



## Interview: Michael Wright, Turk Telekom

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One game into the Last 16 of the 2008-09 Eurocup, Turk Telekom has taken another step forward toward a dream of continental success. The reigning Turkish Cup winners used an 89-82 home victory against visiting Zadar of Croatia last week to start their Last 16 group in the right way. Or perhaps it was "the Michael Wright way", since his 23 points led Turk Telekom to victory. In his eighth season in Europe, the 28-year-old forward has more than made his mark on Europe's second competition this decade, moving into ninth place on the points-scored list with fewer games than anyone above him. Indeed, Wright now ranks first in highest average performance index rating for Eurocup and ULEB Cup players this decade, 22.4 per game. Because his injury last season kept Turk Telekom from surviving the first, 32-team elimination round, Wright wants to take his team as far as possible in

this new Last 16 group stage. "I have never made it this far in the competition and reaching the Final Eight would mean a lot to us," Wright told Eurocupbasketball.com. "Even with that, we are just one game into the Last 16 and have five more to go. We have to take it one game at the time if want to reach the Final Eight. If we make it, then we will take it from there."

**Hello, Michael. First of all, congratulations on the big win against Zadar, a very tough opponent. Is it what you expected right at the start of the Eurocup Last 16?**

"Well, actually, we knew that it was going to be a hard game coming in. Zadar is a very good team, like all that made it to the Last 16 round. It was a hard game and we had to play really well to win it. You have to give Zadar a lot of credit because they came in and put up a good battle."

**Turk Telekom is having a fantastic Eurocup season and you are a main reason for that. Do you feel that at age 28 you are entering the prime of your career?**

"Yes, definitely, I think that I am entering the prime of my career. I have been playing over here for eight years already and everything has started to come together. I feel like I have become a complete player. I think that the best years of my career are about to arrive, definitely."

**This is your fourth season in Europe's second top competition, with three teams - Alba Berlin, Besiktas and now Turk Telekom. How do you see the evolution of the competition from the first time you played it until now?**

"I definitely think it is a much better competition now, especially this year. There are a lot of tough teams and they cut the number of teams down, which was a great change. Every game is tougher this season. The playing quality is much better. I always thought it was a great league, but this year is even better. I played in the Euroleague with Pau-Orthez and Slask and, of course, it is the top competition in Europe. You have a lot of great, prestigious teams, but the Eurocup is not far away from that level."

**You started the season coming off the bench in Telekom's opening four games but recently stepped into the starting lineup. Does it make any difference for you, in terms of confidence and role?**

"Actually, it doesn't make any difference at all, because first of all, we have a great team, with a deep bench and a lot of great players. Also, it is not who starts the game but who finishes it and the final outcome, of course. I don't worry about that because there are enough quality players in this team. It definitely doesn't make any difference to me."



**Last week, you entered the competition's all-time top 10 in scoring and now have 604 points in the ULEB Cup/Eurocup. What does it mean to you to reach such an impressive milestone at this point in your career?**

"Well, I didn't know about that, but it is a great milestone. Being listed in the all-time scoring list is a great accomplishment and shows how much I improved my game during the years. How much I matured as a player, too."

**Your career has taken you all over Europe with stops in Poland, Spain, Israel, Germany, France and Turkey. How have your travels influenced you as a person and as a basketball player?**

"I am a very adjustable person. Of course, getting to a new country and a new league needs an adjustment. Being very adaptable was important, but I have shown that I can play all over Europe, in so many different countries. I liked every country I have been to. Overall it has been a great experience, getting to know different cultures. It has been great."

**You are a great low-post scorer, even though at 2.03 meters, you are often giving up some height to players guarding you. What is the secret to your scoring prowess?**

"Well, there is no secret at all. I work hard because I know I am undersized to play power forward or center, whatever you want to call it. In that case, I think you have to work harder than anyone. I use my athletic abilities and strength, too. I have to position myself well to score. All that comes into play, and that's the key. I don't think that height has anything to do with scoring inside. If you have the heart to do it and play hard, you will get it done."

**After all those experiences, Turkey is the only country in which you have played for more than one team and Turk Telekom is the first team that you have played more than one season for. Tell us what it is at Turk Telekom and in Turkey in general that has kept you there?**

"The Turkish League is great, with a lot of good players, especially this season. Many teams have increased their level. Then I love Turkey, I like the culture. It is a very good country as far as basketball is concerned, too. What happened is that I found a place and a club like Ankara and Turk Telekom where I feel like I am capable of playing really well. Also, I love playing with Erwin Dudley. We communicate well on the court and do a lot of things to help the team. We complement each other really well and know each other after two years playing together. We always try to get the job done."



**Two Turkish teams - Besiktas Cola Turka and Galatasaray Cafe Crown - made it to the ULEB Cup Final Eight last season. Turk Telekom is now the only Turkish team remaining in the competition. Is that an extra pressure, as in a way you are representing Turkish basketball in the Eurocup?**

"Even when you had Besiktas and Galatasaray in the Final Eight last season, Turkish basketball also has good Euroleague teams to be represented in Europe. Even with that, we have to put that on our back to represent Turkey and the Turkish basketball league well. We have to go out there, play hard and take one game at the time."

**After four seasons in the competition, this is your first chance to make it to the big event in Torino, the Final Eight. What would it mean for the club and for you personally to win this Eurocup title?**

"Winning the Eurocup would be a great accomplishment for the club, as well as for me. Like you said, I have never made it this far in the competition and reaching the Final Eight would mean a lot to us. Even with that, we are just one game into the Last 16 and have five more to go. We have to take one game at the time if we want to reach the Final Eight. If we make it, then we will take it from there."