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## 2005

Bert went to a basketball game in early December 2005: Union Mons-Hainaut vs Liège Basket in Belgian Division I.

Quarter by quarter score evolution: 29-20, 51-41, 77-53 and 91-78.

Union Mons-Hainaut has had a wonderful week as the Foxes reached the second round of a European competition for the first time in their history by beating SLUC Nancy of France in FIBA EuroCup on November 29th, 2005 but also as they defeated Liège Basket with a spectacular touch on December 3rd.

Saint-Nicolas opened the game by throwing the jump ball as many kids (Bert's son included) were delighted and, despite an excellent start by US Liège playmaker **Mo Finley** (who hit two consecutive shots from the three-point range), Dexia Mons set wonderful offensive plays and quickly took the lead. Former NBA player **Omar Cook** as well as ex-GI **George Evans** simply seemed unstoppable. Liège played stronger in defense in the second quarter but Union Mons-Hainaut ended the first half very well on a fantastic three-pointer by **Obradovic**.

Local attendance simply enjoyed the third quarter when **Omar Cook** distilled some fantastic passes (to US center **Evans**) and hit long range shots again. **Mathias Desaevers** and **Markovic** had their moment of glory at the end of the third quarter too. **Ere, Finley** and experienced **Ron Ellis** seemed to be the only players of Liège able to challenge the home squad. Their reaction in the beginning of the fourth quarter could have been a problem for Mons if home team's Coach **Niksa Bavcevic** had not taken crucial time-outs (Liège came back at 81-71 indeed). Ex-Leuven player **Kevin Houston** had a tremendous end of game for Dexia Mons and allowed his team to remain ahead until the final buzzer.

Mons: **M. Desaevers** 9; **K. Houston** 19; **G. Evans** 24; **Obradovic** 6; **O. Cook** 21; **Markovic** 8; **J. Potter** 2; **C. Young** 2.  
Liège: **B. Gaye** 5; **R. Ellis** 14; **K. Souchu** 4; **E. Ere** 22; **M. Finley** 20; **S. Pelle** 10; **M. Brown** 3.

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Bert went to a basketball game in September 2005: CEP Fleurus (+10, Div. 3) vs Atomia Brussels (Div. 1) in Belgian Cup 1/16 Finals.

With 1' 50" remaining, it was still 83-84 and anything could happen in this game. CEP Fleurus had a nice run in the Belgian Cup last year (reaching the quarter-finals against BC Ostend) and eliminated Okapi Aalstar (Div. II) in the previous round this season. Lithuanian forward **Vilius Gabsys** was perfect in the last quarter of the game and helped Brussels US leader **Elijah Palmer** (ex-Duquesne) to literally save Atomia's honour. The Lithuanian player scored 27 pts (13 in the last quarter) and grabbed 13 rebounds while the US forward almost had a perfect game in offense with a total of 32 pts. But they both seemed alone among Belgian young talents **Lionel Bosco**, **Duke Tshomba** as well as former Spirou Gilly players **Julien Pirlot** and **Seb Vermeulen** who were never able to reach a high level of game. **Greg Harris** was also rather disappointing in this first official game for the Brussels team. **Eric Struelens** (ex-Mars Pils Mechelen, Paris SG, Real Madrid and Girona) was missing for Atomia and coach **Yves Defraigne** certainly cannot wait to see him back on the floor again. Another solution could come from Greek center **Thanassis Efthimiou** who wore his new Atomia equipment and sat on the Brussels bench on Wednesday. Special mentions for **Zaki Ayyoub** (34 pts, 5 reb.), **George Bokanga** (14 points) and **Sam Semijejro** (10 pts, 13 reb.) of CEP Fleurus who, with the help of their team mates and coach **Pat Verdun**, made the local attendance dream of new exploits until the last seconds of the game again.

Quarter by quarter score evolution: 31-23, 48-44, 69-61 and 85-91.

CEP Fleurus: **Z. Ayyoub** 34; **S. Semijejro** 10; **G. Bokanga** 17; **F. Muylaert** 10; **D. Billet** 6; **D. Mukeba** 1.  
Atomia: **L. Bosco** 10; **J. Pirlot** 5; **G. Harris** 6; **V. Gabsys** 27; **D. Tshomba** 5; **E. Palmer** 32; **S. Vermeulen** 6.

