in places where Jewish emancipation was not yet fully or even partly achieved, Jewish sports clubs came into being. They bore names like Maccabi, Bar Kochba, HaKoah and HaGibbor. Not only did they allow organised sporting activities, but they altered the profile of the Jewish youth community, involved adults and even senior citizens, and reinforced the healthy, energetic pioneering way of life in pre-State Palestine.

In Australia, Jewish sport actually pre-dates Max Nordau’s “Muscular Judaism”. Apart from individual Jews who achieved note in boxing, cricket, tennis, swimming and other sports, there were organised Jewish sports activities: Hebrew School picnics included a range of games, with the excitement spanning not only the children and their parents but even some of the clergy, and cricket matches between some of the synagogues. From 1924 onwards, the interstate sports carnivals became highlights of Jewish life. But Hermann Adler, who did not mind children swimming on Shabbat as long as they had *davened* first, would have felt uneasy to see very little *davening* and hardly any concern for Sabbath observance, not to speak of kosher food and other religious practices.

Enter the great Judean League controversy. Various initiatives for younger people had come out of [Rabbi Jacob Danglow](#)’s first years in Australia, including the establishment in 1911 of JYPA, the Jewish Young People’s Association or “Jippa”, with sporting, cultural and social activities which waxed and waned. Young Zionist groups – some for boys, some for girls – also came into being, though some said they were more social than Zionistic. Some of the clubs used the name “Judean” in order to denote Zionist identity, but others took to it because, like “Hebrew Congregation” for a synagogue, it sidestepped the blunt word “Jew”. The co-ordination of youth and adult organisations was undertaken by the Judean League, which in 1926 bought a building in Carlton which was opened by [Sir John Monash](#) and in his honour given the name Monash House. This continued for many years as a north-of-the-Yarra community centre, though it was not greatly patronised by the growing Jewish population south of the Yarra. In time, the Judean League played a major role in spearheading community democratisation, arguing that the patrician Jewish Advisory Board was too limited and unrepresentative, but this is a story on its own.

In the 1920s the leading clergy – [Rabbis Israel Brodie](#) of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, Solomon Mestel of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and Jacob Danglow of the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation – all supported the desire of the Judean League “to uphold traditional Judaism” (*Jewish Herald*, 17 April, 1930). The League was aware, as the Jewish press pointed out, that the community, including “prominent Jewish personages”, were holding or attending social events on Friday nights (*Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 10 May and 19 July, 1928). The clergy welcomed the Judean League’s attempts to avoid Sabbath desecration by holding literary evenings at Monash House on Friday nights (*Jewish Herald*, 6 Feb, 1930). However, sporting activities on Shabbat were a more difficult problem, and in early 1929 the Council of the League decided upon a referendum, asking, “Are you in favour of strictly regulated and supervised Jewish Saturday sport?” (*Judean League Minute Book*, date uncertain, page 122).

The issue was not the principle of playing games on Shabbat. The *Shulchan Aruch*, the Code of Jewish Law, expressly states: “Young men who derive pleasure from jumping and running are permitted to do so on the Sabbath” (Orach Chayyim 301:2). The fear was of ancillary infringements of the Sabbath law, such as taking equipment from place to place, using transport, writing down results and handling money, and even making holes in the ground. These problems could be minimised when playing sport privately but were almost inevitable when it came to organised team matches.

Yet it was not because of the Judean League that the problem surfaced in Melbourne. In February, 1930, Rabbi Brodie made a fierce public statement on the subject at the annual prize distribution of the United Jewish Education Board. Referring to “a group of Jewish newcomers who called themselves the Hakoah football club (and) wanted permission from the Beth Din to play with non-Jews on the Sabbath afternoon”, the rabbi said, “The Beth Din has not granted and will not grant permission”. He declared, “Our enemies in the past tried to make us give up the Sabbath. They failed. Now enemies in our midst try to do the same thing. They, too, would rob us of our Sabbath. But they, too, will fail.”

“Only in a community where people observe the Sabbath would the slightest concession be justifiable. And even then the concession would be very slight and could not extent to organised sport. But in this community, where surely there is sufficient Sabbath desecration without making it more barefaced and more shameless, no Beth Din, no self-respecting Jew, could possibly grant any such permission. The Melbourne Beth Din has not sanctioned, under any conditions, and will not sanction the playing of organised games on the Sabbath” (*JH*, 3 April, 1930).

