

Fighting Fahrenheit in 512

Through Chipotle, Hebrew and arriving late, Friesem brothers acclimate to America

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Kai Friesem hates talking about the weather. And it's not only because he firmly believes that Texas has environmental mood swings—a statement he stands by—but because instead of using Celsius, like the rest of the world, the U.S. measures temperature in Fahrenheit.

"I think it's so stupid," Kai chuckled. "You guys don't use the metric system, which is idiotic. Everyone else does, but America just *has* to be different."

The Friesem brothers, senior Kai and twin sophomores Lyrr and Theo, moved from Tel Aviv, Israel, in August and settled in Austin, Texas, to begin high school in the States, where they were immediately welcomed by the Knight baseball team.

The first time the brothers practiced with their teammates over the summer, Kai thought he was going to die.

"We asked Andy [Honea] how hot it gets and he replied with, 'Oh, it gets up to like 100,' and I thought there is no way it can get up to 100, that is boiling. You burn and die at 100," Kai said. "Then I had to learn about the Fahrenheit, which is stupid. So all in all, a great first memory."

While they are now settled and somewhat acclimated, to Theo, the move was sudden.

"It was kinda surprising," Theo said. "Our mom, who works at Apple, had been telling us we were going to move for a while, but we only found out like six months before. It was abrupt."

The family was supposed to move earlier, but COVID-19 hit and thwarted their original timeline.

Moving to America came with a few distinct changes after years of schooling in Israel.

"You watch American TV and movies and how they portray high school in the States," Kai said. "But it really is not like what you see in

movies. It's really different."

A difference cited by the boys: the change in language.

"The primary language in Israel is Hebrew," Kai said.

"It is somewhat weird because we now have to take English literature and math classes. I don't like

writing all the essays. But, in baseball when Lyrr does not know what the signs mean, I just tell him in Hebrew. So hopefully none of our opponents know Hebrew."

Teammate and friend Andy Honea sees their bilingualism as a scare tactic.

"When they talk in Hebrew, I think it psychs out the other team—it's a bit disorienting," Honea said. "They can't pick up what the brothers are putting down. It's especially funny when Kai yells, and he tends to do that a lot."

Lyrr, conversely, is focused on the culinary aspect of life in America.

The Friesem's cuisine in Israel consisted of meats, bread, salads, hummus, lots of olive oil, lemon and spices—something they described as fulfilling and satisfactory but incomparable to Chipotle.

"Fast food, that is the big difference," Lyrr said. "The fast food in Israel does not compare to America, especially the classic deliciousness that is Chipotle."

One thing that's true wherever the Friesem's find themselves: brotherly love.

To Kai, it seems healthy for brothers to argue, and Lyrr is the instigator of all.

"Of, course, it's natural for brothers to argue; it sets nature in balance," he said. "And Lyrr definitely causes the most issues."

"And is the messiest, and is never ready on time," Theo added.

This second-rate time management skill has led to many memorable adventures.

"He never has things organized; whenever we leave the house he can never be ready two minutes early, it's either on the dot or late," Kai said.

In fact, their daily Tel Aviv bus stop dash is something Lyrr oddly misses.

"In Israel, we always had to run to our bus," he said. "We

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— senior Kai Friesem

BELOW: The Friesem brothers Theo (age 9), Kai (age 11), and Lyrr (age 9) pose with the Sharon Region Juvenile division trophy after a summer baseball league game in Tel Aviv. Photo courtesy of Kai Friesem.



ABOVE: The Friesem brothers Theo (15), Kai (18) and Lyrr (15) pose after a morning Mac baseball practice. Photo by Grace Nugent

would have to sprint to get on. Our daily sprint. But that bus driver was the best; he would stop the bus for us and sometimes he would take us to lunch after school."

To teammates and friends, each Friesem's distinct personality is unmistakable, even when they are lumped together.

"Theo is calm and keeps everyone grounded," Honea said. "Lyrr is confident, outgoing and a tad bit off the wall, and Kai is in between, the comical man, the fun dad of the three."

Ez Guenther, a friend of the brothers, artfully describes the twins as fire and ice. To this point, the day he met Lyrr was unforgettable.

"The first time I met Lyrr, he asked me to do a pull-up challenge," Guenther said. "He then proceeded to do 20 pull-ups and promptly pass out. Lyrr Friesem, ladies and gentlemen. I was honestly very impressed."

But Lyrr and Theo's biggest pet peeve with life at Mac is the mispronunciation of their names.

"Kai is lucky his name is never mispronounced; it makes me so mad," Lyrr said. "The baseball team has nicknamed me 'Lurr.' I blame Andy."

Honea, however, has a backstory to the nickname.

"We call Lyrr 'Lurr' because one day we had a substitute, and she pronounced it 'Lurr' and followed it up with 'What kind of name is that?'" he said. "Lyrr was not amused."

Theo has the same issue.

"Everybody thinks it's Th-eo but it's T-O," he said with a laugh. "Americans will never learn."

Kai, Lyrr and Theo plan to play baseball this summer for the Israel U18 team in the Maccabiah Games—what Theo refers to as the Jewish Olympics.

And while Kai is looking forward to revisiting a country that uses Celsius, even if just for a brief spell, being with his brothers is always a comfort.

"Whether the temperature is measured in Celsius or Fahrenheit or whatever continent I'm on," he said, "everything is constant and easier when I'm with those two."