

First Minister official patron of The Scotland Women's National Team



The Scotland Women's National Team has announced Nicola Sturgeon as their official Patron.

Scotland National Coach Anna Signeul and her squad were invited to Bute House, the First Minister's official residence, this morning to meet their new Patron and discuss how they can work together to grow awareness and involvement in the national game among girls and women.

The First Minister takes up her ambassadorial role in the run-up to International Women's Day 2016, a global celebration of women's contribution to social, economic, cultural, sporting and political achievement.

She will promote and champion the women's national team, and work with football authorities to encourage the ever-increasing participation in the women's game, whilst continuing to grow attendances.

The news comes as a welcome boost for the squad as they enter a crucial phase of matches. Scotland are currently in pole position to qualify for their first ever major tournament, sitting top of their UEFA Women's EURO 2017 qualification group at the half-way point of the campaign.

The First Minister is a keen supporter of Scottish sport, and under her leadership, the Scottish Government has committed to gender equality, including a cabinet with an equal split of men and women.

Anna Signeul said: "We are absolutely delighted to receive

this official backing from the First Minister. Our women's programme has enjoyed great support from the Scottish Government, sportscotland and the sportscotland Institute of Sport over the years, and this underlines just how much the women's game has grown in Scotland.

"We have some crucial games ahead of us this year, with the ultimate aim of reaching the UEFA Women's EURO finals in The Netherlands next summer, and we really appreciate the support that we receive from fans across the country. Adding the support of The First Minister is a fantastic boost for the squad as we prepare to resume the qualifying campaign.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: "I'm delighted and honoured to accept the role of Patron of the Scotland Women's National Football Team, and I enjoyed meeting Anna and the squad to hear about the encouraging progress they are making in the current qualification campaign for next year's European Championships.

"It's an exciting time for women's football, which is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, and I hope to use this role to promote the women's game at all levels across Scotland. I would like to see more women participating in the sport, and more people watching the sport and will work with the Scottish FA and others to achieve this.

"I look forward to hearing about how I can support and help increase awareness of the game – and getting along to the games when I can."

Scotland's UEFA Women's EURO 2017 qualification campaign recommences with the visit of Slovenia to the Paisley 2021 Stadium on Friday 8th April.

As part of their preparations, Scotland take on Spain in a friendly match on International Women's Day (Tuesday 8th March) at The Falkirk Stadium.

Fans can show their support for the squad, and International Women's Day, in the run up to the match by tweeting – I'm supporting #SWNT on #IWD2016