



## ***Cubs connections a big spur in Team Israel's surprising WBC story***

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Label them the Little Team That Could or Hoosiers with a Jewish pedigree.

But don't call them the Jamaican Bobsled Team. Those are fighting words to a bunch of athletes who bonded together, forged team camaraderie and racked up a nice winning streak to steal headlines while playing in the opening rounds of the World Baseball Classic in South Korea and Japan.

Team Israel's low-seeded WBC entry was the talk of the tourney, especially after beating a Netherlands squad with five big-league starting players and then world power Cuba. What wasn't well-known was the squad was so intertwined with Cubs connections.

Six players or coaches, five Jewish, who had Wrigley Field ties were integral parts of the story that reminds us baseball is the one, unpredictable sport where any team can beat any other team, and do it again and again, where the 27th out is the hardest to get in any sport. Team Israel had the added impetus of a roster-wide commitment to their Jewish identity, only fulfilled by playing for their team, in showing a keen prowess for the all-American game.

Leading off and playing center was Sam Fuld, a fan favorite from back in 2007 after making one of the greatest catches ever in Wrigley Field. Fuld went on to become a human highlight reel, a frequent Web Gem, with his outfield acrobatics for the Cubs, Rays, Twins and Athletics.

"They reached out to me this winter and once I got clearance from my surgeon to play, I committed," said Fuld, 35, injured all of 2016 due to left-rotator cuff surgery after last playing for the Athletics. "I felt like it was a once in a lifetime opportunity that I couldn't pass up."



**Sam Fuld returned to action with Team Israel after missing the 2016 season with injuries.**

Providing a glue to the pitching staff was Jason Marquis, the Cubs' fifth starter in 2007-08. At 38 with his last big-league inning recorded in 2015, right-hander Marquis looked at the WBC as a possible means for a big-league comeback.

"My agents have sent out some feelers, but I didn't throw for any teams this winter," Marquis, 38, said after last pitching for the Reds in 2015. "The WBC is a good platform to show where I stand. Hopefully everything goes well. You never know what can happen with teams, whether it's injuries or younger pitchers not being as ready as they thought. Maybe I can snag a job."

Stalwarts of manager Jerry Weinstein's coaching staff were pitching coach Andrew Lorraine and third-base coach Tom Gamboa, who were previously connected. Lorraine and non-Jew Gamboa knew each other when the former was a star high-school lefty in the northern part of the Los Angeles area.

Then they wore Cubs pinstripes together for the final two months of the woebegone 1999 season, when Lorraine tossed one of the three shutouts recorded by that season's horrible rotation (five of seven pitchers with 11 or more starts had ERAs more than 5.00). Lorraine has an added Chicago background, having also appeared in relief in five games for the 1995 White Sox. In the late summer of '99 then-Cubs third base coach Gamboa was finishing his two-year stint of shaking Sammy Sosa's hand trotting home on each of his 129 homers in 1998-99.

Lorraine kin got name from part of France

"Everyone's got their degree of feelings for Israel and Judaism," said Lorraine, whose original family name was Levy, until his paternal grandfather adopted the surname after serving in the British Army in the French region of Alsace-Lorraine in World War II.

"I was amazed how many there were who were similar to me, growing up in a Jewish household," added Lorraine, also newly hired as a Pirates pro scout. "Our family was conservative and I was bar mitzvahed. I have family who live in Israel. My uncle is a retired Orthodox rabbi in London."

Yet another Wrigley Field connection was first baseman Ike Davis, a son of a Cub. Ike's dad was right-hander Ron Davis, dispatched as the player to be named later to the Yankees to in exchange for Ken Holtzman in his return to the Cubs in a June 10, 1978 trade. The elder Davis, a Baptist, went on to become one of the first good setup men, for Goose Gossage, before coming back to the Cubs past his prime in 1986. Ike's mother was Jewish, qualifying him for the Team Israel roster.

Head coach Weinstein never made it to Wrigley Field proper, but was a member of the Cubs organization in 1993-94. He managed the Class A Short Season Geneva Cubs of the New York-Penn League in 1993, and the Class A-Short Season Williamsport Cubs of the New York-Penn League in 1994. Weinstein had a connection to then-player development chief Al Goldis, also Jewish and GM Larry Himes' longtime sidekick with



**Jason Marquis tried to get his career jump-started with a main-stay role on Team Israel's pitching staff.**

both the Cubs and White Sox. Weinstein most recently has been manager of the Double-A Hartford Yard Goats (no Cubs connection!) in the Colorado Rockies farm system.

