

Dutiaume set to battle Blaze

Fife Flyers, who did not play last weekend's scheduled double-header because opposition clubs Dundee Stars and Guildford Flames were under COVID-19 protocol, are due at Coventry Blaze on Wednesday (19.30) in a key basement battle in the Premier Sports Elite League.

The Kirkcaldy club, who have suffered a form slump, losing their last five games, have skidded to the bottom of the ten-strong, Premier Sports Elite League table with ten points from 17 games.

Coventry have also hit a bad patch and are ninth with 11 points from 13 fixtures. Both teams desperately need a lift coming into the heavy Festive schedule.

Fife, sponsored by UNISON Fife Health Branch, last celebrated a home win on Saturday, November 27 thanks to a 3-0 home success over Guildford Flames and that was followed 24-hours later by a 4-2 victory at Nottingham Panthers, but since then it has been all downhill.

Flyers lost 4-1 at Glasgow Clan, 3-0 at The Fife Ice Arena to Belfast Giants, 4-2 at home to Nottingham, 3-1 at Belfast Giants and 5-1 at Kirkcaldy to Manchester Storm, their last game which was on Sunday, December 12.

Blaze have lost their last four following a shoutout success at Glasgow on Saturday, November 27, losing 2-0 at home to Cardiff Devils, 5-2 in the Midlands to Glasgow, and 3-1 at Sheffield before a 5-1 capitulation to the same team at Coventry.

Fife coach Todd Dutiaume (pictured) suffered a 2-0 defeat when the Scots visited Coventry in their first league game of the season on Saturday, September 25 but Flyers whipped Blaze 6-2 at Kirkcaldy in mid-November, a bright spot for the club.

He said his squad were down after their home defeat by Manchester but trained well last week.

Danny Stewart, Coventry's coach and a former Fife Flyers star, said that currently Blaze are not making opposition teams pay for their mistakes whether that is on the power play or five-on-five.

He added: "If we make mistakes we are punished. When you are struggling to find the net that creates a lot of pressure."

Elsewhere, Glasgow Clan's No 1 netminder, Shane Starrett, is set to make his comeback from injury as the misfiring Scots square-up to Elite League pace-setters Sheffield Steelers in Yorkshire on Wednesday (19.30).

The 27-year-old, highly-rated American hot-stop sat out Sunday's 5-2 defeat by high-flying Cardiff Devils at Braehead, a result which left coach Malcolm Cameron fuming.

Clan, backed by Aspray Glasgwo West, ended the weekend pointless after a 4-2 defeat at Manchester Storm on Saturday and Cameron vowed to stop the rot.

He confirmed that changes won't happen before Christmas but vowed: "It's either may way or the highway."

Clan fans have seen their favourites lose three of their last four games and Sunday was a major blow.

Cameron, who has coached in North America and Europe, admitted: "Right now, we are a team that does not score a lot of goals so we need to defend very heavily and we have not been doing that for the past two weeks.

"We have been giving up stupid, daft goals, bad turnovers and that comes back to bite us.

"For me that's not our identity, that's not what our hockey club is about, it is not what makes us run and you are either

onboard or not, it's either my way or the highway."

The straight-talking Canadian added: "It's disappointing for the guys that do it every night and 40 minutes is not enough. We need to play for 60 minutes.

"We played a heck of a game (against Cardiff) for 40 minutes. Killed off two five-on-three situations, blocked shots, we scored some nice goals but you have to do it for 60 minutes, the game is 60 minutes."

The weekend double-whammy means Clan are eighth in the ten-strong table with 11 pints from 13 outings while Sheffield are in pole position with 27 points from 17 games.

Looking ahead to the midweek trip south to The House of Steel, the playcaller said: "They are all tough, whether you are playing at home or on the road. You come to play. A lot of hockey is man-on-man and you lose your check that's your responsibility. To do some of the things we did in the third period (on Sunday) which cost us two points or even a point is the thing I can't accept.

"Four goals in the final period is not acceptable to me, the organisation or the fans. I am going to put a stop to it. We're not going to be able to do that before Christmas, we are talking long-term. Right now we don't have everybody buying in."