

2012

Last October, Bert attended the regular Belgian Division II season game CEP Fleurus vs. Sint-Niklase Condors.

CEP player **Kevin Jonniaux** (1,98 m, born in 1983) warmed up but did not play in this game. He should be back in action soon and will have a new team mate: CEP eventually did not sign **Karim Nesba** but inked **Anthony Chada** (1,96 m, born in 1989) instead. **Chada** convinced the CEP staff and coach **Paul Vervaeck** after some try-outs.

The *Sint-Niklase Condors* of coach **Steve Ibens** started strongly in this game. Center **Sebastien Vermeulen** (2,07 m, born in 1981, ex-Spirou Charleroi) gave a hard time to the CEP big men in the paint. In the first quarter, **Anthony Chada** played his first minutes with CEP Fleurus but this was not enough to put an end to the visitors' efficiency in the paint and in fastbreak situation: 11-19 after ten minutes. The *Condors* played very well during two third of the game. *Condor* **Elias Lasisi** (1,92 m, born in 1992) hit big three-pointers at the end of the second and third quarters: 27-41 and 51-57.

Christian Ilongo (1,94 m, born in 1985, 26 points), **Louis Hazard** (1,99 m, born in 1994), **Amaury Marion** (1,96 m, born 1991) and **Ludovic Pourtoit** (1,82 m, born in 1988) had boosted their team in the third quarter but CEP was still behind after thirty minutes. Fans of both sides were thrilled by the game but also annoyed by obnoxious referees' calls in the final quarter.

The home team tied the game at 57-57 but **Steve Ibens'** well-balanced squad, although counting some players in foul trouble, quickly re-took the lead at 57-64 with 6'21" remaining in the game. **Christian Ilongo**, physically fit and very spectacular through the whole game, gave the advantage to his team at 67-66. The *Condors* lost **Joao-Pedro De Decker** (1,90 m, born in 1983) and **Jeroen Gerlo** (1,93 m, born in 1985) who were fouled out in the last quarter while power forward **Christian Manzanza** (1,93 m, born in 1985) of CEP also had a fifth foul. The visitors made 67-69 but the CEPmen reassured their fans by hitting important shots and free-throws in the last minute. **Ilongo** fixed the final score from the line at 72-69 and the *Condors* missed a last attempt from long range. See free video highlights (comments in French) on *Telesambre*: <http://telesambre.rtc.be/content/view/15718/471/>.

Score evolution: 11-19, 27-41, 51-57 and 72-69.

Before the summer vacation, Bert attended the 26th World Junior Tournament of Douai with U17 national teams of Argentina, Canada, China, Croatia, Egypt and France.

U17 national teams met in Douai, Northern France to prepare the FIBA U17 World Championship... Created in 1986, the World Junior Tournament of Douai usually welcomes the best youth basketball national teams. Listed on the FIBA calendar, this tournament regularly hosts future international stars. Many players who previously took part in the event are now playing in the NBA or in the Euroleague: **Tony Parker**, **Carmelo Anthony**, **Andrei Kirilenko**, **Luol Deng**, **Kevin Durant**, **Rudy Gay**, **Nicolas Batum**, **Esran Ilyasova**, **Nick Calathes**, **Cenk Akyol**, etc. This year, the 26th World Tournament was held in Douai (at the *Sports Hall Corot*) from June 21st to 24th. It welcomed 6 teams which were preparing the FIBA U17 World Championship for Men which took place in Kaunas, Lithuania (see kaunas2012.fiba.com) from June 29th to July 8th, 2012. For the Douai Tournament, the French Federation sent several invitations earlier this year and 5 teams besides France gave a positive answer: Argentina, Canada, China, Croatia and Egypt.

The 2012 World Junior Tournament of Douai was a chance to see great prospects like **Mario Hezonja** of Croatia (see picture here left) who led his team to last year's U16 European Championship title, China's rising star **Zhou Qi** (2.15 m), last summer's U16 Africa Championship MVP **Ihab Saleh** of Egypt, promising Argentinian trio players **Alvaro Merlo**, **Lucio Reinaudi** and **Gabriel Deck** as well as the much awaited pair of French centers **Petr Cornelie** and **Lionel Ebreuil**. **Mario Hezonja**, for instance, helped *KK Zagreb* to the *Nike International Junior Tournament* title in 2011.

