

Novelist Saul Bellow once observed that Israelis want to be able to parade one champion that would be "the best in the world" in every single field of endeavor. Ambition is laudable, but it may also be unrealistic and sometimes even perilous. The line between assertive arrogance, between the will to win and self-assurance of winning, is thin. Walking that line is the key to sporting success.

With the opening of the Olympic Games in Athens tomorrow, this arrogance will certainly be waiting around every turn of the track, every lap in the pool, hiding out in every hall, waiting to pounce on unreasonably over-confident athletes among the representatives of more than 200 countries competing in 28 sports.

The Olympics is not a place for arrogance. Greece took some harsh international criticism for its organization of the games, and Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, president of the Athens Organizing Committee, has earned the first Olympic medal of these games by getting everything ready on time, albeit in the nick of time. The International Olympic Committee has also prepared for the curse of modern sport, the drug menace. In order not to tempt fate, the dangers of terror are not widely discussed.

Going into the 16 days of competition, Israel needs to give arrogance a rest. At least a quarter of the 36 members of the Israeli team offer real hope for a medal. But we should not expect more from a true athlete than the best that he or she can give. If they do, we can raise our heads in pride.

Less of a focus should be placed on hopes for a medal and more on fostering the sporting spirit that the team takes into the events. Apparently the fixation that says no one wearing blue and white should shame us with a place at the bottom of the scoreboard has clouded judgment. Measurable standards are necessary, but the level of commitment and work ethic shown by an athlete should not be ignored when the Israeli Olympic Committee is deciding who is worthy of a place on the Olympic team. It was therefore a mistake to prevent the participation of some of the most dedicated athletes by raising the qualifying standards even higher than those determined by the organizers in Athens.

Only gold-medal winners are granted the honor of hearing their national anthem echo through the Olympic stadium. How wonderful it would be to hear "Hatikva" played at least once. But as we hope for that magical moment, we should remember the words of champion pole vaulter Alex Averbukh, who like half the Israeli Olympic team is not a native born Israeli. Quizzed recently by a reporter whether he had finally mastered the words of the national anthem since becoming European champion in 2002, he answered, "I can't say I know all the words, but I think I do know what needs to be done to create tikva [hope]."

The only way to keep our arrogance at bay is to remember that the Olympics should, above all, be about joy and enjoyment.

Novelist – סופר

Observed – הבחין/שם לב

Parade – מצעד / להצעיד

Champion – אלוף

Field – תחום, שדה

Endeavor – מאמץ

Ambition – אמביציה, שאפתנות

Laudable – ראוי לשבח/ראוי לתהילה

Unrealistic – בלתי מציאותי

Perilous – מלא ורצוף בסכנות ומכשולים

Assertive – אסרטיבי, עומד על שלו	Arrogance – שחצנות
Will – רצון (גם צוואה)	Thin – דק, קלוש
Key – המפתח	Track – מסלול
Lap – הקפה (גם ירך)	Hall – אולם/פרוזדור
Pounce – לתקוף, להתנפל, להסתער	
Unreasonably – באופן בלתי הגיוני, בלתי סביר	
Representatives – נציגים	Harsh – נוקשה
Criticism – ביקורת	
Organization – ארגון (גם מלשון "יכולת ארגון" וגם מלשון "ארגון גדול")	
Committee – ועידה	Earned – הרוויח
Albeit – הגם ש..., אף על פי ש...	
In the nick of time – ברגע האחרון, בדקה ה-90	
Curse – קללה	Menace – מפגע
Tempt fate – להתגרות בגורל	Discussed – מדוברים, עומדים לדיון
Competition – תחרות	Quarter – רבע
Members – חברים, משתתפים	Offer – להציע
Raise our heads in pride – לשאת את ראשו בגאווה	
Fostering – טיפוח, אימוץ	Apparently – מסתבר ש..
Fixation – קיבוע, קיבעון	Scoreboard – לוח התוצאות
Clouded judgment – ערפל את יכולת השיפוט	Cloud – ענן
Measurable standards – סטנדרטים הניתנים למדידה	
Commitment – מחויבות	Work ethic – מוסר עבודה
Ignore – להתעלם	Worthy of – ראוי ל...
Prevent – למנוע	Participation – השתתפות
Dedicated – מסורים	Qualifying standards – הסטנדרטים לקבלה
Determined – נקבעו	Granted – זוכים, מוענק להם
Anthem – המנון	magical moment – רגע קסום
Native born Israeli – יליד ישראלי מקומי, "צבר"	
Quizzed – נבחן	Recently – לאחרונה
Reporter – כתב, עיתונאי	Mastered – הגיע לשליטה מלאה ב...
Create – ליצור	
At bay – במפרץ (זהו ביטוי שמשמעו - "על אש קטנה" או "לא פעיל")	
Joy and enjoyment – שמחה והנאה	