

2009

A look back at the Belgium vs. France game attended by Bert in Antwerp on 27th August 2009

France with NBA stars **Tony Parker**, **Ronny Turiaf**, **Nicolas Batum**, **Ian Mahinmi** and **Boris Diaw** came to Antwerp, Belgium with strong ambitions. Fans (5500) were well present at the *Lotto Arena*. Not only there but also on the Brussels' Grand Place where a big screen had been installed to watch the game. First time ever that a basketball game involving the Belgian team was shown on the Grand Place. **Tony Parker** quickly proved that he was one of the best



players in the world as he scored 16 points in the first quarter. Good surprise: **Sam Van Rossom**, who recovered from injury, was in the Belgian National Team's starting five. The Lions missed too many shots from long range and **Axel Hervelle's** wish to do well was not sufficient to challenge **TP** and Co. End of first quarter: 19-27. All of a sudden, Belgium came back thanks to a fantastic 11-0 run. **Roel Moors** was very efficient in fast break situation as well as from long range. Belgo-congolese center **Didier Mbenga** showed all his potential at rebounding and won several duels against French centers. Half-time was reached under the following score: 37-39. The French squad led by **Jeanneau** and **Diot** kept pushing and tried to take a larger lead but each time the Lions with **Lionel Bosco**, **Doum Lauwers** and **Roel Moors** relaunched the machine and ran down the court for some very spectacular baskets. The crowd enjoyed the game... It was showtime! **Mbenga** defended very well and had a few impressive blockshots. **Axel Hervelle** remained well present through the whole game and grabbed several important rebounds. It was 55-56 after 30 minutes. Despite great plays by **Turiaf** (14 points and 11 boards) as well as last attempts by French superstars **Tony Parker** and **Nicolas Batum**, the Belgians finally won after two incredible three-pointers by **Dimitri Lauwers**. Final score 70-66. This was not enough for Belgium to qualify as the Lions were largely defeated by France three days later.

Belgium: **Moors** 13; **Van Rossom** 9; **Beghin** 6; **Hervelle** 14; **Bosco** 6; **Van der Jonckheyd** -; **Lauwers** 12; **Oveneke** 3; **Mbenga** 7.

France: **Diot** -; **Batum** 5; **Jeanneau** 2; **Koffi** 8; **Mahinmi** 2; **Parker** 26; **Pietrus** 1; **De Colo** 2; **Diaw** 6; **Turiaf** 14; **Traore** -.

World Tournament of Douai from June 10th to 14th, 2009: Canada wins the high-level competition!

Without doubt, the Douai World Junior Basketball Tournament is one of the greatest youth basketball events in the world and, once again, the rosters of the 6 teams involved in the 2009 version of the tournament looked very impressive! **Jean-Pierre Ciesielski** explained in the editorial note of the 2009 program booklet: "*The World Junior Tournament, annual event that cannot be ignored in the Douai sporting life and on the regional basketball scene, will be organized by the Basket Club Douai from June 10th to 14th, 2009. Again, the future basketball stars will be present with main objectives: some show time, preparation for the world championship as well as keeping track of their older idols **Tony Parker**, **Carmelo Anthony**, **Kevin Durant** or **Andrei Kirilenko** who all went through the Douai event indeed.*"

The 23rd edition of the tournament proved that all present teams were already well prepared for the FIBA U19 World Championship held from July 2nd to 12th in Auckland, New Zealand. The first days of competition clearly showed that any team could have won the Douai tournament this year. On the opening day, Lithuania of Coach **Vitoldas Masalkis** defeated Australia of Coach **Martin Clarke**: 96-80. Already in this first game, **Gediminas Orelikas** (2,00 m, forward, *Meresta Pakruojis*) and top rebounder **Donatas Motiejunas** (2,15 m, center, *Aisciai Kaunas*) definitely showed all their talent. In the second game of the day, Canada led by the 2009 Douai Tournament's MVP **Kelly Olynyk** (2,11 m, center, from Kamloops, British Columbia) and shooting guard **Rob Gagliardi** (1,89 m, from Pickering, Ontario) already surprised all observers by beating the French U19 National Team of Coach **Richard Billant**: 79-71. Despite excellent rebounding by the French young men, 27 turnovers could not lead **Billant's** squad to a win. In the third scheduled game of the opening competition day, the USA 2K Sports All American team of Coach **Ed Schilling** was defeated by Puerto Rico, including some college players like

Mike Rosario (*Rutgers*), **Joshua Nirenberg** (*Appalachian State*) or **Kevin Young** (*Loyola Marymount*) in their roster: 90-105. The US squad lost the fourth quarter 10-32 against the Latin American team.

