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Ashkelon's basketball team shows resolve

By [MARK J. ALBOM](#)

In the midst of erratic rocket fire from Gaza, Ashkelon's premier basketball team, Ironi Ashkelon, is attempting to keep spirits high as the season continues.

Currently in eighth place in the BSL, the club suffered a loss to Hapoel Holon on Sunday, only to return to instability on its home court with Kassams regularly landing in the city.

Starting small forward Cory Carr is no stranger to Israeli tensions, having played in the league since 2001.

"Everywhere I've been in Israel it seems like a war has followed," he quipped.

Originally from Arkansas, USA, Carr is currently averaging 12.5 ppg and 81.1 percent FT.

"When you talk about rockets being fired blindly it could be a little bit nerve-racking," Carr told *The Jerusalem Post* on Monday.

"I feel this way and the Israelis are just as fearful about it. It's all about how you handle it. You don't really have control over what could happen."

Carr said he believes that his "situation is no different from theirs and everybody else's. If things get worse we will have to make the same adjustments that they do."

Humble in his stance, Carr's position as a transition member for the new American players places him in a mentor position, which he is using to help acclimate his foreign teammates to their new, sometimes dangerous, surroundings.

"Just because I do have some experience in this department, I try to keep them informed. I don't keep them in the dark. I'm trying to comfort them the best way I can," he said.

The stance of the management is also both optimistic and responsible.

Moran Vak, head of the team's public relations, admitted that the players are "scared a little bit."

But she added: "They know that we're with them, talking to them all day long. We know about everything and try to talk to them, calm them and everything".

Management has stressed that their responsibility for the players is their number one priority, and are keeping their ear to the ground to assess the situation.

"All the management is staying here and everybody is ok 'till now. And if the situation is worse and if the police and city hall says to take them out, that's what we will do," Vak said.

And what about the club's operations? Vak insisted that business will go on as usual, citing an even divide between home and away games for the remainder of the season (between seven and eight games each).

Teams lacking the same courage as Ashkelon will see their rivals ascend the ranks, as technical forfeits are in place for opponents who miss their scheduled appearance.

Yet the potential boon to their standings is not what concerns Moran; their safety and reputation among Israel is.

"If the [other] team will choose not to come then technically we will win. For now, that's what they've decided. I hope that everything is ok, and they will want to come to Ashkelon. It is the most important thing," she said,

Although trying to focus on the league, Carr and his American teammates are hesitant to return to the city.

"Some of the guys went back to Ashkelon [after Sunday's game in Holon] and those that didn't want to go didn't go," he said. "We had a day off today so most of the Americans stayed behind."

But Carr has seen this all before. "People think because it's near the Gaza strip that there aren't any good qualities in the city and I beg to differ," he said. You have to take the good with the bad. I think the country ought to respect a city like Ashkelon."

And as Ironi Ashkelon continues to persist under the threats the city is currently enduring, respect for them is already as high as the team spirit.