

2007

Bert went to a basketball game on 24 November 2007: Union Mons-Hainaut vs Okapi Aalstar in regular Belgian Division I season.

Bert has attended a few basketball games in Belgium since the beginning of the 2007-08 season: scrimmage game Belgium vs. Bulgaria with a beautiful clutch play by Lukoil Sofia's guard **Todor Stoykov** who gave a close 79-80 win on the buzzer to his team, Belgium vs. Ukraine (72-69) with fantastic **Lionel Bosco** and **Axel Hervelle** as leaders of the Belgian NT, Belgium vs. Israel (83-74), CEP Fleurus (Div. II) vs. Verviers-Pepinster (65-98) in Belgian Cup, Spirou Charleroi vs. Giants Diamond Antwerp (76-65), etc.

The most interesting game was undoubtedly Union Mons-Hainaut vs. Okapi Aalstar at the *Mons.Arena* on November 24th. Okapi Aalstar saw its 4 game winning streak ended in Mons with a 82-69 loss. Union Mons-Hainaut of Coach **Chris Finch** got the win but lost **George Evans** on injury in the beginning of this game. He is out for about two weeks.

MVP of the week and of this game was Union Mons' US player **Ben Ebong** (202-F/C-76, college: Davidson, see picture -- source www.monshainaut.be) with 18 points, 9 rebounds, 4 assists and 2 steals.

After 61-41, Okapi of Coach **Brad Dean** and led by **Pablo Gonzales** as well as **DeAndre Haynes** came back into the game but never got closer than 67-59 when England's guard of UMH, **Mike Lenzly**, hit great baskets to offer a nice win to the local team.

Union Mons-Hainaut: **Justin Gray** 7; **Mike Lenzly** 22; **Ben Ebong** 18; **George Evans** 6; **Travis Conlan** 3; **Jim Cantamessa** 5; **Nate Reinking** 11; **Andrew Sullivan** 10.

Okapi Aalstar: **Trevor Huffman** 8; **DeAndre Haynes** 14; **Lars Tielens** 2; **Pablo Gonzales** 8; **Damian Cantrell** 5; **Matt Lojeski** 13; **David Kalut** 5; **Eric Poole** 6; **Piet De Bel** 8.

Exclusive interview of Belgian Lions' Manager Jacques Ledure: enthusiasm, solidarity and pride after the Additional Qualifying Round in August 2007.

Find here an interview of **Jacques Ledure**, the Manager of the Belgian Lions (the Belgian national team). Belgium had an excellent Additional Qualifying Round but did not qualify for the European Championship in Spain which will be held in early September. With 5 wins and 1 loss, the Lions finished second in Group C, just behind Israel. The Israeli NT qualified for the Euro 2007 Additional Qualifying Tournament in Menorca thanks to a large 19-point victory over Belgium in Tel Aviv.

Here is what **Jacques Ledure** told *Eurobasket* (interview by Bert) after the nice campaign of the Belgian NT:

Eurobasket (EB): *What would you answer to some observers who criticized your choice of going to Dallas, Texas for the preparation of the Lions (you had already gone with the national team in Orlando, Florida a few years ago)? What lesson can you draw from this experience and what would you change in future preparations?*

Jacques Ledure (J.L.): Besides **Eddy Casteels** and **Jacques Stas**, I've probably been one of the few people to believe in the purpose of going to Dallas. The aim was to give a necessary kick to the group and therefore get away from the kind of moroseness which has prevailed around the national team for several years. This investment turned out to be fruitful thanks to the enthusiasm generated among the whole group (players and staff) as well as the very professional environment of the Mavs.

The experience taught us several things in many ways: gaining better knowledge of the men, continuously keeping up with the players during a rather long period, preparing in a more valuable and progressive way (nobody was injured during the whole campaign), creating a team spirit and being proud to be there.

I wouldn't change many things in the future even if it won't be possible to fly to Dallas each year. In any case, I'll find something similar (at least, if I'm asked to go on with national team's management, what I'd pursue with pleasure).

EB: **Ralph Biggs** (Belgian passport) was announced in the group before the campaign. On one hand, **Axel Hervelle** was an example and a real leader for the group. On the other hand, **Ralph Biggs** never showed up. What happened and do you think that, with him and the presence of other players with international experience such as **Tomas Van den Spiegel**, **Didier Mbenga** or **Dimitri Lauwers**, the Lions could have avoided the 19-point defeat in Israel and gone further?

J.L.: Certainly! In fact, we've been missing two players: a strong center like **Didier Mbenga** and a shooter like **Dimitri Lauwers, Ralph Biggs** or **Marcus Faison**. I think that with these two players, showing the same spirit as the others, we would have had big chances to go to the Eurobasket 2007.

