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California Briefing

with Louis Keene



A Koufaxian conflict



A bronze Sandy Koufax will soon join this statue of Jackie Robinson. (Victor Decolongon/Getty Images)

It's grand that the Dodgers honored Sandy Koufax with a statue at Dodger Stadium yesterday — we'll finally have a place to meet for Ma'ariv on Jewish Community Night! But I was surprised that the statue unveiling, and accompanying replica giveaway for the first 40,000 fans in attendance, was planned for a Saturday afternoon.

Now, clearly, most Jews do not observe Shabbat in a way that would prevent them from attending a ballgame on a Saturday afternoon. But we're talking about honoring a guy who is best known for refusing to play a World Series game on Yom Kippur. As one Jewish fan I interviewed noted, there are six other days of the week that would not have presented any conflict with Koufax's legacy or for those who don't drive on Shabbat, like yours truly.

“Obviously they don't have a *yiddishe-kopf* running the operation,” he said, using a Yiddish expression that means, roughly, “Jewish mind.” (As a matter of fact, team president Stan Kasten — [like about a third of major professional sports-team owners](#) — is Jewish, so I'm really at a loss.)

ONE BIG STORY

I've been tracking Chabad of Poway for more than three years now, dating back to when a man with an assault rifle opened fire inside the San Diego-area synagogue in April 2019. (I [covered the shooting](#), which killed a congregant and injured the rabbi and two others, as a stringer for The New York Times.)

That rabbi, Yisroel Goldstein, was later discovered to have organized a sprawling tax fraud scheme enveloping some of his congregants, and in January he was [sentenced](#) to 14 months in federal prison in upstate New York, a surprising decision because prosecutors had recommended home confinement.



Goldstein in 2019, with his injured hands wrapped in blue tape. (Sandy Huffaker/AFP via Getty Images)

But [I broke the news](#) last week that Goldstein is out “on furlough” and back in Poway, under a pandemic-mitigation program aimed at reducing the populations in federal prisons like Otisville, where Goldstein was serving time alongside his brother, a co-conspirator in the case.

Meanwhile, close followers of the case are waiting for one last shoe to drop, which has involved more than 30 co-conspirators. The authorities say that one of them, a San Diego religious leader identified in court records only as Y.F., authorized a \$1.2-million tax writeoff for an “[ancient Iranian Torah](#)” that did not exist. When the Justice Department names them, we’ll let you know here.

In the meantime, you can always email me tips: keene@forward.com.

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WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

 A few days before he was re-minted world champion and named Finals MVP, Stephen Curry

wore a [sweatshirt with Hebrew words on it](#) to an NBA Finals news conference. Except the Hebrew letters — meant to spell out a phrase from the New Testament that translates to “love never fails” — were in reverse order. Reminds me of the time a guy got what he thought was the Hebrew word for “strength” tattooed on his arm. ([It was a very different Hebrew word.](#))

📖 Brentwood School — alma mater of Maroon 5’s Adam Levine and MSNBC’s Katy Tur — got sued by a Jewish parent who says he and others who pleaded with school officials to be wary of antisemitic material were [subsequently excluded](#) from future curriculum discussions. If I was paying \$50,000 tuition, I’d want a say, too!

🚀 The NBA Draft will be held in Brooklyn on Thursday. If Ryan Turell, the [shomer-Shabbat](#) Valley Torah High School alum who took YU’s team to [historic heights](#) over the past few years, isn’t picked, look for him to catch on in the Las Vegas Summer League.

WHAT WE'RE WEARING

😬 [If Seth Rogen can be a blonde](#), then so can I. Consider yourself warned.

WHAT WE'RE READING



The Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum in Long Beach. (Via Facebook/Kleefeld Contemporary.)

