**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey dear Israel Story listeners, it’s Mishy. Last night was the first night of Hanukkah and tomorrow is Giving Tuesday. So it seems like the perfect time to ask for your help. And here’s the truth: Making a show like Israel Story is hard. It’s *really* hard. We’re a small team, on a shoestring budget, and we work on each and every episode for months and months, sometimes even years.

We do it because we believe in our mission. We think it’s important to tell complicated and nuanced stories about our country. And we want to model the Israeli society we’d like to live in - one that’s open-minded and pluralistic, diverse and full of curiosity. One in which we listen to each other, and learn from one another. One in which there is room for people of different faiths, different beliefs, different backgrounds, different lifestyles. Our team works around the clock to produce stories that are hopefully not only meaningful and thought-provoking, but also beautiful and artistic. And we release those stories into the world for your listening pleasure.

Now, podcasts have emerged as a free medium, which is great. We all have access to fabulous content, all the time. But unless your show is backed by a powerful organization or a big station, or bankrolled by wealthy donors (all of which, by the way, we are *not*) - it’s an ongoing struggle. The only way we manage to survive, the only way we’re able to produce season after season, is with your support and your generosity. So, I hope you’ll open your hearts and make a donation to Israel Story today. If you enjoy our show, if we’re a part of your life, if you look forward to new episodes, and if you believe in what we do, please pitch in. Go to our site - israelstory.org - and press the “support us” button. There are a bunch of different ways to give, and what helps us most of all is if you choose to become a monthly contributor. An extremely generous donor will match the first ten thousand dollars we receive. So if you give today, your gift *will* be doubled.

And because we don’t want to ask for your help without giving something in return, we produced a special bonus, as our way of saying thank you. So here’s Marie Röder with **Yalla Banaat**.

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**Anan Jarjoura:** We want to prove two things. The first thing that even though that we are Arabs, we are playing sports. We could beat anyone if we are good. And the second thing, it's a way to… to tell our society. They are girls, OK, they are champions.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Most people who know Anan Jarjoura call him…

**Anan Jarjoura:** Abu el-Banaat.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Abu el-Banaat is Arabic for ‘Father of the Girls.’ But this nickname doesn’t refer to Anan’s own biological daughters. It refers, instead, to his *girls*. Which is to say, the girls on his team.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I’m a volleyball coach. I’m been coaching for twenty-three years.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Volleyball is Anan’s passion, or - seen from a different angle - his obsession.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I love that. I love that so much.

**Marie Röder (narration):** And that’s somewhat surprising, since - growing up in Nazareth - volleyball really wasn’t a thing.

**Anan Jarjoura:** There was no volleyball in Nazareth, nobody knows the volleyball.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Even today it’s not a massively popular sport in Israel, and even less so among the Arab population. But that doesn’t seem to matter to forty-six-year-old Anan, a stocky man with a salt-and-pepper goatee. He first fell in love with the sport when he studied physical education at the Wingate Institute in Netanya. While many of his classmates gravitated towards Israel’s more popular sports - basketball, soccer or judo - it was volleyball, with its combination of teamwork, strategy and skill, that appealed to Anan.

**Anan Jarjoura:** In order to get even one point you have to be together, you have to understand each other, to feel the others in the field.

**Marie Röder (narration):** In 1998, Anan landed his first job as a sports teacher at the Salvatorian Sisters’ School - a private Catholic high school in Nazareth. And his first order of business was bringing his favorite game to his new home court.

Anan opened up two teams, one for boys and the other for girls, and was successful at drumming up excitement among the students. The boys’ team quickly filled up, but the idea of a girls team created quite a stir within the community.

**Anan Jarjoura:** In the Arab society, everything have to be in the tradition.

**Marie Röder (narration):** And the girls’ volleyball team? That was most definitely *not* “in the tradition.” Anan’s phone began ringing off the hook. Some parents were worried that volleyball would cause their daughters to neglect their studies. Others complained that the games would keep them out at night and - to his surprise - some even took issue with the tight uniforms female volleyball players usually wear. It was the eve of a new millennium, and Anan was shocked by the force of the conservative pushback.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I really couldn't imagine that they really supposed to ask a permission from the dad, from the mom, even from the big brothers. It was our society in that days.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Now, why was this surprising to Anan? After all, he had grown up in that very same society. He was - in many ways - its product. But here’s something you need to know about him: Long before he became a volleyball fanatic, he was a die-hard feminist. And that, he told me, is something he absorbed at home.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I grew up in Nazareth in a family that really educate me to respect all of the people. I’ve seen that when my father was speaking, how he spoke with my mom. It’s a relation of a respect, maybe from this place I’ve got the respect for the others, and respect for the woman.