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Bert went to a basketball event in June 2005: the XIXth U18 World Basketball Tournament of Douai in Northern France.

Before entering into the press conference room, **Nihat Izic**, coach of the U18 Turkish National Team hugged his US counterpart **Linzy Davis**: "*Thank you... You helped us a lot to see our mistakes.*" Obviously, the Turkish coach was very pleased to have faced the USA Elite team twice during the XIXth U18 World Tournament of Douai, Northern France, last weekend. Although they lost both games against the Americans, the young Turks never seemed impressed by the US team: **Rudy Gay** (2.06m, forward), a sophomore in UConn next season; **Malik Hairston** (1.98m, shooting forward), a freshman in Oregon in 2004; **Kevin Durant** (2.05m, forward), a true 17-year-old NBA prospect and the tournament's MVP **Tywon Lawson** (1.82m, guard), already committed to North Carolina, were among **Linzy Davis'** protégés indeed.

The words that the US coach had at the press conference after the final game lost by Turkey tells it all: "*I've respect for the coach of Turkey. I know it's good tough competition here in Douai. We had to focus on their best players so that it gave us the opportunity to play our game.*" **Davis** looked at **Cenk Akyol** (1.97m, guard/forward), the Turkish young star already named in the NBA draft, also present in the press room and continued: "*...and I told my guys that our challenge was to stop their leader. We have a great team always based on American standards. We came in Douai to compete and that's why I personally made up a competitive team based on two leaders already involved in US college (Gay and Hairston).*" **Akyol** added that it was an honour to have such feedback from a great coach like **Linzy Davis** and emphasized the fact that there is no hurry for him to play in the NBA. He would rather concentrate on his future in Europe first.

No doubt that the Turkish performance in Douai is very positive in the frame of the preparation for the next U18 FIBA European Championship in Belgrade, Serbia-Montenegro, scheduled from July 15th to 24th, 2005. Turkey was well ahead 43-47 at the half in the final played on Sunday but could not stop the US fastbreaks in the third and fourth quarters: 94-82 final score. Other teams participating to the World Tournament of Douai have also qualified for the next U18 European Championship. Earlier in the afternoon, France defeated Lithuania for the third place. **Richard Billant**, coach of the U18 French National Team, was very pleased with the performance of his players except in the semi-final against the Turks. "*We haven't played our game against Turkey. It is true that some of my players haven't always come up to my expectations in that particular game. The game was tough in the first half and we were 16 points behind at the half. The margin was too big to come back. Nevertheless, we beat the Turks in the second half which was more encouraging. Then, as you can imagine, playing a game for third place is mentally difficult... It's like in the European Championship, you have to be mentally prepared to play such a game and today it was positive indeed.*" The small French playmaker **Aldo Curti** was all smiling as he explained that he will postpone his *baccalauréat* (final exams), in September to focus on the next European Championship. And when he hears about the possibility to make it to the 2012 Olympic Games, for which Paris is one of the candidate cities, **Curti** answers again with a smile: "*I just don't think about it yet!*"

The Lithuanian assistant coach **Egidijus Zenevicius** looked disappointed after the 3rd-place game: "*We worked only one week together before this tournament. We waited for three guys to come back from the States. It was our first tournament with the whole group and our first steps as far as tactic is concerned. We still have some time to work before the European Championship in Serbia.*" The Lithuanian staff was probably pleased to see their center **Karolis Petrunkonis** (2.10m) among the Tournament's Best Five beside **Tywon Lawson** (USA Elite) as point guard, **Cenk Akyol** (Turkey) as shooting guard, **Kevin Durant** (USA Elite) as shooting forward and **Rudy Gay** (USA Elite) as power forward. **Ivan Sirsicevic** of Croatia was the best scorer of the 2005 Douai competition. All staffs, players and observers agreed that the World Tournament of Douai is now a fantastic event for any team willing to prepare an important competition set later in the summer. **Rudy Gay**, already in Douai last year, told the press that he enjoyed playing in this tournament before a busy summer in the AAU camps and at the FIBA U21 World Championship held from August 5th to 14th in Cordoba and Mar del Plata, Argentina. Many congratulations to the organizer **Richard Ciesielski**, his two sons and his staff for the very professional organization and the enjoyable atmosphere around the World Tournament of Douai. Next year will be the XXth tournament and you can be sure that the Douai organizing team will still be very enthusiastic to welcome future international basketball stars. See also the following links for more info on the tournament: <http://www.fiba.com>, <http://www.fibaeurope.com> and <http://www.tournoi-douai.com>.

