



Richard Bleier

Red Sox reliever pitches in for Team Israel

BY STEVE MARANTZ([HTTPS://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/AUTHOR/STEVE-MARANTZ/](https://JewishJournal.org/author/steve-marantz/))

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Boston Red Sox fans might feel kinship with Team Israel in the upcoming World Baseball Classic, with former All-Star Kevin Youkilis on the coaching staff and newly acquired reliever Richard Bleier in the bullpen.

Bleier came to the Sox in January in a trade for Matt Barnes after parts of seven seasons in the Major Leagues, the last three with the Miami Marlins. The 35-year-old lefthander grew up and was bar mitzvahed in South Florida and pitched for Team Israel in the qualifying rounds of the 2013 WBC. He skipped the 2017 tournament while he competed for a spot on the Baltimore Orioles roster.

In May 2018, Bleier was asked by JMORE magazine of Baltimore what being Jewish meant to him. “Family is the biggest part for me,” Bleier said. “When I’m home [in Florida], my wife and I like to go to my cousin’s house for Shabbat on Friday nights. And then on the holidays, we’ll go and celebrate with her and her family. She’s Orthodox, so it’s different and special. But just growing up with the general faith and the values make for a lot of good memories.”

Asked what was unique about being Jewish in Major League Baseball, Bleier said, “It seems once people find out I’m Jewish in the area I am, wherever it is, people tend to reach out. In Baltimore especially, more than a few people have invited me over for the holidays ... it’s definitely nice to know that the community is there for us.”

Bleier will be playing in front of a hometown crowd when Team Israel gathers for Pool D play in Miami March 11-21. Israel’s opening game is at noon March 12 vs. Nicaragua, which will be televised on Fox Sports 2.

Team Israel’s roster is made up almost entirely of American Jews (WBC rules allow eligibility if a player qualifies for citizenship or a passport under the laws of the country) and may be “the greatest collection of Jewish talent ever squeezed into one dugout,” wrote Louis Keene of The Forward.

Of 30 players on the Israeli squad, 14 have Major League experience, including nine that spent time in the big leagues in 2022. Most notable are San Francisco Giants slugger and two-time All-Star Joc Pederson, and Orioles righthander Dean Kremer. The roster includes two former Red Sox, catcher Ryan Lavarnway and infielder Danny Valencia.

Team Israel qualified for the WBC for the first time in 2017 and became something of a Cinderella story, sweeping the first round with wins over host South Korea, Chinese Taipei, and the Netherlands. It beat Cuba in the opening game of the second round in Tokyo before two straight losses ended its run.

Read a feature about Former Red Sox star Kevin Youkilis here:

'Youk' swings for the fences with brewery, spot on Team Israel coaching staff



Kevin Youkilis tells a story about his Jewish ancestry, his bootlegging great-uncle, and his California brewery that illuminates his hire as hitting coach for Team Israel in the upcoming World Baseball Classic. It also hints at why he was a valued contributor to the Red Sox World Series championship in 2007, and why he's among ... [Continue reading](#)



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