**Marie Röder (narration):** So for him the girls’ volleyball team was much more than just a high school sports team. It was a way to empower Nazareth’s young women, and carve out a place for them to shine in the public sphere. The parents’ resistance simply convinced him that this was a crusade worth fighting.

**Anan Jarjoura:** This make me insist to continue and to go on and to fight this kind of people.

**Marie Röder (narration):** He started making the rounds.

**Anan Jarjoura:** Nights and days, I went from house to house. I spoke with the mothers, with the fathers.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Anan argued and sweet-talked. He explained and listened. And, little by little, it seemed to work. A few weeks later he invited all the parents to the school. He served cookies and Turkish coffee in the teacher’s lounge, and then - nervous yet determined - he shared his vision. The importance of opening the team, he said, was...

**Anan Jarjoura:** To tell all of the people, to tell our society, let your girls be a leader. Just leave your stupid tradition. Sorry, leave the ideas, leave these stereotypes.

**Marie Röder (narration):** And somehow, that straight-talk worked. One by one, the parents changed their minds.

**Anan Jarjoura:** The parents start taking part with me, start helping me, supporting the girls. It was really something special. Like a revolution.

**Marie Röder (narration):** With the parents’ blessing, Anan set out to work. He began recruiting players, such as Rawand Msallam.

**Rawand Msallam:** *[Laughs]* OK, again. To say hi or not? I’m Rawand from Nazareth.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Rawand has long brown hair and a contagious laugh. Most importantly, however, she’s tall, and soon became one of the team’s star players.

**Rawand Msallam:** I started to play when I was in seventh grade. I saw that there is something special about this game, it attract me.

**Marie Röder (narration):** For Rawand, much like for Anan, it was all about the team, the camaraderie, and the sense of being part of something greater than herself.

**Rawand Msallam:** If we’re six on the court and one player is not good, then the whole team, you could feel it, that you can't score. Maybe it’s the feeling that you belong to somewhere. I found myself there.

**Marie Röder (narration):** There was a ton of team spirit in those early days. But that was just about all they had. Their uniforms were baggy, their equipment was minimal and they didn’t even have a hall. Instead, they played and practiced outside, in the school’s asphalt courtyard.

**Rawand Msallam:** You know, the volleyball... like so many times you fall on the floor in order to... to get the ball. It was really... it hurts because it's like schoolyard like outside.

**Marie Röder (narration):** The teams they were up against, on the other hand, represented affluent Jewish highschools, had snazzy uniforms, and practiced in professional indoor courts.

**Nadine Mattar Zaitoun:** They have their showers, very clean and very organized.

**Marie Röder (narration):** That’s Nadine Mattar Zaitoun, another player on that early team. But what they lacked in resources, they made up for in Anan’s enthusiasm. Though he coached both the boys’ and the girls’ teams, the girls were his real passion. Anan believed in his girls, even when they had a hard time believing in themselves.

**Anan Jarjoura:** They said, “OK, for sure they are Jewish, for sure, they will beat us.” They have the stereotype. They are girls, the weakest ring in the society, and they are Arabs, the weakest people in the country.

**Marie Röder (narration):** It was clear to Anan thathis role as coach was as much psychological as it was physical.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I have to convince the girls that they are equal and they can beat anyone.

**Marie Röder (narration):** And sure enough, just like every single underdog sports film you’ve ever seen, the scrappy girls of the Salvatorian Sisters’ School soon started winning. And - at least as far as Anan was concerned - every victory *on* the court marked an even greater victory *off* the court.

**Anan Jarjoura:** They are the women of the Arabs’ future. Not only sport. In the whole society. If this reflect to them, they will reflect that to their sons and daughters.

**Marie Röder (narration):** In 2003, five years after Anan first opened the girls’ team, the school won its first regional championship. Then, they won two more.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I really felt that I put Nazareth on the map. Everybody knows. I really start feeling really proud about what we are doing.

**Rawand Msallam:** Like, as an Arabs, minority in Israel, and especially women, doing extraordinary things - it gives you confidence.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Anan's dream had come true: Nazareth had embraced volleyball, and his girls felt a tremendous sense of pride and empowerment. But now that his girls were about to graduate, they reached the end of the road. There was nowhere for them to continue playing. Always a dreamer, Anan started thinking.