At the annual general meeting of the Judean League the matter was debated to and fro, and Alfred Newton Super denied that Rabbi Brodie was speaking in a personal capacity (*JH*, 1 May, 1930). Nonetheless the League, under the influence of Maurice Ashkanasy, asked Rabbi Mestel for a ruling. Ashkanasy, a dominant force in the League, was involved in East Melbourne and was a severe critic of Rabbi Brodie. Mestel, born in Poland in 1886, was a fine rabbinic scholar with degrees from Jews’

College, London. Minister of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation from 1923-30, he took leave in 1926 to go to England to gain the rabbinical diploma. Apart from East Melbourne, he held British rabbinic posts at Richmond, Nottingham and West Ham. For some time he was a welfare minister of the [United Synagogue](#) and in retirement lived in Ilford, where he gave a Talmud *shi'ur* and assisted with services. He died in 1966.

He gave the Judean League the following statement on Sabbath sport on 22 April, 1930: “I welcome the opportunity to correct the erroneous but widespread idea that such sport is contrary to Jewish Law – an idea which I can only attribute in part to the fact that the conception of the Sabbath as a day of gloom, which has been adopted by some of our Gentile neighbours, has ousted the true Jewish conception of the day as being not only one of rest but of joy and recreation. Possibly the restricted movement and liberty of our people in Russia, Poland, and other countries, created such economic conditions as did not allow them time for sport.”

He affirmed that “Amateur sport on the Sabbath is not only not prohibited but is expressly permitted by Jewish Law”. His permission extended “to competitive sport, to competitions for trophies of no intrinsic value, and to organised sport, but not to sport pursued as a business or for gain”, and warned against “committing numerous incidental breaches of Jewish law”. He was, however, prepared to envisage conditions under which sports could be played on Shabbat, so long as matches were strictly supervised. He added, “I would regard it as a fine thing that, instead of young men engaging in Sabbath sport in defiance of authority, committing numerous incidental breaches of Jewish law, and forming undesirable attachments, they should play together under Jewish religious supervision, observing Jewish Law, and strengthening their Jewish Faith, enthusiasm, and consciousness” (Mestel re-published the full text in the London *Jewish Chronicle* years later, when there was a Sabbath sport controversy in South Africa: *JC*, 19 Dec, 1954).

Mestel’s proposal would have established a concept of kosher sport. Other rabbis might have opposed any form of sport, supervised or not, though in practice the more modern rabbis learned to turn a blind eye to such prohibitions. Mestel was, however, not simply thinking of good relationships with young people, but was arguing from within Jewish law and finding *halachic* justification for his stance. Nonetheless he was in error when he claimed that his position was approved by Chief Rabbi Kook, as we shall see.

The specific matter in contention was football, which is not a simple problem of running and jumping but involves additional *halachic* concerns. Though Moses Isserles, in his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch*, takes a lenient view of ball games on Shabbat and says, *yesh mattirin, v’nahagu l’hakel* – “some authorities permit it, and the custom is to be lenient” (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim 308:45 and 518:1), other authorities disagree. Karo, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* itself, says, *Asur lis’chok b’Shabbat v’yomtov bakkadur* – “it is forbidden to play with a ball on Shabbat and festivals” (Orach Chayyim 308:45). Yet they were not debating a new problem. There is evidence that ball playing was already known and not regarded with great rabbinic

favour two millennia ago. Rabbinic sources indeed aver that the Palestinian town of Tur Shim'on was destroyed *shem'sach'kim bakkadur*, because its inhabitants played ball on the Sabbath (Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit 14:5). Another source suggests that the Jewish community of Alexandria perished for the same reason.

Football, entailing kicking a ball, generally produced strict rabbinic responses. Rabbinic sources in the Middle Ages also knew of other ball games in which a bat was used, possibly similar to cricket and tennis, though of course without these names. These sports must have been popular even before medieval times since they also figured in rabbinic debate about Shabbat laws (Babylonian Talmud and Tosafot, Betzah 12a).

Rabbi Mestel told the Judean League that he had heard that Chief Rabbi Kook had approved the playing of football in the Land of Israel on Shabbat. Rabbi Brodie was certain no such permission had been given. In order to find out for himself, Newman Rosenthal as editor of the *Jewish Herald* cabled Rabbi Kook (and also Chief Rabbi JH Hertz in London). Rabbi Kook sent back an indignant reply denying that he had ever even contemplated allowing football on Shabbat. His cable to Rosenthal dated 13 May read, "I have never approved. Cricket and Football on Sabbath or Holydays are Forbidden" (*JH*, 15 May, 1930). The contrary impression had been spread by an official of the Maccabi football team in Palestine. The *Jewish Chronicle* in London reported what this official had said or deduced, and someone sent Rabbi Kook a cutting of the *JC* report.

