

Ice hockey – former Capitals star eyes world gold

Former Edinburgh Capitals netminder Stephen Murphy believes home advantage will be key as Great Britain host the World Championship, Division 1, Group B in Belfast from Sunday.

Dundee-born Murphy, who has also played for Paisley Pirates, Fife Flyers and Dundee Stars now ices for Belfast Giants.

And the 35-year-old admitted that appearing in the tournament on his home ice will be special.

Britain open the competition against Croatia on Sunday and also face Estonia, Lithuania and Netherlands and Japan.

The experienced netminder said: “We can achieve something special here but we have five tough games ahead of us.

“The home crowd can be very important. Then there is the GB Barmy Army who support us across the world and are like an extra man.”

He added: “There are no easy games at this level but, hopefully, we can perform throughout the week to set us a chance of winning the gold medal and promotion.”

Meanwhile, the Elite League enjoyed a 12 per cent growth in fans last season.

More than 940,000 people watched league matches this season smashing last year’s record by almost 100,000.

It is the fourth straight year in which league attendances have gone up.

And the league now boasts the seventh highest average league attendance in Europe and Asia according to a recent IIHF study ahead of Austria, Slovakia and Denmark.

Chairman Tony Smith said: "This season has been one of the most competitive we have seen since the league was formed.

"It is a testament to the hard work that goes on every week at both club and league level that attendances continue to rise.

"With Guildford and Milton Keynes joining us from next season naturally we expect that trend to continue and we hope to smash the one million spectator mark next season."

