

News

Brooklyn Nets pick two Jewish players in NBA draft

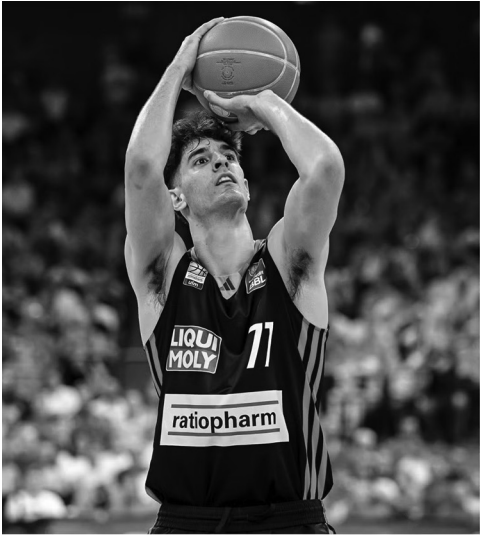
By Jacob Gurvis

(JTA) — In the span of a few minutes during the NBA draft in June, the Brooklyn Nets single-handedly doubled the Jewish population in the league from two to four.

The Nets selected Israeli Ben Saraf and Israeli-American Danny Wolf back to back with the 26th and 27th overall picks in the 2025 NBA Draft.

Wolf, a 7-footer from the University of Michigan, was projected to go earlier in the round, while some prognosticators had Saraf, a 19-year-old currently playing in the German professional league, to slip to the second round. Instead, Saraf and Wolf were selected in quick succession toward the end of the first round and will be teammates in Brooklyn.

Wolf, 21, transferred to Michigan last year after two solid seasons at Yale, and led the Wolverines to a No. 5 seed in March Madness, where they lost in the Sweet 16 to Jewish coach Bruce Pearl and No. 1-ranked Auburn. The Glencoe, Illinois native averaged 13.2 points and 9.7 rebounds per game this past season, while



Israeli Ben Saraf, left, a 19-year-old currently playing in the German professional league, and Israeli-American Danny Wolf, a 7-footer from the University of Michigan, were picked by the Brooklyn Nets in the NBA draft, June 25, 2025. (Getty Images)

shooting 49.7% overall and 33.6% on three-pointers.

Saraf, who is 6-foot-6, is the son of two former Israeli pro basketball players, and he wears No. 77 because it represents the Hebrew word “mazel,” which means luck. He averaged 12.8 points and 4.6 as-

sists per game this year as he helped lead his team to the German league finals.

This marks the first time since 2006 that two Jewish players were selected in the same NBA draft. That year, Lior Eliyahu and Yotam Halperin were both taken in the second round, though neither

appeared in the league.

Saraf and Wolf join a growing contingent of Jewish players in the NBA, including Israeli Deni Avdija — who is coming off his own breakout season with the Portland Trail Blazers — and Sacramento Kings star Domantas Sabonis, who is converting to Judaism. Amari Bailey, who was drafted 41st overall in 2023, played in the NBA’s G League last season.

Wolf, who obtained his Israeli citizenship to represent Israel at the FIBA U20 European Championship in Greece, has worn his Jewish pride on his sleeve throughout his life. He attended Jewish day school until fifth grade, keeps kosher and had his bar mitzvah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

“I would hear it growing up, that noise about me being Jewish and (so) you don’t expect much from me as a basketball player,” Wolf told the Jewish author Mitch Albom for a column in the Detroit Free Press. “When I was younger, I kind of looked at (being Jewish) as an opportunity to prove myself.”

Now he and Saraf will represent the city with the most Jews in the world.

Happy Tears

By Lauren Sachs

Lauren holds a bachelor’s degree in English and Psychology, and a Master’s Degree in Social Work, from the University of Michigan. After completing advanced clinical training at Yale University, Lauren worked as a therapist and consultant in a variety of settings. During her time in Jewish Toledo, Lauren has received the Harry Levison Young Leadership Award and the Shining Light Award, and is currently serving as the Chair for the 20th Annual NW Ohio Jewish Book Festival. In addition to her involvement within the local Jewish community, Lauren serves as a volunteer for Hospice of Northwest Ohio. Lauren is also the author of a forthcoming book about her late husband, his joyful approach to life and work as an oncologist, and how examining his life helped her better cope with her grief. To learn more about Lauren’s journey and her work on living well after loss, visit www.literally-lauren.com.

Five years ago this month my life was turned upside down. On August 24 of 2020, about six months into the global pandemic, my husband had a massive heart attack and I became widowed without warning at the age of 46. Many people have told me that they cannot imagine what it is like to suddenly lose a spouse. Many others have wondered aloud what they might do in the wake of losing their spouse. In my case, after saying goodbye to Brad’s physical body at Toledo Hospital and spending the night tossing and turning in my bed, I got up and did the only thing I could think to do: go for a run.

While you might presume that this was my habit, I had never been a runner in my adult life prior to Brad’s death. I felt compelled to run the morning after Brad’s death because I needed to find some sort of release for the acute shock and excruciating feelings I was experiencing. Since we were in the midst of the COVID pandemic, I stayed indoors and turned on my treadmill, a machine that had been largely gathering dust in our basement. My run that morning was relatively short, but also somewhat intense. My legs were not used to this sort of workout, but I pushed fairly hard just to try to find some relief and garner

some much-needed endorphins. Without making a conscious decision to become a runner, that is exactly what transpired over the next year.

While my foray into running has had its stops and starts over the past five years, this activity eventually became a part of my identity. I distinctly recall days when running felt like the only way to manage my grief and cope with the complex array of feelings I was experiencing. I found myself turning to running each time Brad missed another key milestone in our lives, including our younger daughter’s bat mitzvah and our older daughter’s high school graduation. While running felt essential, it was also deeply personal; never something I felt compelled to do publicly or with others. The only exception was when I would spend time with Brad’s sister, Julie, a serious runner who regularly competed in various races. Despite my limited interest in competing, Julie somehow convinced me to join her for this year’s Glass City Marathon weekend. Since she was already planning to run the half-marathon, she suggested I join her for the Savage 5K the day prior.

Competing in the 5K was particularly meaningful because it signified how much my life has changed

since Brad’s death. In the weeks following the race, I found myself reflecting on this evolution as I lay on my back during the start of a yoga class. I began to consider the frequent refrain of my yoga teacher about the vital role of savasana, literally “corpse pose” in Sanskrit, the resting pose in all our classes. Our teacher often said it was the most important part of our yoga practice, a concept I found intriguing. Exploring this idea, I discovered that savasana is supposed to help one integrate and process the physical, mental and energetic shifts that are experienced in yoga. Considering these matters further, I suddenly had an epiphany: five years after losing my husband, I was finally in a phase of needing to integrate all the significant transformation that I had experienced since his passing. Given the massive change I had lived through - including the shift from wife to widow, from partnered-parent to single mom, from non-runner to runner, and so on - it was essential for me to process and integrate my current identity.

While I have witnessed a slow but steady consolidation of any internal shifts, I have learned that external integration can be highly unpredictable. In general, much like the process of preparing for a race,



the change comes in fits and starts, with many aches and pains along the way. Even when I feel ready to move forward with certain aspects of my life, my children and those around me are often on a different trajectory. Though we must all follow our own path in life, I will continue to run at my own pace, walking beside my children and holding hands with them when they need it most. I will also continue to feel proud that I have learned to run at all, knowing it has always led me back to a place of peace and higher love.