

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv Take to the Ice

Historic game at the UBS Arena for the Israel Elite Hockey League



By Henry Levy

ELMONT, N.Y. -- What a game! Over 8,000 people showed up at the UBS Arena on Sunday, March 23, 2025 to cheer for two Israeli Elite Hockey League (IEHL) rivals in a nail-biting 7-6 overtime game.

The USA Challenge Cup match was won by the Jerusalem Capitals as they squeaked by the HC Tel Aviv club. According to veteran announcer, Kenny Albert, "the fans couldn't be more excited." He called it a special night and remarked that from a purely technical standpoint, you could see that the level of athleticism of the players was amazing.

The love for hockey was only exceeded by the attendees love for Israel. There were images on the Jumbotron of IDF soldiers, an appearance by Miss Israel, a candidate for the Miss Universe title and Israeli songs including Jerusalem of Gold as well as people draped and waving Israeli flags.

The highlight was the appearance of 87-year-old Holocaust survivor Ivan Gluck in uniform, as the honorary captain of the Jerusalem Capitals, skating on the ice prior to the opening ceremonies, wearing No. 18 and fist bumping the players of both teams.

The Capital's assistant coach David Warsofsky remarked, "What (Gluck) went through and what he's gone through his whole life is everything to us. So, it's important to recognize him and what he's been through. In the grand scheme of



87-year-old Holocaust survivor Ivan Gluck

things, stuff that he had to go through is way more difficult than what we're able to do on the ice."

The all-volunteer non-profit, Voices for Truth and Humanity had spoken to the



IEHL commissioners and representatives of the UBS Arena about dedicating the game to Holocaust awareness and education and they were pleased at the ovation given to Ivan Gluck.

Marc Brunengraber, league co-founder and co-commissioner said that the IEHL "serves as a way to promote Israel." He added, "This game normalizes Israel and the people of Israel through sports. The greatest way to get the truth about Israel and see what Israel is all about is to go there. The IEHL is a vehicle to help fight efforts to demonize Israel. It brings Jewish players closer to their heritage, and non-Jewish players are our brothers and we love and appreciate them. The non-Jewish players (comprising about 1/3 of league) see that Israel is a diverse democracy. They see that while it is the one Jewish state in the world, other ethnicities thrive and even flourish there. They then go home to their countries and tell people that the portrayal of Israel as an apartheid,

genocidal state is an outright lie. This is bigger than hockey."

The IEHL has only three full size ice hockey rinks where games are played, so playing on NHL ice and the home of

the NY Islanders, with all the lights, goal horns and signage was quite an experience for these two teams. It was an historic moment for Israeli hockey.

HC Tel Aviv coach Stuart Gourdji said, "This is a dream coaching in front of, I think 8,000 people. Truly incredible hearing Hebrew songs at a hockey game, the music, the spirit, the atmosphere."

Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman threw down the first puck with Evgenii Kozhevnikov of the Capitals and Krill Polozov of Tel Aviv taking the opening face-off. The game proceeded at what seemed like break-neck speed. There were over 120 combined shots at goal.

There were penalties, power plays and even a fight as Tel Aviv's captain Michael Gennello and Jerusalem's Nolan Berr y went at it. Chris Blake scored first for Tel Aviv and Denis Zaychik who scored the winning overtime goal for Jerusalem said he was "feeling amazing. Fans of Israel and fans of hockey and together it's a very good mix."

Game MVP was the Capitals Nikita Zitserman, a highly touted 16-year-old who accomplished a 3 goal "Hat Trick". He is so good that he may be a prospect for the NHL when he is eligible. Zitserman said, "I knew I had to put the puck in the net. He added that four years ago, he played 4-on-4 and now an NHL arena. It was my dream since I was a kid."



Voice for Truth and Humanity contingent in their box enjoying the game