
2013

Bert went to Belgian Division II game in Fleurus, Belgium on November 29th, 2013: *CEP Fleurus vs. BBC Haantjes Oudenaarde* 95-72.

Thomas Van De Vondel of *BBC Haantjes Oudenaarde* was simply excellent in the first half of this game and rather impressively showed the way to the basket to his mates in the first quarter. The *Haantjes* were well organized and, either in fastbreak or from all shooting ranges, also pretty efficient in the first twenty minutes. **Van De Vondel** could have been the Division II *Most Valuable Player of the Week* if young talents on the *CEP* side had not successfully come off the bench: **Gilles Lemy** who brought some speed, **Amaury Marion** who boosted his team by driving nicely to the basket and **Rik Vandenberghe** who worked hard on both ends of the court. **Vandenberghe** showed his full potential in the paint by challenging *Haantjes'* center **Mikhail Linskens** and hit his second three-pointer of the evening right before the break to make 45-44. It was the first time that *CEP Fleurus* of Coach **Tom Poppe** took the lead in this game. After half-time, the whole *CEP* team played well and **Rik Vandenberghe** again hit a shot from long range. **Thomas Bauwens**, **Kevin Jonniaux**, **Louis Hazard**, **Amaury Marion** and **Thomas Depouhon** each converted some spectacular shots for *CEP Fleurus* and gave their team an always bigger advantage. Despite efforts by **Van De Vondel**, the *Haantjes* were suddenly unable to react in the third quarter. We even saw two *Haantjes*, **Maxime Verspeeten** and **Gilles Mestdag**, having an argument on the court. *CEP* Coach **Tom Poppe** could offer some playing time to each of his players. Last attempts by **Mestdag** and **Linskens** to reduce the gap were not sufficient for the *Haantjes* who finally lost the game by 23 points.

Free TV broadcast made available on the official website of *Telesambre*: <http://telesambre.rtc.be/content/view/19024/166/>.

Score evolution: 15-25, 45-44, 74-57 and 95-72.

Best scorers:

CEP F: **G. Lemy** 2, **K. Jonniaux** 13, **T. Depouhon** 9, **R. Van Den Berghe** 13, **C. Manzanza** 3, **A. Marion** 14, **J. Moonen** 2, **T. Bauwens** 8, **L. Hazard** 14, **C. Ilongo** 15, **A. Behaderovic** 3.

Haantjes: **N. Delepeleire** 5, **T. Van De Vondel** 30, **M. Linskens** 10, **G. Mestdag** 9, **J. Van Haevermaet** 8, **M. Verspeeten** 4, **J. Hendrickx** 6.

Bert went to an *Ethias League* game in Charleroi, Belgium on October 25th, 2013: *Belgacom Spirou Charleroi vs. BC Telenet Oostende* 84-70.

It was a real pleasure to accompany and chaperon five teenagers in love with basketball who wanted to attend what can be considered as *el clasico* in the Belgian basketball *Ethias League*: *Belgacom Spirou Charleroi vs. BC Telenet Oostende* scheduled at 20:30 on Friday, October 25th, 2013. Many basketball fans showed up at the *Spiroudome* and were delighted to see US experienced players **Demond Mallet** (guard, 1.86 m) and **Darryl Watkins** (center, 2.11 m) of *Belgacom Spirou* well present on both ends of the court in the first minutes of the game. The *Spirou* squad quickly took the lead: 8-2. The tough defense played by the home team allowed former *Maccabi Tel Aviv* and *Juventut Badalona* player **Demond Mallet** and his mates to stay in front most of the first quarter: 13-9 and 15-11. Nevertheless, *BCO's* Serbian-Montenegrin guard **Dusan Djordjevic** played in a smart way and, thanks to his excellent court vision and many passes, helped the visitors take a short lead at the end of the first quarter: 18-19.

Early in the second quarter, *Spirou* Head Coach **Giovanni Bozzi** complained about referees' calls and was penalised by them with a technical foul. The call boosted the *Spirou* side. The hosts even reached an 8-point margin (35-27) on a new shot hit by **Demond Mallet** after a fantastic team work. *Belgacom Spirou* kept a rather large lead until half-time: 39-32.

