



Sports and Aspirations: Football in Palestine, 1900–1948

Issam Khalidi

St. George's School football team, Jerusalem, 1909. *Source: St. George's School archive, Jerusalem.*

More than one hundred years have passed since the beginnings of football in Palestine. By the Mandate period, football was the most popular game in Palestine, played on streets and in schools and clubs. In this essay, I argue that football was a mirror that reflected political, economic, and social conditions in Palestine. Indeed, the emergence of sports in the 1920s coincided with the acceleration of Jewish immigration to Palestine and with increased Palestinian opposition to it. Palestinian national sentiments and activities were manifested in many aspects of Palestinian life including football. By 1948, there were some sixty-five athletic clubs in Palestine, approximately fifty-five of them members of the Arab Palestine Sports Federation (APSF). It is not known exactly when football entered Palestine; most likely it was introduced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

by the missionary schools established throughout the country.¹ These included the St. George's School (Madrasat al-Mutran, est. 1899) and Collège des Frères (est. 1892) in Jerusalem, the Friends Boys School (est. 1901) in Ramallah, and the Salesian Schools of Bethlehem and Haifa (est. 1891).

In 1908, two football teams were formed: one by Rawdat al-Ma'aref,² the other by St. George's School. In 1909, the St. George's team, which included 'Izzat Tannus, later a member of the Arab Higher Committee,³ traveled to Beirut and defeated the team of the American University of Beirut, one of the best in the region. In 1910, a few young men – including Dawud Di'dis, Fa'iq Bullata, George Khuri, Hilmi Husayni, Qustandi Labbat, George Halabi, Abdallah Jamal, Hasan 'Awda, Tawfiq al-Husayni, Salim Hanna, and Fu'ad Nashashibi – formed a team to compete with foreign teams visiting Palestine. An April 1912 story in the newspaper *Falastin* reported on a school team from Beirut coming to play students from the Jerusalemite Youth School and the St. John's School, a further indication of the regional development of the sport in this formative period.⁴

At that time football also started to be played in the streets of big cities of Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa. To create their own footballs, children used to fill a leather ball with pieces of worn out clothes. Later, street football became the beginning of stardom for many youths who eventually found their way to clubs and national teams.

The British Mandate and the Rise of Sports Clubs

After World War I, the establishment of British rule in Palestine meant the spread of football both through British institutions and in opposition to them. When the British imposed their Mandate in Palestine, they brought a culture of football with them, promoting it (and other sports) among the population. In 1920, the British established the Jerusalem Sports Club, where football was one of the main sports (beside tennis and cricket). At the same time, the British police, air force, army, and other branches of the Mandate authority fielded football teams.

Meanwhile, Palestine witnessed the expansion of civic-minded Palestinian social clubs, ranging from charitable societies to women's groups to youth organizations such as the Scouts. Sports came to be seen as a key component of social development, and football began to be viewed as an element of nationalist culture. The British authorities were aware, and wary, of this connection, as is shown in an April 1921 account in *Falastin*:

Last Saturday was the laying of the cornerstone of the Sports Club in Jerusalem. The *Palestine Weekly* mentioned that Mr. Storrs, the Governor of Jerusalem, insisted on the participation of everyone regardless of his religion or beliefs. The *Weekly* added that the partisan athletic clubs in Egypt were a factor in the turmoil there, so this mistake must not be repeated in Palestine.⁵

By the end of the 1920s, football had become the main sporting competition beside boxing; it was the most popular sport and most clubs had football teams. The Dajani Sports Club



St. George's School football team, Jerusalem, 1923. Source: *St. George's School archive, Jerusalem.*

of Jerusalem and some of the Orthodox clubs that grew out of church affiliation are prime examples of this. Other teams were established as athletic organizations and later incorporated social and cultural activities. As football took its place among cultural and social activities, city and village football teams transformed into athletic clubs, changing their names accordingly. By the start of the 1930s, Arab athletic clubs in Palestine numbered about twenty.

The first conference of Orthodox Christian clubs and societies held in July 1923 played an important role in advancing the growth of athletics programs. The conference was held to protest what the Orthodox community perceived as the dominance of non-Arabs in the local church hierarchies. To counterbalance this, it advocated the establishment of new societies and clubs throughout Palestine and Transjordan, and Orthodox clubs were soon thereafter established in Jaffa (1924), Jerusalem (1926), Lydda (1927), Ramla (1932), and Haifa (1937).