On day two, Australia with an impressive **Brock Motum** inside (2,05 m, forward, from Brisbane, Queensland) won their first game against Canada: 82-77. The second game of the day was a real shock between *USA 2K Sports* and Lithuania. A real shock in the paint indeed, with two huge players and future superstars: center **Donatas Motiejunas** who scored 24 points in 29 minutes for the Baltic squad and center **Jared Sullinger** (2,08 m, center, from *Northland High School*, Ohio) who scored 21 points in a bit more than 30 minutes of play for the US team. Final score in this game: *USA 2K Sports* vs. Lithuania 110-113! In the last game of the 23rd Douai World Tournament's second day, Puerto Rico was defeated by France led by forward **Nicolas Lang** (21 points with 4/6 from three-point range) of *Elan Chalonais*.

In the third day, all three games finished with a close score: Puerto Rico lost against Canada 76-77, France beat Lithuania 91-80 thanks to an excellent fourth quarter by the French guys and the Aussies defeated the *USA 2K Sports* team 79-77 despite a great offensive game by US three-point shooter **Jordan McRae** who scored 19 points.

I attended the fourth day of the tournament, a day full of unexpected moments. In the first match-up of the day, Lithuania vs. Puerto Rico was a close game with 5'42" remaining (56-58) when a brawl started on the court. The referees called fouls on both sides. After much talk and due to the fact that Lithuania had 6 players who were fouled out, Puerto Ricans were finally declared winners in this game. Guard **Alex Abreu** of Puerto Rico had been very impressive and quick in fast break situation. Later on in the afternoon, the *USA 2K Sports* squad impressed all observers by finally winning its first game over Canada: 83-92. The game had been of great quality and all scouts or observers (e.g. **Danko Cvjeticanin**, the *Philadelphia Sixers'* European Scouting Coordinator, as well as **Linzy Davis**, a former NBA player and *Georgia Elite* coach) have taken good notes about such players as **Joshua Selby**, **Robert Golden III**, **Cory Joseph**, **Jordan McRae**, **Tristan Thompson**, **Jared Sullinger** and **Joshua Hairston** on the *USA 2K* side or **Mangisto Arop**, **Roger Dugas**, **Rob Gagliardi**, **Ty Nurse** and **Kelly Olynyk** on the Canadian side. They might have a nice career first in college basketball and, why not, in pro basketball afterwards... The last game of day four ended up with France's win over Australia: 68-65. **Andrew Albicy** of *Paris Basket Racing* led the French team in playmaking and **Paul Lacombe** of *ASVEL Lyon-Villeurbanne* hit some important baskets from long range and from the free-throw line to make the difference in the fourth quarter. In the *Down Under* selection, four names to be remembered: forward **Cody Ellis** (2,02 m, from Sterling, Western Australia), forward **Brock Motum** (2,05 m, from Brisbane, Queensland), center **Shane Harris-Tunks** (2,05 m, from Liverpool, New South Wales) and guard/forward **Hugh Greenwood** (1,87 m, from Hobart, Tasmania). The rhythm of the day was fantastic with some interludes by the *Showdream* dancing girls as well as great mixed rap music by *DJ'Oh!*

On day five, Lithuania was beaten by tournament winning team Canada 78-86 (**Kelly Olynyk** 17 points, **Ty Nurse** 15 points and **Laurent Rivard** 20 points) while Australia was severely defeated by the Puerto Ricans (**Mike Rosario** scored 20 points) 59-73 and France, led by top scorer **Christophe Leonard** of *Cholet Basket* (34 points), could not avoid a close loss after overtime against *USA 2K Sports* (**Jared Sullinger** 19 points, **Jordan McRae** 14 points and **Joshua Selby** 25 points) 84-85!

23rd Douai World Junior Basketball Tournament final rankings:

1. Canada 3-2 (+7)
2. Puerto Rico 3-2 (+0)
3. France 3-2 (-7)
4. *USA 2K Sports All American* 2-3 (+6)
5. Lithuania 2-3 (-4)
6. Australia 2-3 (-16)

Three-Point Contest winner: **Cory Joseph** (*USA 2K Sports All American*)

Slam Dunk Contest winner: **Joshua Selby** (*USA 2K Sports All American*)

Bert interviewed Coach Chris Finch (Dexia Mons-Hainaut and British National Team) in January 2009.

On behalf of *Eurobasket.com*, Bert has just had the chance to ask a few open questions to **Chris Finch** (see picture, source: *news.bbc.co.uk*), the current Dexia Mons-Hainaut and British National Team head coach.

Born in Ohio in 1969, **Chris Finch** graduated from Franklin & Marshall in 1992. He was a successful British league player afterwards and became a successful coach later on. While it is true that his teams play a somewhat different style of



basketball and his players run and score quite a bit, **Coach Finch** actually considers himself as a defensive-orientated coach by far. He feels that his teams usually play a tough defense and that is really the route to his squad's success. **Coach Finch** is used to European players and to working on their skills.

As a player for the Sheffield Sharks in the BBL-British Basketball League, he became league champion in 1994 and 95 and won one BBL Cup title in 1995. He was then coach of the Sheffield Sharks from 1996 to 2003. **Chris Finch** was three time league champion and won the national cup two seasons in a row as he coached the Sharks.