Right after the break, the men of Coach **Bozzi** had an impressive 10-0 run and the scoreboard suddenly showed 49-32. Technically speaking, the game was very enjoyable with spectacular plays and much athleticism. The rhythm was far from being slow. For the first time since the beginning of the 2013-14 season, *Spirou* played well and kept the same tempo through the whole game. Polish players on both sides, **Karol Gruszecki** (guard, 1.93 m) for *Spirou* and **Mateusz Ponitka** (guard, 1.96 m) for *BCO*, showed their potential and proved that they should be considered like great European talents, most likely just starting a great basketball career. Despite a time-out taken by *BC Telenet Oostende's* Coach **Dario Gjergja**, *Spirou* still digged the gap: 59-41 via several spectacular plays by **Mohamed Abukar** (forward, 2.08 m), **Devin Green** (forward, 2.01 m) and **Demond Mallet** for the home

team. The crowd at the *Spiroudome* was absolutely on fire and was really cheerful when **Mallet**, again, showed the way to make 66-48 at the end of the third quarter.

Despite last efforts by an impressive **Ryan Thompson** (transferred from *Okapi Aalstar* last summer, forward, 1.98 m) and the presence of Belgian international players **Quentin Serron** (guard, 1.90 m), **Pierre-Antoine Gillet** (forward, 2.01 m) and **Niels Marnegrave** (guard, 1.91 m) who displayed their excellent basketball skills in this high-quality game, *BCO* could not come much closer in the last quarter. **Demond Mallet** played his role of playmaker in a perfect way and, with 25 points, offered a rather impressive win to the *Spirou* side. *BCO's* US forward **Ryan Thompson** finished the game with 22 points for the losing side. It was definitely worth attending what has probably been the best game in the beginning of the 2013-14 *Ethias League* season thus far. *Belgacom Spirou* eventually defeated *BC Telenet Oostende* 84-70.

Best scorers:

Spirou: **J. Steinbach** 7, **C. Beghin** 1, **J. Hamilton** 4, **Green** 8, **D. Watkins** 15, **D. Mallet** 25, **Gruszecki** 6, **Abukar** 11, **W. Mukubu** 7.

BCO: **Berggren** 5, **Q. Serron** 10, **Stipanovic** 6, **Thompson** 22, **N. Marnegrave** 3, **V. Petrovic** 3, **P.-A. Gillet** 7, **Ponitka** 2, **Boukichou** 2, **D. Djordjevic** 10.

A look back over the two weeks of action at the *EuroBasket Women 2013* in France last June.

In order to wrap up my full report on the last *EuroBasket Women 2013* held in France from Jun. 15th to 30th, I would like to have a look back at the excellent competition that ended up with Spain's thrilling win and at what we have learned from this breathtaking tournament.

First of all, there were quite a few nice stories at the *EuroBasket Women 2013*. Spain of coach **Lucas Mondelo**, who has attained success either at youth or pro level since he picked up a play board, could count on **Sancho Lyttle** who was the true star of the Spanish team through the whole tourney with 7 double-doubles in 9 games played. **Lyttle** and her mates managed to get more and more impressive game after game and, despite a slow start in the first round against Russia, Italy and even Sweden, did upset France in the fantastic final game played on Jun. 30th. Sweden also wrote a nice story in this European championship, a true fairy tale! Nobody will ever know what could have happened in the last two minutes of the France vs. Sweden quarter-final game if the referee had not called an offensive and therefore fifth foul to **Anna Barthold** of Sweden when the game was still tied. This allowed **Celine Dumerc** to really get on fire and hit unbelievable three-pointers from downtown to give France the victory after a sensational end of game. The third nice story was written by Serbia which is marked by the confirmation of **Marina Maljkovic's** coaching talent. The daughter of **Bozidar Maljkovic** proved, with a fourth place in this high-level championship, that she now belongs to the best women coaches on our continent.

Then, I would like to mention the few disappointing facts that occurred at the last *EuroBasket Women*. Russia, for instance, completely missed its tournament. Russia was eliminated after the first round and recorded only one short but insufficient win over Italy in the last game of Group B in Vannes. Without legends **Maria Stepanova** and **Svetlana Abrosimova** who have now ended their stellar NT career and **Olga Arteshina** who was injured, the inexperienced players of Head Coach **Alfredas Vainauskas' Team Russia** never seemed able to get rid of their doubts and went back home very quickly after only three games played. The young Baltic teams of Lithuania and Latvia did not qualify for the second round either and are probably the second disappointment of this tournament. Eventually, France was seen as the top favourite team in the *EuroBasket Women 2013* played in their homeland. As experienced French coach **Marc Silvert** mentioned it in the press, it was an excellent and almost inevitable opportunity for France to win a new title. "*If not, it would be a failure!*", he said. For some local analysts, Spain has broken the French team's golden dream after a dramatic end and it is perceived by these observers like a cruel lack of success indeed.

