



Leadership Innovation Community

The FJMC mission is to involve Jewish Men in Jewish Life by building and strengthening Men's Clubs in the Conservative / Masorti Movement. We accomplish this mission by:

**Leadership:** mentoring leaders at the club, region and international level,

**Innovation:** developing programming that better connects people of all ages to the Jewish community,

**Community:** forming meaningful long-lasting relationships based on camaraderie, common interests and core values.

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**Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs**

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 832 New York, NY 10115-0022

(212) 749-8100

international@fjmc.org

www.fjmc.org

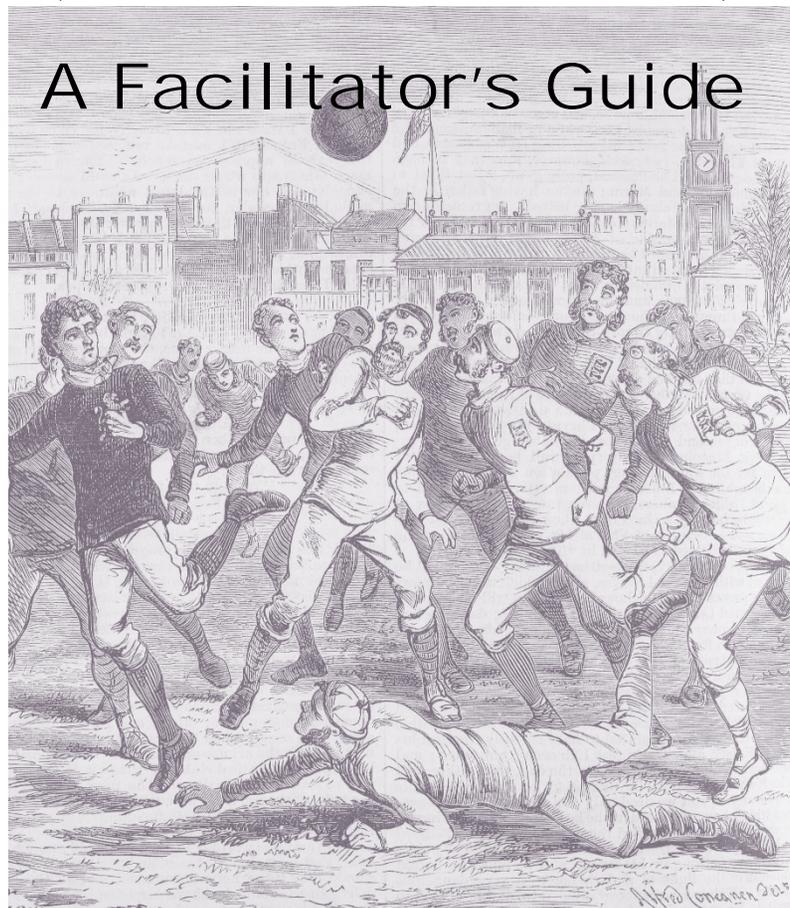
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# Physically Competitive Sports (You and Your Child)

## A Facilitator's Guide



Hearing Men's Voices Program  
Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

## About the Program

### Goal

To create a series of discussions focusing on the emphasis of sports in North American culture and the challenges it presents to Jewish Continuity.

### Program: What is Judaism's attitude towards sports?

This can be a brief discussion at a Men's Club Board meeting or a fully-fledged program designed to attract and engage fathers of young children.

### Preparation: A flyer, and a facilitator.

#### Facilitator begins the session:

During Greek and Roman times, the amphitheater had a major place in cultural life. Amphitheaters were built in Israel and featured fierce contests between gladiators and often professional fighters and slaves. Most rabbis attempted to prohibit attendance, possibly because offerings to numerous deities took place. Rabbi Nathan the Babylonian (2nd century C.E.) disagreed. (*Tosephta Avodah Zarah*).

He was of the opinion that if one pleaded for the life of the defeated warrior or served as a witness to his death it would be permitted. Pleading for the life of a defeated warrior is self-evident. Serving as a witness to his death, if the victim was Jewish, would allow his wife to remarry.

#### This raises an interesting question: Can this witness, the spectator, add a spiritual dimension to a violent sport?

Think about it as we watch football, boxing, wrestling, or any other sport where a strong possibility of physical harm exists.

#### Do we have a role? (Go around the room)

#### Have you ever experienced a negative experience as a fan?

Facilitator continues:

In 1982, the film *Chariots of Fire* won four Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

It told the story of track stars from the 1924 British Olympic Team. One of them, Eric Liddell, a Scottish Christian runner, was quoted as saying:

“I believe God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

Have any of you ever experienced anything like this?

Liddell made international headlines when he refused to run in a heat of the 100m race as it was scheduled on Sunday (his Sabbath). Similarly, Sandy Koufax made the historic decision not to pitch the opening game of the 1965 World Series because it took place on Yom Kippur.

#### What do you think?

#### Facilitator continues:

Violence is not a Jewish value but competition can be encouraged. As fathers, what do you think about activities or sports where the goal is to harm the opponent (i.e. boxing or martial arts)?

#### Have you discussed any of this with your sons and daughters? Would you?

Do you think there is a parallel with video games, boxing matches, fights in hockey games, or football?

#### Facilitator continues:

The NY Times February 4, 2016 featured a two page article about former NFL quarterback, Ken Stabler. After he died at age 69, an autopsy was performed, and he was found to have chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease believed to be caused by repeated blows to the head.

Stabler was the N.F.L.'s most valuable player in 1974 and led the Raiders to their first Super Bowl title two seasons later. He ended his 15 year career with the New Orleans Saints in 1984.

Stabler is the seventh former N.F.L. quarterback found to have evidence of CTE. Researchers at Boston University have found over 90 cases of CTE in football players, including former Giants safety Tyler Sash, who died at age 27.

#### Facilitator:

As *fathers*, your children may be encouraged to play in physically competitive sports.

#### What do you tell them? What should you tell them?