As far as **Ralph Biggs** is concerned, I suspect some regrettable influence from his manager when he had to decide on his participation.

EB: *What will you particularly remember about this campaign? First, something positive? Then, a negative point (if there was any)?*

J.L.: Something positive: the sporting success and the always growing interest from the attendance (respectively 2200, 3000 and 5000 cheering spectators for all three official home games). Something negative: too many good-level players still not motivated enough to play for the national team.

EB: *What do you think about the situation of four Belgian Lions still looking for a job? This reflects the problem of our national competition where there is almost no more limit as far as allowed foreign players in Division I are concerned, not leaving any place for the best Belgian players.*

J.L.: You're right! In the past, you were going to the national team because you belonged to the best players in clubs. Nowadays, some good-level players are coming for being in good conditions in order to find a club. It's just the other way round.

I've made the following proposition: I'd like to see a Division I club for which only Belgian players who have great potential would play. The club could possibly be strengthened by no more than two young foreign players.

EB: *How does the Belgian Lions' staff see the future of the group and what are the next objectives for the Lions?*

J.L.: The staff sees the future by continuing in this year's direction and add some new young players having the same motivation to the group (we don't want to bow to the ground in front of recalcitrants anymore).

The objective is to approach or play for a qualifying spot to the Eurobasket 2009 after having reinstated **Didier Mbenga** and **Dimitri Lauwers**. If this does not work out well in 2009, it has to be a success in 2011.

EB: *Three words to summarize the last campaign?*

J.L.: Enthusiasm, solidarity and pride.

World Tournament of Douai from June 6th to 10th, 2007: Israeli U20 national team undefeated!

Scheduled just one month before the FIBA U19 World Championship in Novi Sad, Serbia, the 21st edition of the World Basketball Tournament of Douai has been one important stage in the preparation campaign of teams hoping to win the world title. Among the six teams (USA Elite Team, Lithuania, France, Germany, Australia and Israel) that confirmed their participation at the Douai tournament, besides the USA Elite Team being formed by Coach **Linzy Davis** who selected great Southeastern US high school players this year, Israel and Germany did not qualify for the next U19 World Championship. A new formula applied to the World Tournament of Douai, Northern France, consisted of a small championship allowing each team to meet each other and the best international players to face one another. This year, the World Tournament was held from June 6th to 10th in Carvin and Douai.

The French team led by many talents (EB Pau Orthez's trio **Ludovic Vaty-Alexis Ajinca-William Molas**, French champion **Adrien Moerman** of Chorale Roanne, Le Mans players **Nicolas Batum** and **Antoine Diot**, etc.) was one of the favourite teams of the 2007 edition. Latest FIBA U19 World Champion Australia was in Northern France for the first time and did its best to challenge great European teams. Lithuania tried to recover after the defeat against France in the final of the last UMCOR U18 European Championship in Greece. As far as talented individuals are concerned, the USA roster looked less impressive than in the last few years (the 2005 and 2006 teams had been truly amazing, with some NBA prospects like **Kevin Durant**, **Chase Budinger**, **LaMarcus Aldridge** or **Thaddeus Young** involved in the 2007 Draft) but the group of Coach **Linzy Davis** was once again competitive. Israel, with an impressive roster, was in Douai to prepare the U20 FIBA European Championship which will take place in Nova Gorica, Slovenia, and Gorica, Italy, next July while Germany of Coach **Emir Mutapcic** came with the hope to surprise one of the other squads during the tournament.

I talked shortly to the tournament's director **Jean-Pierre Ciesielski** while watching the end of the game involving Australia and Germany on Day Four of the event and asked him why the formula had changed into a small championship this year.

«For budgetary reasons, we had to change the formula and not go through semi-finals and finals this time. Our usual partner decided to withdraw last February and we had to find another one. As far as the competition is concerned, everyone seems to find this new formula very interesting as all teams face each other.»

The first day of the tournament took place in the small town of Carvin where three interesting games were played in front of a nice local attendance. The first game between Lithuania and Australia ended up with the Emus victory 84-76. «*Australia is a team to be reckoned with at the next U19 World Championship in Serbia!*» told **Jean-Pierre Ciesielski**. In the second game of the day, the young US team with great prospects like **Jordan Hamilton**, **Laron Dendy**, **Tracy Smith** or **James Fields** (all approached by major NCAA colleges with great basketball programmes) largely defeated Germany 112-88. In the third game, Israel surprised France by winning with a close margin 90-86. **Richard Billant**'s team seemed to have come on the court to play a scrimmage game while the Israeli team of Coach **Gino Yaakov** showed up to win the game.

The next day, two games were played at the Lycée Corot in Douai (Germany vs. France and Australia vs. Israël) and a third one was held in Carvin (USA vs. Lithuania).