🤪 Every once in a while, a critic delivers such a merciless pan that the review itself becomes

reviewable. (Pete Wells' [zero-star](#) takedown of Peter Luger Steak House is a classic example.) That's what happened when the LA Times' art critic slammed the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum — the art museum at Long Beach State University — for showing the work of its namesake, whose father was Mark Taper, a major LA philanthropist (and [Jewish hero](#)).

The reviewer, Christopher Knight, [called the exhibit](#) “toothache-inducing,” “bleary” and “frankly terrible.” I won't spoil the rest, but the review was picked up by [Artnet](#) and [Jezebel](#), which offered the headline “A Rich Lady Has Fully Taken Over a California University Art Museum.” How do I get these folks to review the California Briefing?

[Review the California Briefing](#)

💬 The Ukrainian-born, California-based founder of WhatsApp, Jan Koum, has quietly become one of the most impactful donors in the Jewish world, and he has been pouring money into the Jewish relief effort in Ukraine. Call him a philanthropist, sure — [just don't call him an entrepreneur](#).

😊 Orderly transition: When Rabbi David Wolpe steps down next June from the pulpit of Sinai Temple, the oldest Conservative congregation in Southern California, a pair of familiar faces will take his place. [Rabbi Nicole Guzik and Rabbi Erez Sherman](#) have more than 20 years at Sinai between them. What's next for Wolpe? He's joining the Maimonides Fund, a Jewish grant-giving organization, as a senior adviser to its newly created [viewpoint diversity portfolio](#).

🙄 Bari Weiss, the pro-Israel, anti-woke Substack success story who lives in Los Angeles, [last year helped launch the University of Austin](#) as an alternative to campuses convulsed by cancel culture. Now, the unaccredited school [has enrolled about 80 students](#) for its “Forbidden Courses” summer program. The first week's curriculum asks them “to gain clarity on the question: ‘[Who am I as an individual?](#)’” (Answer: anything but a [Longhorn!](#))

YOUR HUMBLE CORRESPONDENTS



(Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

🐱 I've been devouring the Jan. 6 special committee hearings, which on Thursday featured questioning by U.S. Rep. Pete Aguilar, who is from Redlands. Near the end of two-and-a-half hours of testimony, Aguilar asked Greg Jacob, who was Vice President Mike Pence's lawyer at the time of the insurrection, how his faith had carried him through, and Jacob invoked the classic Bible tale of Daniel in the Lion's Den. I wrote about how [the moment fit](#) in the committee's general strategy.

CALLBACKS

🗳️ Last week we asked readers to weigh in on “LA” versus “L.A.” and I am happy to report that no recount will be needed: it’s “LA” in a rout...or shall we say a LAndslide?

🥑 LA election update: As more ballots have been counted, Karen Bass surged ahead of Rick Caruso in the open mayoral primary, though we’ll see what happens when they go head-to-head in the November runoff. Katy Young Yaroslavsky still looks like she’ll just miss outright victory in City Council District 5, taking [48.99% of the vote](#) as of the latest count on Friday. Fewer than 75,000 ballots left to count and then I pinky-promise to stop talking about it (for at least two weeks).

👤 **Dept. of Corrections:** Turns out Snapchat CEO Evan Spiegel is not Jewish, as we reported here last week. (He was raised Episcopalian.) Thanks to two of our readers, Elise Karl and Phillip Hain, for setting us straight. (We’ll assume they would have pointed it out even if Snap’s stock hadn’t taken a 74% nosedive so far in 2022.) Sorry Evan!

Finally, in the we-are-so-lucky-to-live-in-California department...



You can bet your razor the handlebar 'stache will be back in 2026.

In a previous era of my life, I had the great fortune to see a few games at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. (I was lucky in the literal sense: I won group-stage tickets in an international lottery.) And I am both unable and completely unmotivated to make it to Qatar for the World Cup this November. So I was thrilled by the news that California will have two stadiums hosting World Cup games in 2026: Inglewood's SoFi Stadium and Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara.

Now I just need Jewish defender DeAndre Yedlin to make the U.S. Men's National team — so I can expense the tickets.

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