The Orthodox Club in Jaffa, for example, subsequently formed a football team and rented a court. Its members worked hard to promote sporting activities among its members, cultivating interest and attendance of matches.⁶ In May 1927, *Falastin* newspaper lauded the club for having made “a big contribution that cannot be denied on the growth of football among the citizens, not to mention what its other committees are achieving [in] the field of science, arts, culture and others.” The club “made all its members promote



The first-string football team (*firqat kurat al-qadam al-uwla*) of the 'Amiriyya secondary school, Jaffa, 1923. Source: IPS archives, Beirut.

sports (football) among the people. Many of the members who never thought about sports became interested and attended most of the matches, enthusiastically encouraging this activity.⁷⁷

The Islamic Sports Club, established in 1926 in Jaffa by members of the city's youth, also formed a football team and held matches against the Orthodox Club in Jaffa, amongst others. Its notable players included 'Abd al-Rahman al-Habbab and Dr. Dawud al-Husayni, each of whom went on to serve as secretary of the Arab Palestine Sports Federation. It played a great role in promoting football among citizens in Jaffa, fielding some three generations of players from its establishment until the end of 1947, some of whom participated in the Palestine national team in the 1940s.⁸ Other clubs fielding football teams included Haifa's *al-Nijma al-Bayda* (White Star), the Carmel Club, Salisi (affiliated with the Salesian School), and Islamic Sports (founded in the 1920s); Nadi al-Baq'a in Jerusalem; the Arab Club in Nablus (est. 1915); and the Sport Club in Gaza.⁹

In 1928, the Arab Sports Club (ASC) in Jerusalem was founded. It was headed by Ibrahim Nusseibeh, a famous Palestinian football player, and elected Fawzi Muhyi al-Din as treasurer. One of its first steps was to form a football team, which was headed by Khalid Duzdar.¹⁰ This team competed with other clubs, including the Jewish club Maccabi Hashmonai, which was one of the best teams in Palestine. The ASC football team would become one of the best in Palestine.

Despite club names that included words such as “Islamic” or “Orthodox,” documents show that both Christian and Muslim clubs had members from both religions. Meanwhile, clubs such as Shabab al-‘Arab in Haifa and the ASC were distant from any religious identification, emphasizing national and local affiliations respectively. However, football did become a domain of competition and contention between Palestinians and the Zionist movement.

Zionist Sports and the Palestine Football Association

The link between national pride and athleticism among Palestinians did not grow in isolation. The founders of Zionism saw sport’s emphasis on organizational unity and physical fitness as a tool for fulfilling its goal of a new society.¹¹ Zionist activists also quickly established athletic clubs, to build physical fitness and military preparedness. Sport had a unique cultural interpretation in the early Zionist movement. It was a tool for national regeneration, and efforts were made to create “Jewish sports” that inspired Zionist feelings. Religious-historical symbols were superimposed onto the athletic playing field: teams were given names such as Maccabi, recalling the years of Jewish independence in the second century BCE, or Beitar and Bar Kokhba, which referenced the Jewish rebellion against Roman rule in the second century CE.

Beginning in the 1920s, Jewish clubs in Europe and the region came to Palestine to compete with Jewish clubs there. They flew flags that resembled the Zionist flag, a provocation that local Arabs vigorously protested. In January 1925, for example, the executive committee of the Muslim-Christian Association sent the High Commissioner for Palestine a protest against the flying of the Zionist flag at a football match held in Jerusalem, claiming that the ordinance regulating the flying of flags – issued in 1920 and banning the carrying or exhibition of “the flag or emblem of any State ... for the purpose of any partisan demonstration” – had been violated.¹² This protest, published in *Falastin*, mentioned the name of the Jewish team – ha-Koah (from Vienna)¹³ – and stated that the Zionist flag was flown beside the British flag in Jerusalem. It added: “there were more Zionist flags flying around the court. So what does his honor the High Commissioner think about this?”

In response, the Governor of the Jerusalem-Jaffa District argued that

the flag flown was the Club flag of the Hakoah football team, of which the colours are similar to those of the Zionist flag.... It is apparent that the Hakoah Club flag is not a State flag, and equally apparent that it was not being carried or exhibited for the purpose of any partisan demonstration, and that the Ordinance was therefore in no way infringed.¹⁴

Thus sports offered a domain in which Zionist politics could be openly expressed and celebrated, much to the consternation of Palestinians.