Gamboa did not even realize all the Cubs connections until the Chicago Baseball Museum pointed it out to him. Lorraine was interested in all the different links among players and coaches.

“There were four guys from Stanford,” he said, counting himself and Fuld among the quartet.

All but one of the Israel players were Americans. However, they were allowed to play through a WBC rule that permits anyone who qualifies for a country’s passport to play for that nation’s team. Long before the WBC even existed, Israel’s “law of return” permitted any Jew in the world to return and automatically qualify for citizenship.



**Tom Gamboa (left) and Andrew Lorraine lent their savvy to Team Israel’s coaching staff.**

The team was the tourney’s darlings with a roster largely of inactive or recovering players, like Marquis and Fuld. None of the star Jewish players like Ian Kinsler or Joc Pederson opted to try out for Team Israel, due to the time away during spring training and travel to the Far East.

Few expected much of the low-ranked Team Israel. But team togetherness had been knitted during workouts in New York and a “birthright” trip to Israel in January, in which a dozen players and their wives/girlfriends visited sights like the Western Wall and the Dead Sea.

The only person missing was Gene Hackman of Hoosiers’ cinematic fame playing Weinstein as Israel swept three games to qualify for WBC play. The team then won four more in a row, including a Netherlands team with five starting big leaguers and Cuba.

“It was great,” said Fuld. “Cuba has a great track record of having excellent baseball.”

The Cinderella story finally ended in a loss to Japan.

In addition to showing that Jews can be as spectacular athletes as anyone else, Fuld continued to demonstrate how to play with Type 1 diabetes. He has the same affliction as Cubs Hall of Famer Ron Santo, whom he got to know during his Chicago days.

“We talked quite a bit,” Fuld said of his chats with then-Cubs radio color analyst Santo. “He understood we had a pretty good handle on it. He told me he had to conceal it, it’s much better for diabetics 30 or 40 years later. You don’t have to hide anything these days.”

Fuld takes care to ensure his blood sugar is regulated.

“There’s no easy way to do that,” he said. “It’s a lot of diligence, checking it frequently. Eat at the same time on a daily basis, eat the right way. Get some carbs.”

Fuld catch emblazoned in fans’ memories

Fuld often played the outfield for the Cubs, Rays, Twins and Athletics as if his caffeine was soaring, not his blood sugar. As a right-field defensive replacement as a Cubs rookie on Sept. 22, 2007, Fuld raced back and made a daredevil catch of a drive off the bat of the Pirates’ Nyjer Morgan, just to the left of the 368-foot marker in right center. He slammed into the wall, got up and doubled a Pirates baserunner off first base.

Fuld immediately was consigned into Cubs annals as many fans simply called the play “The Catch.”

“Sam Fuld was definitely a bleacher fan favorite — that 2007 catch is one that everyone remembers,” said witness Al Yellon, managing editor of BleedCubbieBlue.com.

Marquis showed similar toughness, in a different way, during his career.

He pitched far better for Team Israel than one forgettable night as a Cardinals starter on June 21, 2006 at Guaranteed Rate Field. Before 37,897, he took it for the team the night after the Cardinals were thrashed 20-6 by the Sox. This time, Marquis stayed in at manager Tony La Russa’s request to give his battered bullpen a break. The White Sox were ahead 9-0 after two innings. Marquis gave up 14 hits and 13 runs, all earned in five innings in 13-5 loss. The thrashing was difficult for even cynical sportswriters to watch.

Marquis’ season was never the same after the bombardment. He was 9-4 coming into the game. His ERA took a beating and rose to 5.53, never recovering. He finished 14-16 with 6.02 ERA. Fortunately, amid a flurry of free-agent signings by GM Jim Hendry, Marquis landed in Chicago to back-end a rebuilt rotation. He went 23-18 in his two seasons, but did not log a postseason start in either of the Cubs’ consecutive Division Series, appearing in just one inning of relief.

Marquis also helped himself with his hitting. He had five lifetime homers (three with the Cubs) and 57 RBIs.

Nearly a decade later, Marquis would be employed doing some good works for baseball in Israel and internationally while trying to jump-start his career.

“My Jewish heritage is a huge part of the person I am today,” he said. “The traditions have been really important in my life. Now I have the opportunity to show more people in Israel why baseball’s one of the greatest games in the world.

“I think that’s one of the big ideas behind the WBC. We want to introduce baseball to countries that don’t play it as much. And if we can find a way to increase the number of people interested in baseball by 5 percent or 10 percent or 15 percent in a particular country, then we’ve done something great.”

Team Israel with its Cubs connections did something great simply by demonstrating to never count out anyone in the most unpredictable sport in the world.