

Who is this Israeli?

Framing this unit

Cartoons are an interesting source to get insight into politics and culture. We will look at a 1971 Israeli cartoon as a commentary about the participation of foreign athletes in Israeli sports.

This cartoon, published in 1971 in Davar, shows the reaction of two Israeli basketball players to the arrival of a foreign player to their team. The two white Israeli players are asking, “Who is this Israeli?” as they stand next to a black player who is looking around slightly puzzled. The fact that the new player is black suggests that most of the foreign arrivals to the Israeli league were African Americans.

The trend of integrating American basketball players into the Israeli national team began with Tal Brody, the first American Jewish player in the Israeli basketball league. Subsequently, non-Jewish players began to arrive, many receiving Israeli citizenship over time. The opening up of the Israeli sports scene to international opportunities was an example of its ongoing commercialization. The integration of the foreign players improved the level of Israeli basketball and the professionalism of Israeli players. However, some have criticized the fact that foreign players take the place of Israeli-born basketball players. Over the past decade, more than 200 foreign athletes have taken an active role in Israeli sports, in particular in basketball, football, volleyball, and handball.

Group Activity

Have students stand in a line rating from “agree” to “disagree” about the following statement: “Israel should cap the number of foreign players on their national basketball team.” Ask students to give reasons for their position.

Discussion

- Why did the illustrator depict the foreign player as black?
- What do you think is the message of this cartoon?
- Do you think national sports teams should have foreign players?
- What is the impact of having foreign players on the team?
- Why might African American players be drawn to play basketball in Israel?
- Why might some Israelis be against having foreign players?

Creative Activity

Pretend you are a veteran Israeli basketball fan. Write a monologue from their perspective about why there should be a cap on foreign players.

Watch this video about [Aulcie Perry](#). Create your own cartoon about what he describes as Macabbi’s “fighting spirit.”

Primary sources in this lesson

- [Who is this Israeli?](#)