Coach Finch then left Sheffield for Giessen 46ers in German First Bundesliga but was released in February 2004.

Two months later, he took over Belgian team Bree which he coached until the end of the 2006-07 season. He led Bree to the Belgian league title in 2005. In 2007-08, the US coach signed with Dexia Mons-Hainaut. Each time he and his team have been in a European campaign they have advanced to the latter stages. In Bree, his squad was the surprise qualifier from a ULEB Cup group that included Aris of Greece, Estudiantes Madrid of Spain and Alba Berlin of Germany. That season, Bree narrowly lost to Hapoel Jerusalem in the knock-out stages. Last season, **Coach Finch** led Dexia Mons-Hainaut to the FIBA EuroCup Final which they lost after a very close game. He keeps on coaching Mons and is still doing a fantastic job this current season. He and his team again have just made it out of the initial group phases by topping the table for the second year in a row. Also to be mentioned: **Chris Finch** has been the British National Team head coach since 2006.

Here is an extract of Coach Finch's full interview published on <http://www.eurobasket.com/Belgium/basketball.asp?NewsID=151420> :

Bertrand Larsimont (B.L.): Your team was involved in the FIBA EuroChallenge 2008-09 Group F with Khimik Yuzhny of Ukraine, Galatasaray of Turkey and KK Zagreb of Croatia. You have now reached the Top 16 and will be playing in another group against CSK-VVS Samara and BC Triumph Lyubertsy of Russia as well as EclipseJet Amsterdam of the Netherlands. How would you rate this competition, compared with the other major European club competitions (Euroleague and EuroCup -former ULEB Cup--), and which team(s) would you see as possible EuroChallenge winner at the end of the season?

Coach Chris Finch (C.F.): When you get to this stage of the competition all the teams should be considered dangerous and especially when you get to the knock-out phase anything can happen. But when you look at the final 16 teams you have to give special consideration to BC Triumph Lyubersty, BC Kiev, Virtus Bologna and Cajasol Sevilla. Those are the sexiest names left in the hunt. Having said all that, we are simply focusing on our chances and the rest of the teams in the group.

B.L.: You reached the final of last season's EuroCup organized in Limassol, Cyprus from April 18th to 20th. A great result despite the defeat 63-62 against Barons LMT Riga of Latvia in the final. Is the current Dexia Mons-Hainaut group specifically built to reach the EuroChallenge final and maybe win the FIBA Europe competition this season? Would you agree with observers saying that the team is better balanced than the one of last season?

C.F.: From a competition point of view, this team is built no differently than any other team we have built during my coaching career to date. That is said, this team is built to win every time it steps on the floor. We never differentiate between League, European or Cup games. To do so sends the wrong message to your team. You cannot prioritize games if you want your team to perform at its highest level of effort and execution every night.

We also try not to compare teams from previous seasons because each team is unique in its make-up and the challenges they face and overcome. Having said that, I do think this season's team is deeper, more physical and full of more individual playmakers. That is to take nothing away from last year's squad. Even though they didn't win any title they certainly accomplished a lot by making two finals and competing hard every night. So far, that's more than this year's team has done but it is still early.

B.L.: You are also the coach of the British national team which qualified for the EuroBasket 2009 to be held in Poland next September (against Spain, Serbia and Slovenia in the opening Group C). You have managed to build a competitive team for the 2012 London Olympics so far. You know what it is like to lead a NT. What do you think about Belgium's NT and the fact that some Belgian Lions have trouble to find a decent job at the start of the season? Do you think that the idea of **Jacques Ledure**, the Lions' Manager, to create a Team Belgium involved in Ethias League is a good one for the future of Belgian basketball?

C.F.: Coaching a NT is a real roller-coaster ride. On one hand it's the most satisfying, wholesome basketball experience a coach or team can have. Playing for a higher purpose is really motivating if handled in the right way. On the other hand, it's full of a lot of innate challenges and each nation has their own set of hurdles that must be jumped in order to have the best chance to compete at the highest level. Overcoming these obstacles is a full time job in itself before you even think about a

practice plan, a set play or a game strategy. So much of the job is about building relationships, maintaining and improving professionalism and getting your players to play hard together quickly.

As for the Belgian NT, I am not close enough to the situation to comment. I can say however that I believe they have the right guy coaching the team in **Eddy Casteels**. Furthermore, my dealings with **Jacques Ledure** have been nothing but professional. I know for a fact these two guys care deeply about the program and are trying their best to remove every obstacle so the Belgian NT can reach its potential. We played them twice this summer and I like the way they played - and that was without their three biggest names in **Didier Mbenga**, **Axel Hervelle** and **Thomas Van den Spiegel**. I think they have a very good chance to make it to Poland this summer. I would not be surprised to see them there at all and I hope they make it.

Go to <http://www.eurobasket.com/Belgium/basketball.asp?NewsID=151420> to read the full exclusive interview.

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