Bert went to a basketball game in May 2005: BC Carnières vs CEP Fleurus in the final play-off game of the Belgian First Regional Division.

Despite the short victory, the local heroes of CEP Fleurus (quarter finalists of the 2005 Belgian Cup against BC Telindus Ostend) had a very tough time in the first leg of the play-off finals. Nevertheless, the *CEP Men* properly finished the job on May 4th. CEP Fleurus won away in the small gym of BC Carnières packed with many supporters of both sides. In both games, CEP's superstar **Zaki Ayyoub** (freshly preselected among the *Belgian Lions* for the next Euro 2005 Qualifying Round) was missing because of a foot injury.

CEPF Head Coach **Pat Verdun** learned important lessons after the first game and asked his players to play a tougher defense from the start of the second leg. Only **Fred Desplat** of BC Carnières had a good day and could score from all ranges. But "**Uncle Sam**" **Semijebero** was perfect at the rebound as well as in defense so that CEPF took a large lead in the first half already.

Some of Bert's former opponents or pals were still running down the court for this crucial game: **Christophe Batardy** for CEP Fleurus and **Fabian Gevart**, **Ali Foudil** or **Fred Desplat** for BC Carnières. **Romane Sculier** had to be very present offensively and CEP Fleurus kept a positive margin by the end of the game. The atmosphere was very good in the small gym.

CEP Fleurus finally won and therefore got the right to go to the upper division next season: Division III. They will have to face teams like Nivelles (ex-Division II), Castors Braine, Aartselaar, RB Antwerpen II, US Lambusart, Oostkamp, Gistel, Essor Charleroi, etc.

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Bert went to a basketball game in mid-April 2005: Huy Basket vs Basket Groot Leuven in Round 29 of the Belgian Division I.

On April 13th, Basket Union Huy played its 15th regular season home game in front of a limited attendance of 600 people. Still struggling to stay in Division I next season, Union Huy faced recent 2005 Belgian Cup winner BG Leuven in a crucial game.

The Wallonian Ministry of Sports, **Claude Eerdeken**s, was invited to make the tip off of this game. The Leuven players quickly showed their clear intentions of coming to win this game. Mainly thanks to US forward **Kevin Houston** (former player in Bree, born in 1976, 193 cm), the visiting Flemish team was leading by 4 points at the end of the first quarter: 16-20. The second quarter started badly for the local team and its young coach **Thibaut Petit** was obliged to take a crucial time-out with 3:29 remaining in the first half (24-35 for Leuven). Union Huy managed to reduce the gap before the half mainly thanks to the efficient "Mercenaries" **Mark Hawley** (of Great Britain, born in 1974, 198 cm), **Adama N'Diaye** (of Senegal, born in 1978, 208 cm) and **Brian Heinle** (of the USA, born in 1978, 206 cm). Israeli guard **Dror Hajaj** (former Hapoel Tel Aviv) and **Kevin Houston** had been perfect offensively for the visitors.

In the third quarter, Huy Basket even took the lead after a nice three pointer by former Belgian Lion **Butch Tshomba** (54-53). The end of the third quarter was positive for Leuven with a remarkable performance of its US duo **Hanavan-Houston** in all sectors of the game. The Huy players could not manage to control the game in the last quarter and **Ian Hanavan** (USA, born in 1980, 200 cm and ex-Almere in the Netherlands) proved once again that he is one of the best players in the Belgian Division I this season and probably a true candidate for the 2005 MVP title. Special mention for Basket Groot Belgian players **Wouter De Wilde** and **Pieter Van Hoecke** too. Final score: 79-94 for the very nice team of BG Leuven coached by **Eric Buis**!

Here are the scorers in this game:

BG Leuven: **Dror Hajaj** 13, **Kevin Houston** 24, **Ian Hanavan** 23, **Pieter Van Hoecke** 7, **Wouter De Wilde** 12, **Wim Vuchelen** 10, **Antanas Vilcinskas** 5.

