

My mum kept asking me to play basketball for two reasons. She did not like the current sport I was participating in – Greek wrestling. The second reason was to encourage me to do something I had never tried before. I hoped to join a well-known team in Aleppo. But then I heard about a different team which was a little less famous, but much better known for giving new players a chance. I only planned to play for the summer. I had no idea I would love the basketball so much I couldn't stop playing, not for even one day. I became one of the top five players on both under 18 and under 21 teams, and I was able to sit on the bench with the first team. At this point I was playing the position of Power Forward. I was two metres tall and weighed 100 kilograms.

When I was 17, I was invited to the National Team Camp (first team). I felt so honoured and proud. Being with all of these Syrian stars was amazing. Most fans just wanted to have their picture taken with them. I had the opportunity to practice and play with them. I was the youngest player at the camp. My goal was to prove to the Serbian coach it was not a mistake to invite someone so young. My hard work paid off. I was chosen as one of 12 players to represent the nation. I played with the Syrian National Basketball team until the end of 2012.

There really are no words to describe my life before the crisis started in Syria. It was heaven on earth. I am familiar with all cities in Syria, because we used to travel as much as twice a week. My team, my friends, the coaches, the managers and fans all left a unique mark on my heart. Especially my team members – the way we competed during practice, but became one when playing against other teams in the league. At one point, my team was half-Muslim and half-Christian. Our original day off was Friday. But we asked to take off one Friday, then the next Sunday, and so on. We were more than just a team. We were family.

I was in Damascus for the national team camp just before Christmas 2012. We were given the week off for Christmas and New Year, so I and the other players from Aleppo flew home. As we were landing, the airport came under attack. It was truly terrifying. After a long time, we were able to land. But this was not the worst part. We now faced the journey from the airport to the city centre. I still remember the snipers shooting at our cars, the bullets all around us. We were scared to death. I didn't believe we will make it home. None of us had realized the situation in Aleppo was so bad.

By Salah Hamwi

<https://talkingsyria.com/2014/11/02/my-basketball-kit/> COMPREHENSION (12 points)

I) Circle the right answer (3 points).

1. The text is taken from...
a) a novel b) a website c) a folktale
2. The text is about...
a) Syrian basketball b) Syrian Wrestling c) a young Syrian basketball player
3. The team's original day-off was ...
a) Friday b) Sunday c) Friday and Sunday

II) Are the following sentences true or false? Justify your answers by quoting from the text. (5 points)

4. The narrator was encouraged by his mother to play wrestling
5. The coach of the team was Syrian.
6. The team is composed of Muslim and Christian players.
7. Before the crisis, life in Syria was wonderful.
8. Just before Christmas 2012, they left Aleppo for Damascus.

III) Answer the following questions (4 points)

9. Why did the narrator decide not to join a well-known team?
10. How did he feel when he was invited to the National Team Camp?
11. Why couldn't the narrator and the other players land at Aleppo airport?
12. What does the writer mean by the following sentence? Explain it in your own words.

-*"We were more than just a team. We were family."*

WRITE (8 points)

Traitez l'un des deux sujets suivants

Topic 1 : What's your favorite sport? Give your reasons. (150 words)

Topic 2 : Imagine that you would like to meet and invite your favorite player for one day. Write a letter to convince him/her to accept your invitation by proposing some interesting suggestions for that day.