In the presence of French Technical Director **Jean Pierre de Vincenzi**, France won against the German team 82-71 but always looked like they could become more steady especially in defense. Israel led by power forward **Omri Casspi** (Israel's Final Four semi-finalist with his club Hapoel Galil Elyon) also impressed the attendance and remained undefeated after a very athletic game won 85-72 against Australia. This was the first shock of the tournament and Israel, despite a poor offensive start by their star Casspi, could not avoid the Emus to take the lead at half-time: 37-29. Israel came back in the third quarter with better intentions especially in defense (43-43) and Australian shooter **Patrick Mills** was limited to a 37% shooting average from the field. **Casspi** (21 points, 6/10, 3/6 from 3-point range, 5 rebounds, 3 assists, 3 steals and 1 block-shot in this game) was excellent in the money time and Australians could not avoid the defeat: 74-85, final score.

Elsewhere on that day, Team USA of Coach **Linzy Davis** could never challenge their tough Lithuanian opponents who left no chance to the American players.

On Friday night in Douai, Israel beat Germany without any trouble. The next game of the day was a convincing demonstration by the Emus who left no chance to the young US team. Australians had a great shooting average of 71% and Coach **Linzy Davis**'s players never defended well during 40 minutes. Australia led by center **Andrew Ogilvy** (18 points), guard **Patrick Mills** (21 points) and forward **Ben Dowdell** (14 points) in offense won the game 118-76.

The game that many observers wanted to attend on that day was France vs. Lithuania. On the one hand France wanted to take its revenge from last year when Lithuania beat the French squad in Douai, on the other hand Lithuania wanted to prove that the defeat at the last Euro 2006 against France was just an unforeseen event. It was for sure one of the best games in this tournament: 25-21 for the French squad after the first quarter. **Nicolas Batum** of France and **Martynas Gecevicus** of Lithuania are excellent from all ranges on both sides. Lithuania came back in the second quarter and even took the lead by 11 at the half. Local fans started to have doubts as Lithuania was still ahead but great plays by **Batum**, **Diot** and **N'Diaye** allowed the French team to be in front: 89-85 with 1'40" remaining before the final buzzer. **Gecevicus** and team mates could never come back and **Richard Billant**'s young men won the game 94-87.

On the following day, after Germany's fifth and final defeat against Australia (95-72), their opponent 'du jour' in this tournament, Israel defeated Lithuania (without **Gecevicus**, left on the bench to rest) in front of a nice attendance. I attended this game which definitely crowned Israel as the 2007 Douai Tournament winner. Despite a great start by the players of **Rutenis Paulaskas** (17-19 for Lithuania at the end of the first quarter), Israeli guards **Gal Mekel**, **Yoad Bet Yosef** and **Dori Assaf** were quick and ran the court well, allowing their team to end the first half with a short advantage: 45-41. Coach **Yaakov**'s team was not challenged in the second half and **Omri Casspi** (8/13 from the field, 21 points and 2 rebounds) finally could score several easy baskets in fastbreak situation: 91-65, final score. Lithuania recorded 25 turnovers in this game.

In the evening, France (without **Ajinca**, also left on the bench by Coach **Billant**) beat the USA Elite Team after a very offensive game by both teams: 114-98. US player **Jordan Hamilton** scored 32 points and grabbed 7 rebounds but this was not enough against **Edwin Jackson** (29 points) and his team mates.

Great moments that the Douai attendance wished not to miss were the three-point shootout contest as well as the dunk contest. In the shootout contest, BC Lietuvos Rytas Vilnius' recruit **Martynas Gecevicus** who had missed the game against Israel scored three-pointers like a real clockwork regularity. He and Emu forward **Clint Steindl** battled until the last attempt missed by the Aussie. **Gecevicus**, among the best young players voted by FIBA Europe last year, was the three-point shootout winner. France's invited Third National Division player **Olivier Gnahoré** won the dunk contest given that ASVEL's French U19 National Team player **Edwin Jackson** missed his last bid.

On the last day of the tournament: Israel finished undefeated and won against a very challenging USA Elite Team 112-88. Australia finished second after beating France 86-90 in a last game of very high level. **Nicolas Batum** finished as best scorer for France in this game: 35 points, 7 rebounds and 3 assists. Australian player **Patrick Mills** had 20 points against the French NT. No problem for Lithuania against Germany earlier that day (73-86, 21 points for Lithuanian forward **Marius Valukonis**).