Rabbi Kook now wrote to the Jewish Forum of New York on 20 Ellul, 5691 (1931), "I have received your esteemed letter with the clipping concerning football playing on Sabbath and festival, and was amazed to see that in my name any sort of permission was given for it. It is absolute falsehood!... It is an *issur gamur*, entirely forbidden without any permissibility whatever, and such a thing should not be done."

Whether Rabbi Kook really understood what football was all about is a moot point. There is a story that in about 1920 he received a delegation from a football club that hoped he would let them play on Shabbat. He asked about football and its rules. They did their best to explain the game but he said, "There is something I don't understand. You tell me that each team has a goal. Why then do they struggle so hard to push the ball into the other side's goal? Wouldn't it be much simpler to get the ball into their own goal?" (Shmuel Katz, *Jerusalem Post Weekly Edition*, 2-9 Dec, 1978).

Rabbi Kook's rejection of Sabbath football was reinforced by Dr Hertz, who in a cable dated 19 May upheld Rabbi Brodie's view "that the playing of organised games by Jewish clubs on the Sabbath is prohibited". The Judean League wanted to appeal to the London Beth Din but Brodie strongly objected because he said he already knew that London supported his own prohibition. Maurice Ashkanasy and the League said that a request to the local Beth Din to allow the appeal to the London authorities had previously gone unanswered, though Brodie was certain that the Beth Din had sent a reply, and Ashkanasy wrote to the press insinuating that Brodie was not entirely

truthful and making personal remarks about the rabbi and “his coterie” (*AJC*, 17 July, 1930).

Whilst the conflict was at its height, Mestel resigned from the Melbourne Beth Din (*JH*, 1 and 29 May, 1930) and informed the Judean League that “having regard to the authority of the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, such sport should not be officially sanctioned” (*JH*, 29 May, 1930). He also denied that a report in the *Argus* had come from him (*ibid*). Before long he left East Melbourne. His departure was hastened by the controversy but it would have happened in any case because the Depression was affecting the congregation’s capacity to pay his salary. However, Mestel never resiled from his *halachic* ruling, and when he was living in retirement in Ilford, Essex, he continued to relate the Judean League story. I recall him talking to me about it in the early 1960s.

His conflict with Rabbi Brodie had not “arisen in a night” (Jonah 4:10). Mrs Mestel had Brodie in mind when she wrote about people who made life difficult for her husband. The *Jewish Herald*, with a Brodie connection, backed Brodie, and the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* – whose editor was not one of his adulating followers – urged that the problem be faced with more understanding and “in a sympathetic and helpful manner” (*AJC* editorial, 8 May, 1930). The *AJC* opposed relying on “an English Beth Din on matters regarding which they have no local knowledge” (*AJC* editorial, 3 July, 1930) and asked whether the cables to Rabbi Kook and Dr Hertz had “fully and frankly revealed” the whole facts (*AJC* editorial, 5 June, 1930). Many in the community probably supported Lionel Jacobson, who, in a letter to the *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, said that Saturday afternoon was the only time when “wholesome... recreation” was practicable, including participation in outside sports competitions. He added, “Although it may seem to some people that Jewish traditions will suffer by this apparent disrespect of our Sabbath day, may I point out that we are always eager to glorify our famous men and women who have succeeded in bringing honor (sic) to the Jewish name, no matter whether they are *froom* or otherwise” (*AJC*, 2 April, 1930).

The more restrictive position was not without its champions, even though the majority of the community were probably lukewarm in their observance of orthodox traditions. Frank Silverton spoke for the less *froom* group when he wrote in the *AJC* on 10 April attacking those who would drive the community “along a narrow groove”. The *froom* sector included Abraham Feiglin who wrote warning that Sabbath sport would hasten assimilation “and the little Jewishness which still remains in the Australian youth would suffer”. JE Stone quoted, with Rabbi Mestel in mind, the rabbinic advice, “Sages, be careful with your words” (Mishnah Avot 1:11). IJ Super, the community’s chief *shochet* (later Rabbi Super) wrote an article examining Rabbi Mestel’s sources (*JH*, 15 May, 1930). Hirsch de Vahl Stone said that Rabbi Mestel’s view was “as inconsistent as it is humorous” and wondered why Mestel allowed his own daughter to play sport on Saturday. He said he was reminded of a case when a cow fell into the river on Shabbat and a rabbi said it would be a desecration of the Sabbath to save it. Then someone said, “But rabbi, it is your own cow”. The rabbi now said, “Save it: it is

cruelty to animals!” (*AJC*, 19 April, 1930). LA Silk said in a letter to the *AJC* that youngsters from *froom* homes were “playing with gentile clubs who are only too pleased to welcome them” (*AJC*, 17 April, 1930).

