

Scotland Under-21s return to action tomorrow against Lithuania

Scotland Under-21s return to action tomorrow night for the first time in nearly 10 months as they take on Lithuania in Vilnius.

Scot Gemmill's side have been operating within a strict bubble, based in an Edinburgh hotel and training at Oriam all week in preparation for the behind closed doors game.



Hibs' centre-half Ryan Porteous is the only Edinburgh based player in the squad as Scotland who currently sit in fourth place, six points from the top with a game in hand and are currently ahead of Lithuania by four points. Last week Czech Republic took on San Marino, winning 6-0.

Reflecting on the build-up to the match so far and the new COVID-19 procedures put in place, Scot Gemmill said: "It feels great to be back training and it's incredibly exciting to be preparing for an international match again. We owe a huge thanks to everyone who has made it happen. I was always confident it would get to this point and now it's all about concentrating on the game.

"The players have gone through a lot of the new COVID-19 procedures with their clubs which is a big help for us but at the same time, it still remains a big priority within the group to stick to the guidelines.

"It's unusual for something to be more important than football

but there's no doubt that the current situation the world finds itself in takes precedence right now. Everyone feels very safe within our bubble so now it's about ensuring we do our job on the pitch."

Scotland last played Lithuania in October 2019 where they drew 0-0 at Tynecastle and Gemmill believes his side has what it takes to take home the three points this time.

He said: "Playing against Lithuania will be a big challenge for us with the way we anticipate them to play. We weren't quite good enough in the home game to break them down and get the goal we were looking for, even though we created a lot of chances.

"Our performances have been strong and we feel we've got a really good squad, capable of gaining a positive result. We have to make sure we don't concede goals as well as threaten up front. We are very proud of how difficult we are to play against and how few goals we've conceded so we need to continue to show that."

So far in the group, Scotland have recorded a memorable victory over Croatia and Gemmill hopes the players take inspiration from that win to spur them on to further impressive victories.

"The result and performance in Croatia helps support what we talk about as a staff group," he said.

"We are working with players who have a fantastic mentality and attitude but also that talent and resilience you need to win football games at the top level. When the team puts on a performance like the one in Croatia it gives us a lot of belief that we're doing the right things.

"We're very confident the way we're working with these players will give them the best opportunity to push towards the full squad and show they can play at the top level."

There are five players who have been called up to the squad for the first time and Gemmill is pleased his squad possess the perfect balance of youth and experience.

He said: "Fast-tracking the best young players is a priority for the performance department and I think around nine of the current squad can continue to play for the 21s squad when the age group changes.

"This is a formula we've used before. Billy (Gilmour) came to Toulon when he was 16 so it's something we feel strongly about across our age grade teams. It's very important we have that consistency to our strategy. I know Malky (Mackay) and the other coaches have the same opinion.

"We also have experienced players in the group who will help the younger ones such as Ross McCrorie. We've consistently selected Ross and I know Derek McInnes recently described him as a 'Rolls Royce of a player'. We've known that for a long time and that's why he's captained our youth teams. He knows he's got it all to do and this is just the start but he's really excited about the opportunity he's been given, both for his club and country."