Created in 1986, the World Tournament of Douai has always attracted the best international U19 basketball teams. More than thirty players who previously took part in the event have been or are now playing in the NBA (**Tony Parker, Carmelo Anthony, Andrei Kirilenko, Luol Deng, Rudy Gay, Daniel Gibson**, etc.). Once more, many NBA scouts came to Northern France to observe young talents this year. Former Croatian star **Danko Cvjeticanin** was among the several scouts seen on the sideline in Douai. Glory days' champions **Pat Durham** (ex-SLUC Nancy, Le Havre, Vitoria, Golden State Warriors, etc.) and **Derrick Lewis** (ex-EB Pau-Orthez, Mulhouse, Reims, SLUC Nancy, etc.) as well as local stars like **Baptiste Bataille** (guard currently playing at Northeastern University, NCAA) also came to the Lycée Corot last weekend. They strongly supported the superstars of tomorrow and the organizers of the great World Tournament of Douai.

Final ranking :

1. ISRAEL 5-0
2. AUSTRALIA 4-1
3. FRANCE 3-2
4. LITHUANIA 2-3
5. USA 1-4
6. GERMANY 0-5

All tournament team:

Point Guard : **Patrick MILLS** - AUSTRALIA
Shooting Guard : **Martynas GECEVICIUS** - LITHUANIA
Small Forward : **Nicolas BATUM** - FRANCE
Power Forward : **Omre CASSPI** - ISRAEL
Center : **Andrew OGILVY** - AUSTRALIA

MVP : **Omre CASSPI** - ISRAEL
Best scorer : **Jordan HAMILTON** - USA

21st World Junior Basketball Tournament of Douai (from June 6th to 10th, 2007), Adidas new official equipment supplier.

The former Nike World Tournament, the World Junior Basketball Tournament of Douai, has found new partners after its historical sponsor Nike USA unexpectedly decided to withdraw due to internal overhaul in February. The 21st edition of the World Junior Tournament will be funded by some local investors and Adidas will be the new official equipment supplier and subcontractor.

Jean-Pierre Ciesielski, the Director of the World Junior Tournament explains: *"These new investors have been found thanks to the task force Les Entrepreneurs headquartered in Douai and its General Manager **Nathanaël Silvert**."* After so many years, the tournament has become a sports event that nobody would miss in Northern France and new financial agreements strengthen the relation between the Tournament and the Nord-Pas de Calais Region. The association with Adidas is simply based on *"the sports equipment manufacturer's will to help the organizers of the Tournament as far as material is concerned while making this partnership likely to evolve next year."* Achieving such new partnerships as far as money and equipment are concerned proves that the staff of the World Junior Tournament, which will be held from June 6th to 10th this season, work with much enthusiasm. Scheduled just one month before the FIBA U19 World Championship in Serbia, the 21st edition of the Douai tournament will be one important stage in the preparation campaign of teams hoping to win the world title. Among the six teams (USA, Lithuania, France, Germany, Australia and Israel) that have confirmed their participation at the next Douai tournament, only Israel and Germany have not qualified for the 2007 U19 World Championship. A new formula applied to the World Junior Tournament of Douai consists of a small championship allowing each team to meet each other and the best international players (**Nicolas Batum** of France, **Omre Casspi** of Israel, **Martynas Gecevicus** of Lithuania, etc.) to face one another.

The French team led by many talents (**Batum, Diot, Ajinca, Mbaye and Vaty**) seems to be the favourite team of the 2007 edition. Australia, latest U19 World Champion, will be in Northern France for the first time and will certainly try to do its best.

Lithuania will try to recover after the defeat against France in the final of the last European Championship. As far as talented individuals are concerned, the USA roster looks less impressive as last year (the 2006 team had been truly amazing, with some NBA prospects involved the 2007 Draft) but the group of Coach **Linzy Davis** will be once again very competitive. Israel and Germany will be in Douai to prepare the FIBA European Championships and both teams could create surprises during the tournament.

*"It is certainly the edition which could reach the highest level among the last few years. Many players like **Batum**, **Casspi**, **Gecevcius** have an Euroleague experience", said **Jean-Pierre Ciesielski**.*

Results as well as more info will be available on www.tournoi-douai.com. The tournament organizers also announce that games will be broadcasted on www.archivasports.com.

About the World Junior Tournament of Douai:

Created in 1986, the World Junior Tournament of Douai welcomes the best international U19 basketball teams. Listed on the FIBA calendar, this tournament regularly welcomes future NBA stars. 35 players who previously took part in the event are now playing in the NBA (**Tony Parker**, **Carmelo Anthony**, **Andrei Kirilenko**, **Luol Deng**, etc.). **Lamaricus Aldridge** of the Portland Trail Blazers and **Rudy Gay** of the Memphis Grizzlies who have recently been selected by the NBA in the best five rookies of the 2006-07 season have also played in Douai in the past. This year, the World Tournament will be held from June 6th to 10th in Carvin (June 6th and 7th) and in Douai (from June 7th to 10th).

Tournament Press Officer: Fabian Tosolini - tournoi.douai.presse@hotmail.com

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