Despite the fact that no US selection showed up in Douai last June, welcoming major basketball U17 national teams demonstrated the high level of this tournament. At the Douai World Tournament, there is also the will by the organizers to go on with a camp for Euroleague and FIBA referees (in 2012 and) in the future.

Last year, Turkey won the 25th World Junior Tournament of Douai.

Bert and his son attended Saturday's games of the 2012 World Tournament. Several players impressed them much: **Anas Osama** (Egypt), **Gabriel Deck** (Argentina), **Petr Cornelie** (France) and most of all, the new Chinese phenomenon **Zhou Qi**

(215 cm, see picture – source: CQnews). Believe it or not but this tall and skinny young man, now much talked about, can really play basketball! He shoots from mid and long range, keeps rebounding, plays defense, can dribble the ball and make big moves in the paint.

The Canadian team was also in Douai with their impressive center **Tanveer Bhullar** (215 cm) of Indian origin.

All stats and results of the games are available via the tournament's web site: www.jump-shot.net/events/DOUAI2012/ (see amazing evaluation of **Zhou Qi** in China's last game on Sunday, June 24th). **Damien Inglis** (forward) of France won the Douai 2012 World Tournament's MVP award.

Special mention to the following young men too: **Moataz Hosny** (center, Egypt); **Marial Shayok** (guard/forward, Canada); **Tyrell Bellot-Green** (forward, Canada); **Jordan Robinson** (power forward, Canada); **Mario Hezonja** (forward, Croatia); **Ivan Bender** (forward, Croatia) and **Tomislav Gabric** (forward, Croatia).

Also for info: French player **Lionel Ebreuil** won the yearly dunk contest in a very spectacular manner (one-handed after a jump over two of his mates, standing 7' from the basket) and the Argentinian coach **Enrique Tolcachier** was sent out of the gym after only two minutes in the game against Croatia due to two committed technical fouls called by the Euroleague's referees (involved in a camp in Douai).

Here are the results of the 2012 Douai World Tournament:

Thursday, June 21st

(France vs. Argentina 75-66)
Egypt vs. Croatia 78-91
China vs. Canada 76-99

Friday, June 22nd

(Argentina vs. Egypt 80-67)
Canada vs. France 63-68
Croatia vs. China 101-58

Saturday, June 23rd

(Egypt vs. Canada 92-81)
China vs. France 49-71
Argentina vs. Croatia 96-70

Sunday, June 24th

Game for 5th and 6th place: China vs. Egypt 76-82
Game for 3rd and 4th place: Canada vs. Croatia 88-74
Final: France vs. Argentina 66-59

France won the 26th World Junior Tournament of Douai.

Last February, Bert interviewed top coaches Daniel Goethals and Etienne Louvrier about Belgian talent Emma Meesseman, the FIBA Europe Young Women's Player of the Year 2011.

On Feb. 6th, the signing of Belgian superstar **Ann Wauters** with the *Seattle Storm* made the headlines in Belgium but, quite unusually, another important scoop about Belgian women's basketball filtered on the very same day. All media in Northern Flemish-speaking, Southern French-speaking and Eastern German-speaking Belgium relayed a news powered by *Belga*, the main Belgian news agency, after a FIBA Europe press release about **Emma Meesseman** being elected Young Women's Player of the Year for 2011 had been issued. Major national newspapers like *Het Nieuwsblad* or *Le Soir*, radio stations or portals on the web like *sporza.be* or *rtbf.be* have quickly announced the results of the FIBA Europe referendum.

I would personally consider the very talented 18-year-old **Emma Meesseman** as an intriguing prospect who usually plays at center position. She has fantastic rebounding skills and a great inside game. **Meesseman** finished at first rank in the FIBA Europe referendum, just in front of Spanish young player **Queralta Casas** of *Mann Filter Zaragoza* and FIBA Europe's Young

Women's Player of the Year 2010 **Nika Baric** of Slovenia. **Emma Meesseman**, who plays for *Cack Blue Cats Ieper* in the Belgian competition, is also the first Belgian to receive a FIBA Europe Player of the Year award in any category. Hopefully for Belgium, this award will prove just the beginning of a long and successful women basketball career for **Emma Meesseman**, born in Ieper on May 13th, 1993. The young 6'3" player was elected MVP at the U18 European Championship organized in Oradea, Romania last summer. The Belgian U18 national team had won the very first gold medal in Belgian basketball history after crushing *Les Bleuettes* of France 77-49.