Union Huy: **Mirza Begic** 4, **Brian Heinle** 20, **Butch Tshomba** 12, **Veron Tabu** 2, **Mark Hawley** 16, **Lionel Bosco** 10, **David Kalut** 4, **Adama N'Diaye** 11.

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Bert went to a basketball game in February 2005: CEP Fleurus (+25, Div. 4) vs BC Telindus Ostend (Div. 1) in Belgian Cup 1/4 Final.

It was a big evening for the home team CEP Fleurus... Imagine, the Regional I team (starting with +25) was hosting BC Ostend, participating in ULEB Cup this year and also a Division I top team, in a 1/4 Final shock of the Belgian Cup. Attendance in the small gym of Bonsecours was limited to 1000 for security reason. Almost 500 tickets had already been sold in advance and the gym was indeed packed with people.

Italian BCO head coach **Boniciolli** chose US duo **Desmond Farmer-Vince Yarbrough** for this very tricky game. **Gardner** remained in the stands and cheered on his team mates. **Desaever** and **Dorsey** were injured and left on the bench for BC Telindus Ostend. On the local side, point guard **Zaki Ayyoub** (1m80, guard, born in 1979) had a broken nose but played with a mask.

**Zaki Ayyoub** was surely a key player in the first half: drive into the key, assists to young Afro-Belgian magic duo **Semijejero** (1m96, age 27) and **Dimbala** (1m96, age 22), great shots hit from all ranges, etc. A good help by ex-Division I player **Fabien Muylaert** from long-range shooting as well as a crucial visitors' 0/4 from the free-throw line a few seconds before the half (local attendance might have stressed BCO shooters **Uche Nsonwu** and **Van der Jonckheyde** indeed) allowed **Zaki Ayyoub** and his team to still lead by more than 20 points after two quarters. **Nsonwu**, despite excellent defense from **David Mukeba** of CEPF, had been very impressive inside and dunked at least 5 times in the first half.

The third quarter was very tough for the local team. Only **Muylaert** from the free-throw line and from three-point range was scoring in the beginning of the third. The full court press started by BCO players was amazing: steals from **Farmer** and ex-NBA player **Vince Yarbrough**, fast-break situations ended up with several dunks, **Mirza Teletovic's** great plays inside (also a NBA prospect) and very good organization by BC Ostend coach **Matteo Boniciolli** after the break. Ostend's center **Dragan Ceranic** (2m11, age 28) had more difficulties underneath the basket as CEPF **Mukeba** and **Semijejero** were defending well. But local attendance still believed that it was possible to do it! Fans kept cheering even if **Zaki Ayyoub** started to have cramps. Local player **Romane Sculier** substituted him rather well in the beginning (hitting a three-pointer) but then could not avoid a few turnovers. BCO played well and came close to the 10-point margin at the end of the third quarter.

Surprisingly, **Zaki Ayyoub** came back on the floor a few minutes afterwards and allowed his Regional I team to reach +16 in the middle of the fourth quarter (when most people would have thought it was lost for CEPF indeed). CEP coach **Pat Verdun** took crucial time-outs. Excellent local defense and great shots by **Muylaert** and **Dimbala** are also to be mentioned here. **Teletovic** was called a fifth foul. In the last minutes, Fleurus managed to keep a short margin even if BCO scored several times in fastbreak situation (**Rudez**, **Savanovic**, **Farmer** and **Yarbrough** in lay up). **Savanovic** followed **Teletovic** on the bench just a few seconds afterwards.

Everyone in the crowd was remembering when the local team hosted great European teams like Vasas Budapest, Izmir, Hapoel Tel Aviv or Banco di Roma in the small gym in the beginning of the 70s and 80s. CEP Fleurus just seems to relive great moments of the past. CEP Fleurus young president **Gio Mureddu**, staff, players and supporters are back on the right track and can surely dream of glory days again. The return game on the Belgian Coast was scheduled next week and BC Ostend had to win by at least 30 points to qualify for the semi-finals.