Within the Judean League itself there were various views. Leslie Abrahams, the past president and now vice-president, admitted as much in a letter to the *Jewish Herald* on 8 May, 1930, criticising the way Maurice Ashkanasy had handled the matter. Abrahams added that nevertheless the conflict between the rabbis had made life very difficult for the League. He quoted Rabbi Mestel: “You may organise and play any game with other Jewish or outside bodies” – and Rabbi Brodie, “You will desecrate all that is left of our Sabbath”... and added, “How long will ye halt between two opinions?” (I Kings 18:21), sighs the weary Community”.

Trying to drive a wedge between the rabbis, a Judean League official made a public statement that he had heard that Rabbi Danglow was in favour of Sabbath sport. Danglow was no fanatic and probably would not have used Brodie’s rather extreme words about “the enemy in our midst” nor given either side a blank cheque, but it was probably he who toned down Beth Din policy to read that “Under certain conditions certain games might be played”, with the wider, “In view of the fact that desecration of the Sabbath must inevitably follow in other ways, we could not give permission for organised games to be played on the Sabbath”. Unfortunately, the full records of the Melbourne Beth Din are not available for consultation, as many of their archives, including registers of conversions and divorces, disappeared about thirty years ago. But the friction between Brodie and Mestel is attested in the following passage from Mrs Mestel’s article, “Memories of Melbourne” in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, vol. 17, part 1 (2003), page 67: “It is not necessary to point out where the greatest opposition came from. The reader will probably guess. People who should have known how to ‘play the game’ wrote to the non-Jewish press, washing their domestic linen in public not for reasons of Orthodoxy, but because of ‘politics’ which ought not to exist in the ministry.”

The whole story filled the Jewish press in Melbourne and Sydney throughout early 1930. The editor of the *Jewish Herald* called for *sof davar*, “an end to the thing”, and said, “Those who observe the Sabbath will continue to observe it. Those who don’t will, of course, continue to please themselves. It will take a higher authority even than Rabbi Mestel to effect a change” (*JH*, 1 May, 1930). The subject did, not, however, lie down and die. The *Australian Jewish Chronicle* said it was “the subject of heated talk in numerous committees and at numerous private gatherings. The matter crops up at social evenings, bridge parties and functions... It even formed, most inappropriately, the subject of discussion at a recent funeral, and otherwise respectable citizens have seized me by the buttons of my coat in the streets of Melbourne, and taking me on one side, have poured their views on the matter into my reluctant ear.” The editor of the *AJC*, Rev AT Chodowski, wryly comments that once the Judean League has sorted the problem out, “I wonder what the Jewish people of this city will have left to them as a subject of conversation”.

Yet the fences between Brodie and the Judean League seem to have mended after a while. The League's minute books record that at the annual general meeting on 7 December, 1931, "After the elections were held Rabbi I Brodie addressed the gathering on the question of Sabbath sport, and suggested a conference of all Jewish sporting bodies being held with the aim of co-operating to eliminate sport on the Sabbath" (*Minute Book*, typed attachment to 162). The conference took place at the Toorak Road Synagogue in mid-1932 under the chairmanship of Rabbi Brodie and was reported on at the Judean League Council on 23 June, 1932. The following strongly worded motion was carried by the Council: "The Association will not tolerate nor on any way countenance the playing of competition sport on the Sabbath, and individual members of the clubs in the Association shall not assist nor be members of any Jewish team playing competitive Sabbath sport". An amendment that the words from "and individual members" onwards be omitted lapsed for want of a seconder. Yet however good this sounds from the point of view of Rabbi Brodie, sporting competitions on Shabbat became entrenched with little regard for Sabbath observance.

There is a relevance in correspondence from much later, when Rabbi Kook's successor, Rabbi Dr Isaac HaLevy Herzog, was chief rabbi of Ireland. Rabbi Herzog's attitude is summed up in a letter written to me on 25 March, 1999, by Dr Leonard Warlock of Sydney. I had given a comment to the *Australian Jewish News* about Sabbath sport and Dr Warlock wrote: "Your comments on sport on Saturday prompt me to recall that in Dublin in the 1930s the Jewish Cricket Club 'Carlisle' of which I was a member played on Saturday although we were all from Orthodox homes and could 'daven from the Amud', i.e. conduct services (I still do when I have *Yahrzeit*); and who was our rabbi? None other than Rabbi Isaac Herzog, later chief rabbi of Israel. He had to quietly acquiesce though not approve. Interestingly, his young sons Chaim and Yankel used to come round to our home in the next street on Sunday mornings after *Shul* to get the results of the games."