In the current 2011-12 season, **Meesseman** (see picture; source : *FIBA Europe*) has reached the eighth-final stage of the FIBA EuroCup with the *Young Cats* and recorded an average of 15.8 ppg and 8.4 rebounds in the competition. The *Young Cats'* team project is made up of the best young women players of Belgium selected to play in EuroCup Women. The *Young Cats* would therefore gain some experience by playing against professional European clubs with the aim to prepare these young women to play for the national team in the next European championship campaigns or Olympic qualifying rounds.

In the past, **Emma Meesseman** had already been well present in international youth competitions. In 2009, **Meesseman** and her U16 team mates finished second at the FIBA European Championship Women U16 played in Naples, Italy. The young Belgian center was named MVP of the tournament and had averaged 14.6 ppg and 12.8 rpg. One year later, the Belgian team led by **Emma Meesseman** (14.4 ppg and 9.6 rpg) finished at an unexpected fourth place at the FIBA World Championship Women U17 organized in Toulouse, France. **Meesseman** was also the natural leader of the Belgian U18 squad which won the gold medal at the 2011 European Championship Women U18 held in Romania. Belgian coach **Benny Mertens** even offered the future star a chance for a standing ovation by benching her with two minutes left in the gold-medal game against France. The tournament's MVP averaged a double-double in points and rebounds in the Transylvanian city of Oradea, Romania: 16.9 ppg and 10.3 rpg. Prior to this competition she played four games with the senior Belgian team during the EuroBasket Women 2011 qualification tournament (against Germany, Italy, Serbia and Romania) and scored 12.5 ppg and grabbed 9 rpg.

Many observers think that **Emma Meesseman** stands out in a wonderful generation of very talented Belgian basketball players. There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that if she keeps working in the same way, it will be much talked about her in the future. And maybe no later than next summer when the senior Belgian NT will take part in the 2013 EuroBasket qualification round's Group C with the Slovak Republic, Lithuania, Slovenia and the Netherlands! The next EuroBasket tournament is due to take place from Jun. 15th to Jun. 30th, 2013 across five venues in France. The first round will take place in a new 5,000 seat arena in Trélazé. The other venue for the early stages should be located in the Bretagne region. The second round action will be based at *Vendespaces* in Western France and also at a venue in Northern France which should be outlined soon. The champions of the 2013 EuroBasket Women will be crowned at a new state-of-the-art 5,000 seat arena in Orchies, very close to the Belgian border and Ieper where **Emma Meesseman** was born.

In the official press release about the Young Women's Player of the Year referendum published in early February, FIBA Europe Secretary General **Nar Zanolin** said: "**Meesseman's success today is the outcome of years of hard work on her part and some fantastic work in development in Belgium**". That beats everything when you will know that one new head coach for the Belgian senior women basketball NT and a new staff for the youth selections (U16, U18 and U20) have been much awaited for over two and a half months already. A decision to be taken by the federation is badly needed.

The FIBA Europe award earned by **Emma Meesseman** on Feb. 6th has also been an opportunity to set an interesting interview with two major head coaches in Belgian women basketball: **Daniel Goethals** and **Etienne Louvrier**. They both know **Emma Meesseman** very well. **Daniel Goethals** is a former international Belgian player (with experience in the major Belgian clubs but also in Greece and Spain) who took part in several Belgian Men's NT campaigns in the past. He currently coaches *Dexia Namur*, a former Euroleague Women participant and a top club in the Belgian Division I for women for many years. **Goethals** has also been the Belgian Women U16 NT coach in 2009-10 and led the U17 NT up to the semi-finals at the World Championship held in Southern France in the summer 2010. He has been named Coach of the Year 2011 in Belgium when he was at the head of *Declercq Stortbeton Waregem*, the team that he led to the Belgian league title that season. Also in 2011, he accepted to coach the Belgian Women U20 NT. He had coached *Dexia Namur* in 2009-10 already and now accumulates some fantastic experience in women basketball. The other interviewee, **Etienne Louvrier**, has also been a very much appreciated coach in youth categories and women basketball. He was hired as head coach of Belgian Division I team *Spirou Girls Charleroi* (which became *Spirou Monceau* afterwards) from 2005 to 2008 and also gained some coaching experience with the Belgian Women U16 and U18 NTs. **Etienne Louvrier** was among the first friends to congratulate **Emma Meesseman** by writing a note in Flemish (**Emma** is plurilingual but her native language is Flemish) on her Facebook wall: "*Proficiat Emma.....!!*" ("*Congratulations Emma.....!!*").