When asked about what he thought of the first game in Fleurus, BC Ostend head coach **Matteo Boniciolli** said before the return game: *"We have won that game by 21 points. And nevertheless, we will still have to win by more than 29 points tonight to qualify. This is ridiculous."*

On February 23rd, the visiting amateur players of CEP Fleurus had to leave work or the office a bit earlier to join the Mister V Arena in Ostend and warm up before their very important quarterfinal. Just like in the first leg, Fleurus began with a 25-points bonus. The start of this second leg was not very good for the regional league side: 30-44 after ten minutes. But CEP recovered in the second quarter and had a larger lead at the half: 51-72!!! Telindus Ostend played very well in the third quarter (**Rudez**, **Gardner**, **Teletovic** and **Yarbrough**). As far as the qualification was concerned, the Belgian Coast team started the last ten minutes of the game with a small 9-points deficit (79-84). Despite the nice fighting spirit showed by CEP players **Ayyoub** (who scored 31 points), **Semijejero**, **Batardy**, **Muylaert** and **Sculier**, last quarter was decisive and fatal for President **Gio Mureddu's** amateur team. Ostend took a larger lead in the last minutes of the game and finally won 112-101. The dream did not come true for CEP but it was a truly remarkable run by the regional team anyway!

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Bert went to a basketball game in January 2005: Dexia Mons-Hainaut (BEL) vs Bnei Hasharon (ISR) in Group C of the FIBA Europe League qualifying round.

Dexia Mons Hainaut and Bnei Hasharon met on Jan. 18th in a dogfight for the last play-off spot in Group C of the FIBA Europe League. Bnei Hasharon won the home leg by 3 points in November 2004 and the second game was equally as close. Dexia was hindered by the absence of US player **Roberto Bergersen** who left the club to play in Spain and **Jean-Marc Jaumin** who was still recovering from injury.

After a good start for Union Mons-Hainaut, mainly thanks to Austrian player **Bernd Volcic**, former Spirou center **Roger Huggins** and Israeli forward **Guy Pniny** of Bnei Hasharon had some great defensive plays which allowed their US teammates **Young** and **Lucas** to run the court in fastbreak. UMH's coach **Yves Defraigne** called his American center **George Evans** to sit back on the bench as he was limited in offense because of a great Israeli defense.

**Jim Potter** came on the floor to substitute **Evans** and did well offensively. Score at the end of the first quarter: 17-15. US players of Bnei Hasharon, **Aaron Lucas** and **Alvin Young**, went on with their great offensive skills: quickness, great layups, steals, three-pointers, etc. **Guy Pniny** also hit a few crucial shots. Just before half-time, Mons' US shooting forward **Corey Williams** hit three shots in a row from behind the three-point line: 38-38 after 20 minutes.

Third quarter started badly for Bnei Hasharon: 45-38 when the Israeli side's head coach took a first time-out. It did not allow Hasharon to get back into the game as Dexia, lead by Lithuanian trio **Cesnauskis-Vaikulis-Jocys**, kept on scoring and playing a tough defense. It was 54-38 when the Bnei head coach took a second time-out. Bnei Hasharon hit its first basket of the second half with just 2:50 left in the third quarter. Score after 30 minutes was 65-47.

Fourth quarter was totally different: Union Mons-Hainaut's coach was not pleased with his Israeli guard **Papy Turgeman** and left him on the bench for a while. But Hasharon, with a very efficient **Alvin Young** and great plays by **Pniny** (3 assists) as well as **Lucas** again, came back into the game. It was 70-56 with 6:02 remaining when **Yves Defraigne** took a first time-out. Fifth foul was called on **Kokia** of Bnei Hasharon and, shortly afterwards, it was **Jim Potter** of UMH who went back on the bench for a while as he was called a fourth foul. Mons could not score anymore. The score was 70-61 when Dexia's head coach took his second time-out with still 4:59 to go.

Turgeman was back on the court and seemed to have better intentions. After 77-70, everyone in the Mons Arena thought the game was over but a few turnovers by the local guards and great steals by **Lucas** and **Young** allowed Bnei Hasharon to come back again. The end of the game was crazy... Hasharon's **Alvin Young** who had a perfect game until then (35 points) finally missed his last three-point attempt, grabbed the rebound but could not go to the hoop again as the buzzer finally rang. Final score: 79-77!

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