In 1924, the leadership of the Maccabi athletic organization attempted to gain

membership in the International Amateur Athletic Federation. This initiative ended in failure, as it was determined that Maccabi did not equally represent Arab, British, and Jewish athletes in Palestine. However, this did not discourage Maccabi leader Josef Yekutieli, who in 1925, sought Maccabi club's membership in the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). According to FIFA rules, only associations representing states could be accepted as members. Yekutieli thus decided to establish the Palestine Football Association (PFA). Maccabi officials were compelled to invite not only their Zionist political adversary, ha-Po'el, but also Arab teams. The federation's inaugural meeting was convened in the summer of 1928.¹⁵ In addition to the fourteen Zionist representatives that participated, one Arab delegate took part – a member of the Nusseibeh family representing the Arab Sports Club of Jerusalem. (Despite his involvement in this first session, however, Nusseibeh's name never again appeared in the directorate's protocol.) Nevertheless, FIFA admitted the PFA in 1929 and during the first years of the PFA, Arab teams participated in PFA matches.

The PFA league ran from 1931 until 1947, with the British Police winning the first championship in 1932 and ha-Po'el Tel-Aviv its 1934 champions. Immediately after being accepted into FIFA, the Jewish leadership of the PFA set about ensuring a majority of Jewish clubs in its membership. The Hebrew language was imposed and the Zionist flag incorporated into the federation's logo. By 1934, the dominance of Zionist officials meant that Arab clubs had no say in the running of the association, despite Arabs comprising over three-quarters of Palestine's population.¹⁶ At the same time the PFA strengthened its connections with FIFA, and used its newfound influence to interfere with the formation of a Football Association in Syria. As soon as the Lebanese Football Association became affiliated with FIFA, it asked the federation for permission to compete (during the 1934–1936 season) against Arab teams of Palestine that were not members of FIFA.¹⁷ The PFA sought to obstruct Arab Palestinian teams, which it had alienated or excluded from the PFA, from competing with teams from other Arab counties.

In addition to strengthening their connections with British Mandate teams, Jewish clubs started to attract teams from other Arab countries such as Egypt.¹⁸ Invited by the PFA in 1931, the Egyptian University team, Tirsana (Arsenal), visited Palestine and played against PFA teams. This is how *Falastin* described one PFA team:

A mixture of the British Army soldiers and Jewish youth ... [T]hey were photographed; among them stood the Governor of Jerusalem and the Egyptian Consul.... Flags that were raised on the sides of the stadium with the Egyptian flag flying between the English and the Zionist flags.... Numerous British soldiers and Palestine police were stationed around the stadium to maintain security.¹⁹

The Orthodox Club in Jaffa was the only Arab team that offered to compete with the Egyptians. The press, especially the daily *Falastin*, encouraged citizens of Jaffa to attend this match and urged other clubs to play against the highly skilled Egyptian team.²⁰ *Falastin* criticized the other teams for not competing with Tirsana and praised the Orthodox Club

for impressing the Egyptians with the quality of Arab football in Palestine.²¹

Meanwhile, Arab teams in Palestine were not allowed to compete with teams in neighboring Arab countries because they were not affiliated with the PFA, which was a member of FIFA. Permission from the PFA was required for any match against a “foreign” team outside Palestine. In a November 1937 letter in English to the federation, Khadr Kamal, secretary of the ASC in Jerusalem, sought permission directly from FIFA:

You will agree with us that recognizing a Jewish team only prejudices the Arab love of sports and of exchanging visits with neighboring countries. If it is not possible to have our Club recognized by your association, we sincerely request that permission be granted to the teams of neighboring countries to play our team without the necessity of taking permission from the Palestine Football Federation.

We have, before the introduction of the present regulations, often played against these teams, giving very good account of ourselves. At the present, we are playing against various British regiment teams in Palestine. In case you need any recommendation in evidence of our ability and conduct in Sports, we will be very glad to produce such certificates.²²

FIFA, seemingly unconcerned with the political conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, encouraged the PFA to maintain its control over such matters. A May 1938 letter from FIFA to the PFA is revealing in this regard, suggesting that “the only possible way is that clubs of Egypt and Lebanon wanting to paly against Arab clubs not affiliated to your Association should have asked you the permission to play such matches.” Forcing non-member clubs to seek such permission would thus “safeguard” the PFA’s “authority as National Association controlling football in Palestine.”²³

These attempts to control the PFA motivated local Muslim and Christian sportsmen to establish the Arab Palestinian Sports Federation (APSF; *al-ittihad al-riyadi al-‘Arabi al-Filastini*). That the APSF was born after the 1929 Revolt is no coincidence – it was part of an era characterized by increased confrontation and new tactics to engage with Zionist expansion and control.

