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## 'Chasing Dreams' at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia

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Being Jewish is not always about religion or tradition, but sometimes about the heritage.

This lesson had been taught to me over and over throughout my childhood.

My favorite tennis player was Aaron Krickstein because he was Jewish, my favorite football player was 49ers tight end John Frank and so on ...

My trip to the Baseball Hall of Fame was more a search of finding Sandy Koufax than anything comparable.

Being a part of a minority, we all root for every Jewish athlete sometimes more than we root for our home team.

So, when the opportunity became available to view "Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American," a new exhibit at the National Museum of American Jewish History, I jumped on the chance to take my children.

There is so much going on in the exhibit that it was a bit overwhelming for my boys, who are 8 and 6. That and having my 3-year-old daughter run around on super speed forced this to be a quick visit.

Still, this surprisingly to me, wasn't just an exhibit of Jewish ballplayers although the big poster picture of Shawn Green might have told you otherwise.

We ran into jerseys of Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente and Ichiro Suzuki. I was pretty certain that none of those were Jewish, but they broke a minority barrier, which is what the exhibit is all about.

We started off learning a little bit about Hank Greenberg, who amassed 183 RBIs in 1937. 183 RBIs? The Phillies may not produce that many runs this year. My 6 year-old Ben professed to know this because he owned his baseball card. Perhaps, but I doubt it.

My older son Max was impressed, while my daughter Millie put some headphones on and got to interact with the exhibit.

We also learned of one of my favorites — Moe Berg, a catcher, a spy and he was Jewish.

I even read a book about him, which seemed so far-fetched that it could not be true. Yet, somehow he was all three.

That could only be topped by Thelma 'Tiby' Eisen of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

This caught Ben's eye — a female baseball player? Girls play baseball?

Then one of the museum ushers spoke in great detail of how women's professional baseball came to be during the war and how long the league lasted. This seemed to keep Ben's attention for a minute or two. I could only think of Tom Hanks in "A League of Their Own" — "There's no crying in baseball."

We moved onto the overcoming adversity part of the exhibit, which featured Jackie Robinson, Hank Aaron, Roberto Clemente, Ichiro Suzuki and Justine Siegal, the first woman to pitch major league batting practice. I was not aware this would be a part of the exhibit.

In fact, this may have caught more of my boys' attention because these were names they've heard of and Aaron is in the news these days commenting on the lack of black athletes in baseball.

Of course then there was Sandy Koufax, who is famous because my dad went with my grandfather to a no-hitter and also this: He refused to pitch in the World Series because of Yom Kippur. Shocking as this was to fans as the time, my boys were also shocked.

You can miss a game for a holiday? Well, maybe only this holiday.

The museum then took off in my boys' mind as on center stage of the exhibit is a big interactive movie screen labeled "Catching History."

Viewers get to field balls hit by a variety of baseball greats and are rewarded with facts and trivia for every play. Maybe not rewarded in my boys' eyes, more like interrupted.

Ben started out and caught 12 of 15 balls, even being rewarded with high-fives as he left the "field" by the contingent of fans. The pressure was on older brother Max, who only came away with 10 and received only a high-five from me.

He did not want to talk about this any further.

While the two tried to figure out this video game, I got to learn about greats ranging from Joe DiMaggio back to Greenberg.

There is other interactive, touchscreen databases titled "People of the Game," which provides exploration of Jews in the majors. My daughter took to this, mostly because of the buttons she could push.

Off to the concourse we went for Koufax on the Koncourse. There, the boys got to imitate Koufax even if he was a lefty and throw like the legend even if he was on the Dodgers.

We closed out our visit on the first floor with nearly 100 baseball cards where we got to read tales of some the recent heroes like Ian Kinsler, Ike Davis and Shawn Green.

Kinsler stuck in our minds — a Jewish ballplayer who actually led the majors in stolen bases.

It was perfect the way the exhibit hit us beginning with old-timers and ending with how their effect on the game has led to star players.

All in all, it felt like a little glimpse of Cooperstown in Philly with a lot less searching.

## **IF YOU GO**

**WHAT:** "Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American"

**WHERE:** National Museum of American Jewish History

**WHEN:** The exhibit runs until Oct. 26. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Beginning on May 7, the Museum will stay open until 8 p.m. on Wednesdays,

throughout the run of "Chasing Dreams," according to [chasingdreams.nmajh.org](http://chasingdreams.nmajh.org).

**TICKETS:** Children under 12 get in free; admission for adults is \$12

**INFO.:** For more information, call (215) 923-3811 x141

CONNECT: <http://chasingdreams.nmajh.org/>; on Twitter @NMAJH

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