

EuroHockey – now it is crunch time for Scotland

Sarah Jamieson is under pressure on two fronts. The 25-year-old is a key cog in Scotland's EuroHockey squad.

And the law graduate (pictured in action for Scotland) is also anxiously waiting word back from several legal firms following interview as the Edinburgh-born hockey star aims to take the first step in the job market.

On Sunday (push-off 14.45) the focus of the ex-Grove Menzieshill player, however, is on delivering victory for Scotland as they open their EuroHockey Championship II campaign against Ukraine at Glasgow's National Hockey Centre.

The Czech Republic follow on Tuesday (18.00) and the qualifiers are completed on Wednesday (19.00) against Austria.

Scotland are ranked No 19 in the world with Ukraine at No 27, the Czech Republic at No 21 and Austria rated No 31. Expectation is high.

However, Sarah has been around the block enough to know that rankings can count for nothing in tournament hockey. It is what you do on the day.

The Edinburgh-born player, who has played at a high level in Germany for the past two seasons, rubbing shoulders with some of the world's best, understands that playing at home in front of a partisan crowd can heap pressure on the hosts.

It's all about dealing with that and coach Jen Wilson and the squad have been together for some time to develop their game plan.

The backroom squad have completed their homework and the squad is boosted by the return of four Great Britain players.

Borders-born Sarah Robertson, formerly of Edinburgh University and now with London-based Hampstead and Westminster, Amy Costello, ex-Inverleith and now with the University of Birmingham, and Glasgow-born goalkeeper Nicola Cochrane, who plays in England for Beeston, are seasoned campaigners at international level.

And rising star Charlotte Watson of Dundee Wanderers recently made her Great Britain debut in Japan.

Coach Wilson argues that the squad has made superb progress and the South African admitted the talent within the group was so strong that it gave her selection headaches.

Now, the chosen 18 have to transfer that promise into results and points in Glasgow.

Sarah hopes the women can produce the sort of form which allowed them to beat World Cup silver medallists Ireland 2-1 in Stormont in the last match of a recent three game challenge contest.

She scored the game-winner for the Tartan Hearts and the victory was significant as Ireland are ranked in the world's top ten and they were deep into preparations for competing in the EuroHockey Championships in Antwerp.

That is the league above the competition in Glasgow and, significantly, Scotland were missing Watson, Robertson and Costello who were with Great Britain women in Japan.

They also recently lost 4-3 on running penalties to the counter-attacking Czech Republic in the FIH Series Finals in Ireland.

That meant the Scots missed out on a semi-final clash against Ireland and faced France in the 5/6 play-off. It was a major disappointment.

There is also history between the nations as the Czech Republic beat Scotland 1-0 two years ago, a defeat which saw Scotland relegated to the EuroHockey Championships II.

The squad know they are in for a bruising battle against Ukraine side today (SUN) but Wilson's charges turned on the style to record a 4-0 win in the qualifying games at the FIH Series finals in Ireland.

Sarah said: "We know what to expect. It will be tough and physical but we have three of the Great Britain players back and they have not seen them."

The intention is for Scotland to make an early mark in the game and ramp up the pressure during the four-quarter clash.

Winning the first game of any tournament is crucial and Sarah said: "We are focusing on one game at a time.

"This is a hard division to get out of, but all the girls want to achieve promotion to A Division.

"Defeat by the Czech Republic two years ago was hard to take and a number of the squad who were there remember that feeling.

"We had our chances and did not take them and we need to take them in this tournament."

Austria are tipped to be the whipping boys of the event and Sarah has inside knowledge of the squad as two of her teammates at Munchner Sports Club in Munich are members of the side.

They, of course, know the steely Scot's attributes but Sarah said that tournament play is like playing a cup final in every game.

Playing in Germany professionally has benefited her game considerably and she said: "Training is high tempo and there

are players there from Ireland, Spain, Argentina as well as Germany.

“Game intensity is also high. You also have double-header weekends and that is like tournament play.”

Sarah said: “Family and friends will be in the crowd on Sunday and during the week. That brings pressure as we want to do well and they want us to do well and there is extra excitement as we are playing at home.

“We want to harness that and our preparation and training has gone really well.”

Now, it is crunch time.