Palestinian Nationalism and the APSF

In March 1931 the first national football team was selected to compete against the team of the American University of Beirut. Its members included players from Jaffa’s Islamic Sports Club and its Orthodox Club, Jerusalem’s ASC, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), and St. George’s Club. *Falastin* stated that “if this team will be formed, it will be the strongest team in Palestine, including Jewish and British [teams]... It will refute Jewish claims and Zionist propaganda that Palestinians are ignorant and have nothing to do with sports. What is worse than this is that our brothers in Egypt were deceived by such propaganda.”²⁴

In April 1931, invitations were distributed to all clubs in Palestine for a meeting to establish a new sports federation. Two months later, the APSF was born from a coalition of ten clubs at a meeting at the Orthodox Club in Jaffa. Dr. Dawud al-Husayni of the Islamic Sports Club in Jaffa was elected president (he later became secretary when the federation had no president), and George Musa of the Orthodox Club in Jaffa was elected secretary. Although the APSF's sole concern was football, the founding committee did not want to call this association the Palestine Football Association because of the existing PFA, which was dominated by the Zionists.

Member clubs of the APSF competed against non-member teams, including the British air force team and the team of the American University of Beirut among others. In August 1933, the ASC in Jerusalem and the Islamic Sports Club in Jaffa formed a select team to match the Alexandria United team [*al-Ittihad al-Iskandari*]. However, there was spirited competition within the APSF as well. In April 1933, an agreement was reached between the Youth Congress and the APSF that the Youth Congress would present a trophy to the winner of the Youth Conference tournament. In November 1933, the following teams took part in this tournament: the ASC and Rawda Club from Jerusalem; the Islamic Sports Club and the Orthodox Club from Jaffa; and the Salesian Club, the Islamic Sports Club, and al-Nijma al-Bayda' from Haifa. The institutionalized relationship between football and politics was further solidified through another tournament organized by the APSF and the Youth Congress, the "Tournament of the Armor of King Ghazi."²⁵

The 1934 establishment of the Shabab al-‘Arab (the Arab Youth) club in Haifa is further evidence of the growing links between football and the national movement in Palestine. Shabab al-‘Arab emerged from the Salesian Club, which was established in the 1920s and had made significant progress in football, winning the 1933 and 1934 tournaments organized by the APSF. Its more activist members, however, felt that there was a lack of "national sentiment" in the Salesian Club, leading them to create Shabab al-‘Arab. This new club received its initial support from the Youth Congress,²⁶ and its inauguration was held under the auspices of the Youth Congress and its president Ya‘qub al-Ghusayn.²⁷

With the outbreak of the 1936 Revolt, many sports activities were suspended. Some of the clubs were closed and their members arrested. Some clubhouses were occupied by the British authorities – the Orthodox Club, for example, became a headquarters for the British authorities. However, the suspension of sports, including football, was not total (in contrast with the closure of all social-athletic clubs and the complete suspension of athletic activities during the first Intifada, 1987–1993). In 1937, some clubs resumed part of their football activities, but not at the same pace as before. The Youth Congress's Trophy Tournament continued until March 1937, with the following clubs taking part: the Workers Club [*Nadi al-‘Ummal*] and the Islamic Sport Club of Haifa; the Qawmi Club and Islamic Sports Club of Jaffa; and the Rawda Club and ASC of Jerusalem.²⁸ Because of the political situation, only a few clubs were able or willing to take part and two of the more famous clubs – the Orthodox Club of Jaffa and Shabab al-‘Arab of Haifa – were absent. At the same time, some inter-Arab competition continued, as a team from the Egyptian University came to Haifa to play Shabab al-‘Arab and the Palestine YMCA team competed against its counterpart in Cairo.

Despite the outbreak of the Revolt, the APSF held a meeting in October 1937 to discuss elections and the nomination of its supreme committee. It also discussed the schedule of tournaments for 1937–1938. Yet, for reasons that are unclear, the APSF ceased its activities around this time. Though there is a lack of sources that give the details of the APSF’s demise, there were presumably several factors involved. It is clear that political conditions in Palestine and the consequences of the 1936 Revolt were main factors behind this suspension. Sports clubs were targeted by British authorities for their role in organizing Palestinian youth,²⁹ while activities like football were seen as “meaningless” by many members of a Palestinian community engaged in full-scale revolt. Further, the APSF, which did not even include the majority of Arab clubs, lacked the popular foundations of other social-cultural organizations that would have allowed it to survive such turbulent times.

