

Commonwealth Games here we come

Sarah Jamieson (pictured) was at her desk before attending a media day for Scotland women's hockey team ahead of the Commonwealth Games.

Yes, Scotland are in the fortunate position of having five members of the Great Britain squad in their ranks, but other members of the squad are teachers, some, like medical student, Ellie Wilson, had key university exams this week, while others juggle jobs and their hockey hobby.

Facing the Tartan Hearts in Birmingham will be teams in the world's top ten, like Australia, who boast full-time athletes.

That simple fact underlines the gulf that coach Chris Duncan and the 18-strong squad have to bridge if they want to make a real impact in the tournament.

The playing field is not level but, however, there is cautious optimism that Scotland can compete with the best, particularly as the Games are only down the M6, under six-hours drive, but only on a good day.

Edinburgh-based Jamieson, a private client solicitor at T C Young, stressed that the emphasis in the final days of training has been to make final tweaks which could tip the balance between success and failure.

The former Grove Menzieshill player added: "Yes, we have been preparing for most of this year and even last year, but we must be aware of the teams we are playing and how they approach their games.

"There is a lot of fine tuning but realistically it is all about how we adapt as we, very much, want to keep our system."

Scotland open against South Africa (world No 16, session from 9am to 12.30, July 29) in Birmingham and then follow-up against New Zealand, ranked No 8 in the world (July 30, 19.00 to 22.30), Kenya (ranked 37, August 1, 9am to 12.30) and finish their pool against the mighty Hockeyroos from Australia, ranked No 3 on the planet, in the morning session starting from 9am to 12.30.

A real benefit to the Scots, however, in the build-up is that a number of the teams have played in the World Cup ahead of their appearance in Birmingham.

Footage of those games has been sourced and the Scotland coaching staff have studied the patterns of play in-depth to glean as much as they can before facing them on the pitch at the University of Birmingham.

Jamieson, who has also played for Edinburgh side Inverleith, and has the distinction of being the first ladies player to represent Scotland at a Commonwealth Games, added: "We have four group games, but we're definitely approaching this competition with a mind-set of one game at a time.

"The games are all very different and the four countries have a very different style of play. It is one game at a time.

"We start against South Africa and have New Zealand the next day then we have quite a big gap before the next game."

She revealed that players have various ways of chilling during a training camp or during a tournament and Jamieson said: "Some just switch off and catch up on sleep, some of the girls have been working as teachers and are recovering from term time.

"I've been finishing off work. I was working this morning (Wednesday) and tomorrow morning (Thursday) before going on annual leave."

The squad believe that there will be a Tartan Army of fans – family and friends – making the trip to the Midlands, and that is a massive lift.

And that's a huge difference from Jamieson's first Commonwealth Games. She made her debut four years ago in the Australian Gold Coast when Scotland came seventh.

She added: "Every Games are different. The Gold Coast was my first one and it was all very new, it was at the other side of the world, and a totally different experience.

"It was a whole different situation in the build-up too and we are calling this a home game as we are in Britain.

"Four years ago we headed out (to Australia) four weeks before the event and that first week of training we were so jet-lagged.

"We went from the (freezing cold) Beast from the East temperatures to over 30c and great humidity and it took around ten days there before we felt normal again.

"Here, we've been training and preparing at Peffermill (in Edinburgh) where we train a lot and that is just around the corner from where some of the girls live.

"There were no stresses about taking half your life with you in a suitcase and so this is something we need to make the most of."

The heat in the last few days of training at Peffermill, she confirmed, had been intense, with record temperatures recorded in Britain, but the 28-year-old added: "It certainly is unusual."

She plays at the University of Edinburgh Playing Fields for Edinburgh club Watsonians, recently crowned Premiership and League champions, and she admitted: "I've seen Peffermill this year in just about every weather situation possible.

“If there are high temperatures (in Birmingham) we must make sure we are hydrated properly.”

It has not, however, been all training and no fun. Monday was a team building exercise with the Army at Redford Barracks and it was not too physical, thankfully.

The highlight was being bussed to Edinburgh Castle to be centre stage as the One O’Clock Gun was fired and that had particular significance for Jamieson, a city centre office worker.

She added: “Our office is in George Street. I hear the gun every day so it was nice to get VIP access to the firing, it was exciting.”

Scotland’s squad felt special that day and the Games are special for the athletes, the highlight of some of their careers.

Now their travelling fans hope for something special when the girls start their campaign in Britain’s second city next week.