If I had to mention one big surprise in this tournament, it would be the great run by Sweden. The Swedes finished seventh in the competition and will be mostly remembered for their convincing wins over Russia 57-68, Montenegro 69-58, Slovak Republic 75-72 and Italy for seventh place 60-77. They were also very close to upset France at the quarter-final stage, after eventually losing the most thrilling and emotional game of the tournament 87-83.

The perspectives for the next *World Championship for Women* to be organized in Turkey, which qualifies automatically as organizing country, are excellent for the top five European nations that also earned a ticket to the Worlds: Spain, France, Serbia, Belarus and Czech Republic. The *EuroBasket Women 2013* was also the occasion to discover or watch some future talents in action. Here are some of the European players to watch in a near future: the new Spanish generation with **Marta Xargay** (born in December 1990), **Cristina Ouviaña** (born in September 1990), **Laura Nicholls** (born in February 1989) and **Laura Gil** (born in April 1992), young French duo

Diandra Tchatchouang (born in June 1991) and **Valériane Ayayi** (born in April 1994), the **Eldebrink** twin sisters of Sweden (Elin and Frida, born in January 1988), Italian playmaker **Francesca Dotto** (born in March 1993) and Czech shooter **Katerina Hindrakova** (born in February 1988).

Among the players who have not played at their usual level or have not been able to show their full potential, I can list the Russian players (their leaders **Ilona Korstin** and **Irina Osipova** but also all their mates in general), the Slovak side (never able to raise their level of play in the second round), Italian captain **Raffaella Masciadri** who should have brought her experience as a plus for the *Azzurre* but who was eventually lucky to have her young mates to lead the team most of the time and **Amaya Valdemoro** of Spain who, despite being a plus in the locker rooms and during training sessions, always seemed to play as she was breathing her last sigh and often forced unsuccessful shots.

Finally, let me tell you that I was included in the panel of basketball experts who helped the *FIBA Europe Communications'* staff choose the *All Tournament Team* and *MVP of EuroBasket Women 2013*. My picks matched perfectly well with the final results of the vote: veteran forward **Sancho Lyttle** of Spain finished as the *MVP* in this competition, having accumulated a stellar 18.4 points and 11.1 rebounds per game, and is joined in the *All Tournament Team* by small forward **Alba Torrens** of Spain, shooting guard **Frida Eldebrink** of Sweden, point guard **Celine Dumerc** of France and center **Isabelle Yacoubou** of France. Let me also add another *All Tournament Second Team* to complete what could be considered as the full *EuroBasket Women 2013 All Star Team*: point guard **Isil Alben** of Turkey, power forward **Jelena Milovanovic** of Serbia, power forward **Sandrine Gruda** of France, center **Yelena Leuchanka** of Belarus and center **Nevriye Yilmaz** of Turkey. The following additional players could also receive a special mention for their good performances and regularity during most of the tournament: Turkish guard **Esmeral Tuncluer**, Turkish (and US-born) center **Quanitra Hollingsworth**, Italian point guard **Giorgia Sottana**, Spanish point guard **Silvia Dominguez**, Spanish shooting guard **Marta Xargay**, Swedish point guard **Elin Eldebrink**, Swedish (and US-born) small forward **Ashley Key**, Swedish center **Louice Halvarsson**, French forward **Diandra Tchatchouang**, British small forward **Johannah Leedham**, Serbian small forward **Ana Dabovic**, Serbian power forward **Jovana Rad**, Belarusian power forward **Anastasiya Verameyenka**, Belarusian center **Marina Kress**, Czech small forward **Michaela Zrustova** and Czech guard **Veronika Bortelova**.

The whole *EuroBasket Women 2013* tournament full of joy, tension, emotion, intensity, spectacular plays and drama was a real spectacular advertisement for women's basketball. It has been two fantastic weeks of basketball. Two great basketball moments will remain in my memories: the quarter-final game between France and Sweden (what a finish by **Celine Dumerc**!) and the final game with the surprising but well-deserved Spanish win (**Torrens** and **Lyttle** were the true superstars of this tourney). Smiles on the face of the French volunteers and friendship among the people in the media room or at press row will also be remembered for sure.