Disorder on the Field

The APSF’s disappearance led to a state of disorder. There was no organized coordination or cooperation between the Arab clubs. Clubs organized their efforts individually, spontaneously and randomly.³⁰ Arab teams were forced to join the PFA and began to compete against the most extreme Zionist teams, such as Beitar.

In December 1942, the PFA formed a league that included twenty-seven football teams, among them Arab, Jewish, British, and Greek clubs. The five Arab clubs were the Qawmi Sports Club of Jaffa; the Islamic Sports Club, Shabab al-‘Arab, and the Tirsana Club of Haifa; and the YMCA from Jerusalem.³¹ Despite the small number of Arab teams in the league, however, three of the eight teams in the third round of the league’s tournament were Arab, joined by one British team, one Greek team, and three Jewish teams.³² This is a good indication of the high level at which the Arab teams played.

With the outbreak of World War II, many matches were held to support (through ticket sales) the British Red Cross and the Allies or to entertain wounded soldiers. This helped to sustain sporting relations between Zionist groups and Britons, and the importance of such relations was acknowledged by Zionist sporting organizations. For example, a memorandum issued by the Maccabi Federation in Palestine about six months after the war broke out reads:

Here it is, we are given the opportunity now that tens of thousands of British soldiers from various countries and classes happened to come to the country; some of which will play important roles in the British policy and it is up to us to influence them and make them our friends through friendly sport meetings; it is our duty to do so properly and on a full state scale.³³

Meanwhile, in the absence of the APSF, Palestinian footballers moved to establish small athletic associations in different cities. In December 1942 a football association was established in Jaffa. It included the Islamic Sports Club, Shell Company, Frères School

Alumni, and the Department of Tourism. In Haifa, a local sports association was formed in November 1943 that comprised forty-three teams, including twenty-one in football, nine in table tennis, six in basketball, and three in track and field. The majority of clubs in Haifa – such as Shabab al-‘Arab, the Islamic Sports Club, the Carmel Club, the Salisian Club, the Syriac Club, the Catholic Club, and Tirsana – joined this association. Some of the clubs that joined were also members of the Jewish-dominated PFA. Yet the desire and aspiration to re-establish the Palestine Sport Federation was growing, not only in reaction to Jewish domination, but also to build and strengthen social and cultural institutions in Palestine.

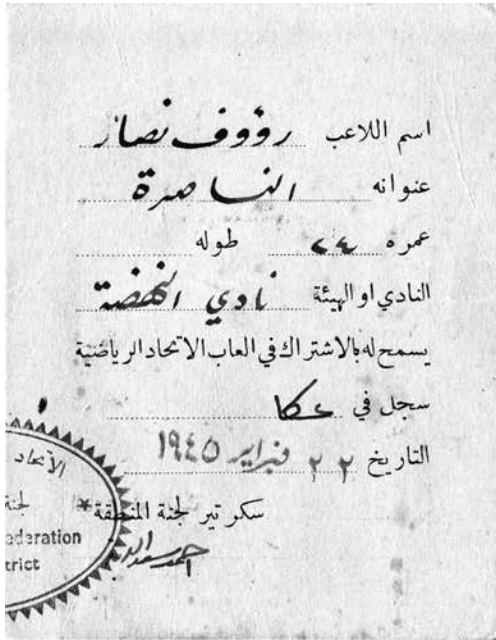
By 1944, aspirations to bring Arab clubs under one umbrella were coming together. Football matches were planned between the Egyptian army team and the member teams of the PFA, but the Egyptian team refused to visit Palestine unless the Arab clubs also organized a team to play against them. This motivated the Arab clubs to establish regional federations (in Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa) to compete against the Egyptian team. In May, a team was formed to compete with a select British Army team. These regional federations, along with the Arab Boxing Federation (established in the early 1940s), now decided to reconstitute a national association.

The Palestine Sports Federation Reborn

In September 1944, the Palestine Sports Federation (PSF) was re-established when thirty-five club representatives attended a meeting in Jaffa.³⁴ The PSF established its headquarters in the Islamic club in Jaffa and set to work. Its three main tasks were: to organize and coordinate between the Arab clubs in Palestine; to establish friendly relations between Palestine and the neighboring Arab countries in the realm of sport; and to participate in international conferences. The PSF divided Palestine into six regions – Jerusalem, Jaffa, Nablus, Gaza, Galilee, and Haifa – solicited membership applications and distributed its banner and emblem. Only months after its re-establishment, many clubs had joined the PSF. By the start of 1945, the PSF had twenty-five member clubs, and the number had risen to sixty by the end of 1947. Clubs were encouraged to join the PSF; at the same time, the PSF stimulated the birth of many new clubs. Membership in the PSF had to be authorized by the central committee. Regional committees periodically coordinated football matches in every region for the first and second leagues.

