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## Focus on... Belgium A history of more than 30 years

From railway terminal to venue for a **Premier Padel** circuit tournament. The **Lotto Brussels Premier P2**, which kicks off on Tuesday after the end of the qualifying draw, will be the first European stage of the season: the chosen venue, evocative and unique in its kind, is one of the renovated warehouses of the former **Tour&Taxis** industrial site in **Bruxelles**, specifically that of the **Gare Maritime**, a historic terminal built in the early 1900s for goods arriving from all over the world.

**Belgium** is a nation where padel has been developing more and more in recent years: it is in the world top 10 in terms of the number of clubs (around 500) and courts (more than 2,000) and, according to data from the **FIP Research & Data Analysis Department**, there are 500,000 amateur players who are passionate about the sport. Padel in Belgium has its own history, however, because the first **Belgian Padel Association** (today **Padel Belgium**) was created in 1992 and became a member of the **FIP** back in 1996. In 2000, it played its first world championship and, to date, eight world events have been played, the last five of which have been in a row.

In 2023, according to data from **Padel Belgium**, there are very high membership numbers in the federation: 416 clubs, 1,752 courts and more than 95,000 members. In 2023, there were more than 100 players in the ranking, including 28 women (with one Top 100 and five Top 300 players) and 73 men (three Top 300 players). With this P2, there are now four FIP international tournaments played in Belgium, the previous ones all belonging to the **CUPRA FIP Tour** circuit in the FIP Rise category (one 'combined' in 2022 in **Koksijde** and two in 2023 including another 'combined' in **Koksijde** and a men's in **Mol**). The most representative Belgian player is **Helena Wyckaert**, number 101 in the FIP ranking and winner of four FIP Rise, three of which with her Belgian partner **An-Sophie Mestach**, number 152 (two won in Belgium in 2022 and 2023 in **Koksijde** and one in **Rotterdam** in the Netherlands in 2023), with whom she received a wild card for the final **Lotto Brussels P2** draw.

In the men's category, the first Belgian player in the FIP ranking is **Clement Geens** (n° 122), winner in 2022 paired with compatriot **Jerome Peeters** (n° 230) of the **FIP Rise Koksijde** and in 2023 of the **FIP Rise Mol**, paired this time with **Maxime Deloyer** (No. 166) with whom he will also participate in the Brussels P2 with a wild card for the main draw.

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