**Anan Jarjoura:** So I'm start thinking to compete other teams in the Israeli volleyball federation.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Anan decided to create an adult team that would allow his high school standouts to keep on playing. In 2005, a new volleyball club - Maccabi Bnot Nazareth - entered Israel’s amateur third league and quickly took it by storm.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I was surprised about that, it was really not hard.

**Marie Röder (narration):** In their first year, they ranked second. The year after that, they topped the chart and qualified for the semi-professional second league.

Maccabi Bnot Nazareth was one of the few Arab teams in the league, and occasionally tensions ran high. During a round of hostilities between Israel and the Hamas, Maccabi Bnot Nazareth was playing an away game against a Jewish team from the North. They were way behind and Anan called a timeout.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I said to my girls, “OK, girls. *Hamas*, *hamas*, *hamas*. Go on, go on.” In Arabic ‘*hamas*’ that mean ‘motivation,’ OK? And then, suddenly, silent in the crowd. Silence in the crowd. “What he’s saying ‘*hamas, hamas*’? He is against us? He is against Israel?” And I said to the coach, “no, *hamas*, you know, to motivate them.”

**Marie Röder (narration):** Andit was that *hamas*, that motivation, that keptMaccabi Bnot Nazareth going. Year after year they poured their hearts into the games, but they were never quite good enough to qualify for the professional first league. Here’s Rawand.

**Rawand Msallam:** I always had this dream that how it feels like to be in the first league of Israel, the best league in Israel.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Finally, in 2017, luck took its rightful place alongside *hamas*. One of the first-league teams went bust, leaving an unexpected spot open. And what was even more surprising was the fact that the Israeli Volleyball Association decided to offer that vacant spot to none other than Maccabi Bnot Nazareth. Anan and his girls immediately realized that they had received an unusual gift, a rare athletic shortcut. But they wanted to show that they belonged at the top.

**Rawand Msallam:** I want to prove to everybody that we deserve that as a team.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Essentially overnight, Anan had to transform a collection of amateur, if spirited, players into a professional organization. And even though he had no idea how he would come up with the money for physiotherapists, fitness coaches and foreign players, he was not going to allow this opportunity to pass him by.

**Anan Jarjoura:** The opportunity to be in the first league it’s, you know, it come once a life, and I must take it.

**Marie Röder (narration):** What had begun with a modest dream to open a girls’ high school team had morphed into something much bigger. He was, in every possible way, making history.

**Anan Jarjoura:** No Arabs team at all were in that league before us. No one. So I take this chance in both hands and go to the first league.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Now, in the fictional version of this story, Maccabi Bnot Nazareth becomes the Cinderella of Israeli women’s volleyball, beats all odds, and shocks the nation by winning the championship. But we, folks, are in the business of documentary storytelling. And, well, the truth is that it’s been a rough ride, to say the least. Frustratingly, it’s all a matter of resources.

**Anan Jarjoura:** We don’t have the same money that other clubs really have, we don’t have the money. All of the local players, including me and the coach assistant, doesn’t get even one shekel for working.

**Marie Röder (narration):** The only team members that *do* receive a salary are three foreign players from Brazil, and at times Anan has to pay them out of his own pocket. All the rest do it for the love of the game.

**Anan Jarjoura:** They sacrificing their time, their lives, in their families, they do it free.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Most of the players have nine-to-five jobs alongside their professional volleyball careers. Nadine, for instance, is a teacher.

**Nadine Mattar Zaitoun:** I’m a wife, I’m a teacher, I’m a mother, and I’m a player. Sometimes I really feel like I’m very down, I’m exhausted, like I want to be alone and to get some rest, but I can't, you know? I have so much things to do, I have so much responsibilities also.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Rawand, who works as a project manager,also struggles to juggle life, sports and a career. But that doesn’t deter her.

**Rawand Msallam:** If you want to enter, you need to be all in, like you need to commit. I’m working in my paid job and I’m doing the volleyball,I feel that I can do everything. And without dreaming about it, you… you can’t continue with this league. You need to aim for something better.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Perhaps. But the exhaustion and the players’ draining lifestyles were immediately evident on the court. In their first year in the premier league, they won just one game, and narrowly escaped relegation. The following season they managed to win two games, and once again, just barely remained in the league. And if those seasons were disastrous, the 2019-2020 season was even worse. Maccabi Bnot Nazareth were losing game after game, and it seemed as if the dream of promoting Arab women through volleyball would soon be over. But once again, luck was on their side.