The PSF set up a primary league [*mubarayat tansiqiyya*] for the teams in each region, and the winners of each region competed with each other to determine the final winner. Every regional committee organized the lot [*qur‘a*], chose the playing field, and assigned the referees, who were chosen by the central committee after the approval of the branch committee. Municipalities and national banks donated the trophies for regional winners. The Islamic Sports Club of Jaffa defeated the Orthodox Club in Jerusalem to win the 1945–1946 championship. Shabab al-‘Arab defeated the Islamic Sports Club in Jaffa in the 1946–1947 tournament final to win the Arab Bank trophy.

The PSF also sent letters to other Arab federations, informing them of the newly



Palestine Sports Federation membership certificate for Ra'uf Nassar. Source: Nazareth Archive.

registered federation and its desire to maintain links with all Arab football federations. The PSF authorized its secretary, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Habbab, to arrange matches with international teams and clubs, and no club was to contact any foreign team without the permission of the central committee. The PSF sought to demonstrate that Palestine was home to an organized, quality Arab athletic league ready to compete with British and international teams. The PSF forged closer links with the Arab federations through correspondence and visits; it strove to distance them from the PFA and to convince them that the PSF had the sole right to represent Palestine. In September 1945, Habbab sent a letter to the Egyptian Football Association protesting matches between the Alexandria select team and

Jewish teams of the PFA. As a result, the PSF sent Habbab to Egypt to discuss future matches with the Egyptian teams in Palestine. (It is worth mentioning that during this period, football competitions with Egypt were infrequent; most competitions were in boxing, weight lifting, and wrestling.)³⁵

The PSF was engaged in more direct political solidarity with neighboring countries as well. When in 1945 the French raided and occupied the parliament building in Damascus and suspended the constitution by force, the central committee called on the PSF's member clubs to support the Syrian Sport Association by donating money for the victims of the turmoil, and the treasurer of the PSF received donations from Palestinian clubs to help mitigate the disaster in Syria and Lebanon.³⁶

Falastin's sports column sometimes congratulated Palestinian athletes on their release from imprisonment (due to political activity). The PSF also joined with other Palestinian groups in marking events of national importance, such as the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. In November 1947, for example:

... in solidarity with all the national and social organizations, the PSF and the athletic teams postponed matches supposed to be held tomorrow because of the anniversary of the sinister (inauspicious) Balfour Declaration.³⁷

By the end of 1947, the PSF had achieved magnificent results in terms of its organization, membership, and competitions with Arab teams in the region. Indeed, its existence and its activities were themselves an obstacle to the Zionist intention of representing Palestine as "Eretz Israel." Zionist sports organizations, represented by the PFA, sensed the threat



The Jaffa Selected Team, 1947. Back row (standing), from the right: Sbiro Iqdis (referee), Michel Kayyal (Orthodox Club), Michel Batshon (Orthodox Club), Hamuda Qabuq (Islamic Sports Club [ISC]), Salim Abu Khadr (Orthodox Club), Fakhri Qara Nuh (ISC), Kamal Qambarji (ISC), Ilarion al-Sayigh (Orthodox Club), and Mustafa Da'da' (captain, ISC). Front row, from the right: Salah al-Hajj Mir (ISC), 'Abd al-Ghani al-Habbab (goalkeeper, ISC), and 'Adnan Abu Ja'far (Islamic Club of Ramla). *Source: Photo from Floka (2000), a publication of Jam'iyyat Yafa lil-Tanmiya al-Ta'awuniyya (Jaffa Society for Cooperative Development), Amman, Jordan.*

of the new PSF and tried to undermine it by wooing Arab athletic clubs to join its ranks. A report from the PSF Central Committee to *Falastin* remarks:

The Central Committee [of the PSF] has been informed that some clubs received notices from the Jewish Football Association [the PFA] in Palestine offering them to join this Association. Some of these clubs responded by showing their commitment to PSF, insisting on not joining the Zionist Association. Therefore, the PSF requested the other clubs to send similar responses, and the Central Committee itself will prepare these responses and distribute them to the clubs in order to be sent to the Zionist Association.³⁸

Through organization and presenting a unified front, the PSF thus sought to combat the Zionist offensive in the domain of sports. At times, however, its members were also involved in literal combat with Zionist forces.