Orthodox Jews in British countries, and many of their rabbis, condoned without protest the playing of tennis on private courts on Shabbat. Examples are Samuel Montagu, the first Lord Swaythling, whose children played on his private court, and Rabbi Danglow in Melbourne, whose children played on the tennis courts at the homes of their Michaelis and Hallenstein relatives. A member of the London Beth Din, Dayan B Spiers, is said to have observed when a Jewish neighbour played tennis on a Saturday afternoon, "Healthy recreation is permitted on the Sabbath" (*JC*, 26 March, 1954). It must be said that on private premises without any admission charge the problems of Shabbat ball games are greatly diminished though not eliminated.

When in 1954 Rabbi Mestel letter re-iterated his 1930 arguments, MI Fabritz told the *JC* (26 March, 1954) that "Rabbi Mestel is quite erroneous". He said that the statement in the *Shulchan Aruch* that young men may run and jump on Shabbat applies to individuals, not to organised sport, and that according to the Magen Avraham, the commentary of Abraham Gumbiner, any permission applies to festivals and not Shabbat. He also quoted Dr Michael Friedlander, a famous principal of Jews' College,

who said that the prohibition of “work” on Shabbat includes “everything which our conscience tells us to be inappropriate on the Sabbath” (M Friedlander, *The Jewish Religion*, 1953, page 352).

In Australia the issue of Sabbath sport surfaced again time after time with the post-war strengthening of the Jewish sporting movement and the upsurge in the Jewish day schools, when schools and clubs were reluctant to deny themselves the opportunity to take part in sporting competitions. In Britain the Association for Jewish Youth organised sports competitions on Sundays in order to reduce Sabbath desecration, though it was no secret that some or many members of AJY clubs who wished to play sport on Saturdays found ways to indulge their interests. If I may be permitted a personal note, I worked for the AJY as religious director for a few years and arranged weekends away, usually at the seaside, without competitive sport. In an unofficial way some participants did play games and they seemed satisfied that I was there to pray for good weather without necessarily playing sport myself.

Few Australian rabbis showed much interest in Jewish sport or indeed in sport of any kind. An important exception was Rabbi David I Freedman of the Perth Hebrew Congregation who enjoyed watching Jewish sports matches so much – probably not on Shabbat – that on at least one occasion he ran onto the field and hugged and kissed some of the players, to everyone’s embarrassment except his own. [Rabbi Lazarus M Goldman](#) of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, a keen sportsman himself, often walked on Shabbat afternoon to watch cricket and tennis at various sports grounds near his St Kilda Road home. Rabbi Goldman was excited to be the official patron when interstate sports carnivals took place in Melbourne; when he was away on active service during World War II he played cricket with his troops and was one of the most energetic members of the Australian military chaplaincy. Rabbi Dangelow played golf and bowls well into old age, though he was more active in boxing and other sports in his earlier years.

Over the years, some Maccabi state organisations appointed honorary chaplains and from time to time raised issues of Shabbat and *kashrut* with them. For a long period I was chaplain to NSW Maccabi and even had a Maccabi blazer. When people asked me what sport I played I used to say, “I’m the captain of the *davening* team!” Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler might have approved, though I am not certain whether I succeeded in bringing very many Jewish sports people closer to the prayer book. Like every other rabbi, however, I always felt for Rabbi Moshe ben Avraham of 16th century Provence who approved a game like tennis on Shabbat subject to the proviso that it not be played “while the sermon is being preached in the synagogue: this is absolutely not permissible!” (Ely E Pilchik, “Anyone for Tennis on Shabbat?”, *The Jewish Digest*, Feb, 1974). That proviso would certainly have resounded well with Hermann Adler.

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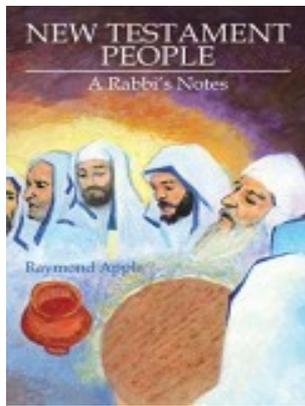
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