**Anan Jarjoura:** Suddenly, the corona come, and stopped the league.

**Marie Röder (narration):** Like many other sports leagues around the world, the IVA - the Israel Volleyball Association - decided to cancel the remainder of the season and freeze any relegations. Maccabi Bnot Nazareth would live to fight another day.

**Anan Jarjoura:** We could survive because we got another chance to stay.

**Marie Röder (narration):** In November 2020, during a momentary lull in the pandemic, games resumed and a new - supposedly post-corona - season began. Given how things left off before COVID, Nadine - the team’s captain - was preparing for the worst.

**Nadine Mattar Zaitoun:** If we dropped out of the league *[sighs]*, it will be hard for me, to think about that we will not continue. I will of course be sad. We love to play volleyball. It’s in our blood.

**Marie Röder (narration):** The first match of the season was a home game, and - making the entire journey come full circle - it was held at the new sports hall of the Salvatorian Sisters’ School. Due to COVID regulations, only a handful of fans were allowed in. Still, Anan was beaming. He and his girls were back.

Maccabi Bnot Nazareth lost all three sets that evening. At the end of the game, Anan did his very best to remain positive.

**Anan Jarjoura:** You know what? I’m really disappointed because we lost. But to tell you the truth, I am really proud of how what we played, even though that we lost. And I am sure that we are going to win next week, that’s for sure.

**Marie Röder (narration):** That, sadly, didn’t happen. Nazareth lost the next game too.

**Anan Jarjoura:** It's unbelievable ladies. How can we win? Please be in focus! It's something I don't know. I don’t know how to explain *[speaks in Arabic]*.

**Rawand Msalam:** But you shout. When I enter, help me. Relax a little bit.

**Anan Jarjoura:** I could not relax. Yallah!

**Marie Röder (narration):** And then the game after that, Nadine broke her leg.

**Anan Jarjoura:** And I’ve told them, “if you really love her, and respect her, we must play good. Please do it for for Nadine, for the team.”

**Marie Röder (narration):** Anan’s motivational speech seemed to work.

**Rawand Msallam:** This was the twist point for our team. We were in the fight mode and we saw that we can do it.

**Marie Röder (narration):** That night, Maccabi Bnot Nazareth got their first win of the season, securing a last-minute upset against Haifa, one of the strongest teams in the league.

**Rawand Msallam:** This was the result of working hard winning against Haifa. We proved to ourselves and to everybody that we are a team that exists and presents.

**Marie Röder (narration):** And with that new-found confidence, off they were.

**Anan Jarjoura:** Tel Aviv, we beat Tel Aviv 3:2.  
**Rawand Msallam:** Hod HaSharon.

**Nadine Mattar Zaiton**: We won 3:0.

**Rawand Msallam:** Tel Aviv again.

**Anan Jarjoura:** Outside game, 3:1.

**Rawand Msallam:** Ra’anana.

**Anan Jarjoura:** And the last game it was in Hod HaSharon, we beat them 3:0.

**Marie Röder (narration):** A season that started out in the worst way possible, ended up being more or less... OK. There were no championship celebrations, but no tears of relegation either.

**Rawand Msallam:** We are in the fifth place, this is a great achievement. I think it shows everybody that everybody can, and especially woman, can do that. Like don’t underestimate any woman, because like you don’t know what they are able to do!

**Marie Röder (narration):** And Anan - Abu el-Banaat - couldn't be prouder of his girls.

**Anan Jarjoura:** They are in the Premier League. They are playing for Nazareth, they are playing for the Arab society. We are so proud to do that. To play, to have the motivation. To have the Hamas, OK? *[laughs]*. We have a love, and a love will succeed. OK, we have no money. But we have a very big hearts.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Marie Röder. Zev Levi scored and sound designed this special. Sela Waisblum created the mix.

Please don’t forget to go to our site - israelstory.org - and support the show. Your generosity is what makes it possible.

Our staff includes Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Yoshi Fields, Skyler Inman, Naomi Schneider, Adina Karpuj, Elie Bleier, Sharon Rapaport and Rotem Zin. Tanya Huyard and Matthew Litman are our wonderful production interns. Jeff Umbro and Jesse Adler, from The Podglomerate, are our marketing team. I’m Mishy Harman and we’ll be back next time with a brand new Israel Story episode. So till then, *toda raba*, thank you, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye.*

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