From Playing Field to Battlefield

In early 1948, during the struggle against Zionist military organizations in Palestine, many members of the athletic clubs died in confrontations or battles. Zaki al-Darhali, the National Selected Team's left wing, and his colleague, Sa'id Shunayr, the secretary

of PSF's Jaffa regional committee, were killed in the bombing by the Zionist gangs of the Social Services Center (Sarai) building in Jaffa. *Falastin* published the news of this incident and mourned their deaths on the front page.³⁹

In an obituary entitled "The Martyrdom of a Youth on the Battle Field," *Falastin* reported:

Nadi al-Ittihad al-Qarawi [The Village Union Club] mourns the death of its active member and a great athlete, the martyr 'Arif al-Nu'man, who died in the public hospital in Jerusalem after he was wounded on the battlefield.⁴⁰

In another condolence letter, *Falastin* wrote:

The athletic committee of the Islamic Sports Club in Jaffa mourns the death of one of its members: Muhammad al-Naqa who fell as a martyr while he was performing his national duty in the late battle of Abu Kabir. He was twenty-two.⁴¹

The loyalty and selfless dedication of club leaders and Palestinian footballers and sportsmen is evident not only in their sacrifice in battle, but also in the development of sports and social-athletic clubs in Palestine in the Mandate era. In fact, sport was and remains an expression of national pride and social progress. The great South African leader Nelson Mandela said, "Sport has the power to change the world; it has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does."⁴² Today Palestinians are using football as a tool for integration within the international community and as a platform for regional reconciliation. The history of football in the period 1900–1948 offers both a lens through which to view the struggles of that period, as well as an understanding of the foundations of modern Palestinian football.

Issam Khalidi is an independent scholar living in San Francisco, California. His publications include History of Sports in Palestine, 1900–1948 (in Arabic), One Hundred Years of Football in Palestine (in Arabic and English), as well as various articles on the subject available at www.hpalestinesports.net.

Endnotes

1 In his diaries Khalil Totah mentions that the Friends School in Ramallah rented a field south of the Girls School in summer 1902 for football. See Khalil Totah, *Turbulent Times in Palestine: Diaries of Khalil Totah, 1886–1955*, ed. Thomas M. Ricks (Ramallah: Institute for Palestine Studies and Passia, 2009).

2 Rawdat al-Ma'arif [Garden of Knowledge] was established in 1904 by Muhammad al-Salih, and subsequently suspended before World War I. This information is found on different websites; the original source is unknown. See, for example: www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=329999843718887&set=a.329999840385554.90170.228173030568236&type=1. Accessed 19 April 2014.