When asked about what the key points in **Emma Meesseman's** way of playing really were, **Daniel Goethals** answers: "*Although she is a young player, she shows maturity and experience on the court. She has great hands (precision). Her game vision is also a key point. Her timing in defense and offense allows her almost never to react too late.*" **Etienne**

Louvrier adds: "**Emma** is extremely intelligent on (and off) the court... Very quickly she understands what needs to be done and can achieve it. She can manage. She can also force or play with fouls and knows when to shoot or drive. **Emma** can easily find the right timing for blocking shots and has a good body placement when playing defense."

Obviously, such a young player as **Emma Meesseman** has still to work and get better in some sectors of the game. "Physically speaking, **Emma** needs to get stronger, gain speed and power", says **Goethals**. He adds: "She plays as a power forward, which is tougher in foreign leagues. Therefore, **Emma** needs to get perfectly prepared because she still has problems from time to time when playing against very strong opponents. She must absolutely progress in one-on-one situation when facing the rim, especially her right hand and quickness. One last point: she should work on her three-point shooting. So far, there is no need to defend on **Emma** when she is behind the three-point line." **Louvrier** tends to agree with his colleague **Daniel Goethals**: "Physically, she has to build her body to be able to struggle in the paint at the highest level... and most of all, get a better base position and shuffling movements on strong legs as well as be quicker when running down the court."

Another Belgian basketball strong character left a note on **Emma Meesseman's** Facebook wall: the new *Seattle Storm* recruit **Ann Wauters**. "Big congratulations! Nice title for an excellent year!" wrote **Wauters**. Many observers in Europe have quickly made a comparison between the two Belgian players. I asked **Daniel Goethals** and **Etienne Louvrier** if **Emma Meesseman** is ready for an international career and whether we could already predict a wonderful career (like the one of **Ann Wauters**) for the new 18-year-old Belgian Young Cat or not? Coach **Goethals** answers: "I think **Emma** could already play in a foreign league right now but she is not ready to dominate in a big league yet! According to me, she should first progress in the aforesaid sectors." **Etienne Louvrier** continues: "Yes, I think she is. And I am sure that she will get a very nice career. But she needs a counselor, other than her family circle, who will be able to help her well in the near future... Let's avoid burning her out or willing her to adapt too quickly to a new league and to a professional status. In some respects, she has still to grow up!" As far as the comparison between **Emma Meesseman** and **Ann Wauters** is concerned, **Daniel Goethals** insists: "Comparing the two players is quite bold. Yes, **Emma** will have a great career but there is only one **Ann Wauters**! Moreover, the two players are different as far as height, power, positions (power forward vs. center) are concerned. I have had **Ann Wauters** come to practice with me for a few weeks and I can assure you that she is physically impressive! **Emma** will never become that type of a player simply because she does not have the same body. She will have to rely more on technique and outside shooting in a big league!"

