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## Ethan Zohn Wants a Gold Medal



**Written By: Noam Watt**

Ethan Zohn has already achieved more in a lifetime than most people could dream of. He won the show *Survivor: Africa* in 2002. He's beaten

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So what more could Ethan possibly want to achieve? Well, it's something he'll have a shot at this summer: a gold medal in soccer at the 21st Maccabiah.

"We're all fighting for a common goal which is to win that gold medal this summer in Israel," Zohn declared.

Zohn is a goalkeeper on the USA Men's 45+ Soccer Team that will be competing in the World Maccabiah in Israel this July. He previously played in the 1997 games and coached in the 2004 Pan-Am Games in Chile.

This year, he's ready to compete with a team that has grown extremely close, and has lofty expectations.

"With this team, we've all made a commitment," said Zohn. "We've made a commitment to represent the United States. We've made a commitment to our Tribe, and we've made a commitment to each other. Our saying for this team is 'embrace the brotherhood.'"

Zohn's life has taken him many places. To start, he won the show *Survivor* in 2002. On the show, he was only allowed to bring two t-shirts. Zohn was planning to play in the 2001 Maccabiah before being selected for *Survivor*, so one of the shirts he took on the show was a 2001 Maccabi

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“That’s the shirt I won a million bucks in!” Zohn proudly exclaimed. “I don’t think people realize this, but the whole reason I won *Survivor* is because I’m Jewish. Think about the game itself: fasting’s not really a problem, I do that once a year anyway [for Yom Kippur]. Eating nasty food isn’t an issue. I’ve had gefilte fish, jelly borscht, and chopped liver. And I had already endured the most grueling test of strength and will known to humankind: my bris.”

Zohn’s earned \$1 million for winning *Survivor*. He invested it in a non-profit startup called Grassroot soccer, an organization with a mission of delivering health interventions through soccer.

“We are an adolescent health organization that’s using the power of soccer to educate, inspire, and mobilize young people to overcome their greatest health challenges and live healthier, more productive lives,” Zohn described.

Grassroot is now in 60 countries and has graduated 13 million kids from the program. The non-profit was inspired by an experience Ethan had during the show *Survivor*, when he met a group of kids in a hospital parking lot. He played hacky sack soccer with them, before learning they were HIV-positive. This interaction was part of what inspired Zohn to start Grassroot, and make an impact on communities that have long been impacted by HIV and AIDS.

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time before a game, Ethan was tasked with sacrificing a goat, an uncomfortable task for the Kosher vegetarian.

This summer he heads to Israel, to compete in a land where he will feel much more at home.

## TEAMMATES IN ISRAEL

Ethan is joined on the team by Lee Popper, a longtime friend and the other goalkeeper on the team. Ethan and Lee share a common bond of being from the Boston area, Ethan from Lexington and Lee from Needham.

Ethan and Lee have known each other for much of their lives. They played against each other at the high school and club level, and in college as well when Ethan went to Vassar, and Lee to Union.

Now, the two are close friends with a common goal of winning gold in Israel.

“[Ethan’s] great. He’s a great teammate,” said Popper. “The one word I would use is he’s just *inspirational*. All that he’s done, all that he gives, he motivates people, he motivates me. We work well together. If it’s him in net I’ll be cheering him on, and if it’s me in net, I know he’ll be cheering me on.”

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Milan's facility in Italy, and had strength and conditioning meetings virtually to maintain fitness.

“This is a chance to go back to Israel and continue the momentum we’ve been carrying,” said Popper.

While the mission of chasing gold is at the forefront, the opportunity to represent the USA is just as special to Zohn. “I am so excited to be able to travel back to Israel one more time, at this stage of my life with a bunch of guys that I love and that are part of this team together. I’m just excited.”

The competition kicks off at the 21st Maccabiah on July 12 in Israel.

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