- 3 Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1948* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984), 231.
- 4 *Falastin*, 18 April 1912.
- 5 *Falastin*, 12 April 1921.
- 6 ‘Ali Hasan al-Bawwab, *Mawsu‘at Yaffa al-Jamila* [The Encyclopedia of Beautiful Jaffa], vol. 2 (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-‘Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 2003), 1179–182. Bawwab mentions that this club was established by Habib al-Himsi and a group of enthusiastic Orthodox young men. This club was established in the Shuhaybar building on Butmeh Street, then moved to a location on ‘Ajami Street.
- 7 *Falastin*, 3 May 1927.
- 8 Bawwab, *Mawsu‘at*, 1179–182.
- 9 *al-Difa‘*, 25 September 1934.
- 10 *Falastin*, 12 June 1928.
- 11 Issam Khalidi, “Body and Ideology: Early Athletics in Palestine, 1900–1948,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 27 (2007): 44–58.
- 12 *Palestine Weekly*, 24 March 1925.
- 13 Hakoah Vienna arrived in Palestine in March 1925 to play the Jewish clubs there and strengthen connections between Jewish clubs in Europe and those in Palestine.
- 14 *Palestine Weekly*, 24 March 1925.
- 15 Haim Kaufman, “Jewish Sports in the Diaspora, Yishuv, and Israel: Between Nationalism and Politics,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 147–167.
- 16 See www.rsss.com/tables/pales-intres-det.html. Accessed 19 April 2014.
- 17 FIFA Archive, 6 August 1935, letter from FIFA to PFA.
- 18 Since the 1920s, Zionist athletic organizations and teams sought to compete with Egyptian teams. First, Maccabi wanted to strengthen bonds of cooperation between all its branches, especially those in Palestine and Egypt. Second, in addition to their close cooperation with the British army teams in Palestine, the Zionists looked to increase cooperation with the British army teams in Egypt. Third, sports in Egypt had made remarkable progress, even sending Egyptian athletes to the Olympic Games and winning medals, thus attracting sports teams throughout the region for competition and cooperation.
- 19 *Falastin*, 28 March 1931.
- 20 *Falastin*, 25 February 1931.
- 21 *Falastin*, 28 March 1931.
- 22 Letter from Khadr Kamal, secretary of the Arab Sports Club (Jerusalem), to Dr. Shreiker, secretary of the World Football Association (Zurich), 18 November 1937. FIFA Archive, Zurich, Switzerland.
- 23 Letter from the General Secretary of FIFA to the Palestine Football Association, 4 May 1938. FIFA Archive.
- 24 *Falastin*, 28 March 1931.
- 25 *al-Difa‘*, 30 May 1934.
- 26 The Arab Palestinian Youth Congress (*Mu‘tamar al-Shabab al-‘Arabi al-Filastini*) was established in Jerusalem in 1931. It was active in youth, scouts, sports and political activities, and was famous for its nationalistic trends. It had its first conference in 1932, the second in 1935. See ‘Isa al-Sifri. *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya bayn al-Intidab wa-l-Sahyuniyya* [Arab Palestine between the Mandate and Zionism] (Jaffa: Maktabat Filastin al-Jadida, 1937), 194–201.
- 27 *al-Difa‘*, 25 September 1934.
- 28 *al-Difa‘*, 21 June 1937
- 29 See, for example, a 1935 government report titled “The Youth Element”: “One of the phenomena that had significance in the Arab National Movement was the strengthening of different sport clubs and scouts and the youth enrolling in organized institutions, generally speaking, under different names. As the year came to a close, even the youth solidified their stance and became a factor that many challenge the influence of those Palestinian leaders above the youth.” Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya*, 195
- 30 It is worth mentioning that by the end of the 1930s, football had lost some of its popularity, while boxing (as an individual sport) maintained its growth. Boxing was not institutionalized under any federation. Although there were probably more football players in Palestine, the level of performance and skills of Palestinian boxers was remarkable and they succeeded beyond the regional level.
- 31 Information on this league is scarce and it is unknown exactly how many clubs from the other group participated.
- 32 *al-Difa‘*, 12 April 1942.
- 33 Harrif Haggai and Yair Galily, “Sport and Politics in Palestine, 1918–48: Football as a Mirror Reflecting the Relations between Jews and Britons,” *Soccer and Society* 4, no.1 (Spring 2003): 41–56.
- 34 The PSF central committee constituted its highest authority. It included nine members: Ibrahim Nusseibeh and Rock Farraj representing the Jerusalem region; Yunis Naffa’ and Fad ‘Abd al-Fattah representing Haifa; ‘Abd al-Rahman Habbab and Isbiro Iqdis representing Jaffa;

Rashad Shawwa representing Gaza; Jamal Yusuf Qasim representing Nablus; and Yunis Zughbi representing the Galilee.

- 35 The PSF planned a competition between the representative team of Palestine and Syria for 12 December 1947 and another match with Lebanon for 14 December. However, these matches were suspended because of the outbreak of war in Palestine. Most of the matches with Arab teams were friendly and reflected national sentiment. In December 1946, the British air force select team competed against the Jaffa select team (which combined players from the Islamic Sports Club, the Orthodox Club, and the Islamic Sports Club of Ramla). In addition, the British team also played against a Haifa select team (which combined players from the Islamic Sports Club, Shabab al-‘Arab, and the Greek Club). In February 1946, the PSF formed a select team to compete against the British army select

team in Palestine. In addition, there were dozens of matches with the British Mandate teams, especially with the worsening British-Jewish relations from autumn of 1945 until summer of 1946.

36 *Falastin*, 4 July 1945.

37 “Sports Condemns the Balfour Declaration,” *Falastin*, 24 October 1946.

38 *Falastin*, 20 November 1946.

39 *Falastin*, 6 January 1948.

40 *Falastin*, 10 January 1948.

41 *Falastin*, 14 February 1948. Naqa was a sport columnist for *al-Sha‘b* newspaper.

42 “‘Sport Has the Power to Change the World’: Inspirational Leader Mandela Hailed after His Death Aged 95,” *Mail Online*, 5 December 2013, online at www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/article-2519097/Nelson-Mandela-dead-95-Sport-power-change-world.html. Accessed 19 April 2014.