My last question to both coaches dealt with the honorific FIBA Europe Young Women's Basketball Player of the Year award itself. How can such a title be beneficial to Belgian basketball? **Etienne Louvrier** briefly answers: "It reflects on the work that coaches, players and staff do for women basketball in Belgium... which does not have enough presence in the mass media!!!" Eventually, **Daniel Goethals** explains: "Honestly I don't know! We have no league in Belgium and plenty of internal problems! To make it short, all things that make you leave instead of being attractive. The problem is that we get good results in youth categories but nothing is done afterwards. The training program from age 18 to 23 is a catastrophe and the best talents will get no other chance than leave to a foreign league because there is no professional structure in Belgium." **Goethals** smiles and finally says: "A professional structure is what I'm trying to build in *Dexia Namur* and that's why I'll try to have **Emma** on my team in *Namur* next season but there are many others interested in having her!" By the way, another Belgian player, **Hind Ben Abdelkader**, age 16, was ranked 10th in the FIBA Europe's referendum for Young Women's Player of the Year 2011. She became Belgian champion with *Declercq Stortbeton Waregem* last season and silver medalist with the Belgian squad at the last European Championship Women U16 in Romania. She joined **Daniel Goethals** in *Dexia Namur* at the brink of the current season. **Ben Abdelkader**, a player from the Brussels area, had already been elected Young Women's Player of the Year by the Wallonia-Brussels branch of the federation last December. On Feb. 11th, *Dexia Namur* with **Daniel Goethals** and **Hind Ben Abdelkader** hosted *Cack Blue Cats Ieper* with **Emma Meesseman** for what turned out to be an excellent basketball game at Belgian top level. *Dexia* (currently ranked first in Belgian Division I) defeated *Cack Blue Cats* (now fourth in the current national standings) in this thrilling regular season game: 68-62. **Hind Ben Abdelkader** scored 19 points and grabbed 4 rebounds for the winners while **Emma Meesseman** had 15 points and 9 rebounds for the visitors in this game. Both *Dexia Namur* (with WNBA player **Chanel Mokango** freshly hired by the club) and *Cack Blue Cats Ieper* are still involved in the Belgian Cup too.

Invited at *De Laatste Show* on the Belgian public television VRT-Een (Flemish-speaking) on Feb. 8th, **Emma Meesseman** explained that she was "surprised" about the honorific title of Young Women's Player of the Year 2011. This title is given after a referendum based on an internet vote by fans and a vote by a panel of basketball journalists and experts from all over Europe. **Meesseman** also talked for the first time about a possible departure to a foreign country in one or two years maximum. The young player of *Cack Blue Cats Ieper* is also the daughter of former basketball player **Sonja Tankrey**. **Tankrey** had been elected best Belgian Women's Basketball Player of the Year in 1983 when she played for the club of *BBC Koksijde*. On the show, **Meesseman** said: "I did not expect to win because there are so many other very good players." She added with smile: "It was totally unexpected because I did not know at all when the vote was to happen. I got the news via my mother, on the way to the butcher". **Emma Meesseman** will turn 19 on May 13th and currently majors in Physical Education at the *VUB-Vrije Universiteit Brussel*. She hopes that a solution will quickly be found to solve the problem about

the NT's staff and coach selection. Belgium already broke the world record for longest wait for a government but found a solution in early December and eventually got one government after 541 days of talks (Belgians are also world champions at finding compromises in the end). Let us hope that the federation will be quicker to have a solution for the Belgian women's basketball national team this time...

Here is the Top 10 of the FIBA Europe's referendum for Young Women's Player of the Year 2011: 1. **Emma Meesseman** (Belgium, power forward/center, born in 1993), 2. **Queralt Casas** (Spain, guard, born in 1992), 3. **Nika Baric** (Slovenia, point guard, born in 1992), 4. **Olesia Malashenko** (Ukraine, power forward, born in 1991), 5. **Farhiya Abdi** (Sweden, forward, born in 1992), 6. **Sara Krnjic** (Serbia, center, born in 1991), 7. **Anastasia Shilova** (Russia, guard/forward, born in 1991), 8. **Astou Ndour** (Spain, center, born in 1994), 9. **Artemis Spanou** (Greece, forward, born in 1993), 10. **Hind Ben Abdelkader** (Belgium, small forward, born in 1995). **Messeman** gets the FIBA Europe award for Young Women's Player of the Year 2011 while **Alba Torrens** (Spain, guard, born in 1989) was honored Women's Player of the Year 2011, **Jonas Valanciunas** (Lithuania, center, born in 1992) got the title of Young Men's Player of the Year 2011 and **Dirk Nowitzki** (Germany, power forward, born in 1978) earned the Men's Player of the Year 2011 award.

© 2013 Bert's Basketball Web Site: www.berthoop.net