

Duncan can't wait to face the elite in Europe next summer

Head coach Chris Duncan can't wait for summer 2023 when Scotland's women go in against some of the world's top teams in the A Division of the EuroHockey Championships in Germany.

The date for your diary is August and Scotland qualified for the top tier on Monchengladbach after beating Austria 4-0, France 2-0 and Switzerland 4-2 in Dunkirk, a tournament which followed a sixth placed finish in the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Now back in Edinburgh, Duncan said: "France was mission accomplished for us. It has been a long hard summer and our main mission was to get into A Division and play in the top tier of European hockey and we have achieved that.

"Our long-term ambition is to be a top ten nation and we realise that to do that we have a long way to go, but we have to be testing ourselves against top teams."

He had mixed feelings after the victory over Switzerland in their final game in France as Scotland led 4-0 and let in two goals, one at the end of the third quarter and another at the start of the final session.

Duncan, who is also head of hockey at The Edinburgh Academy, added that being top seed in a tournament, as they were in France, is not something the squad is used to.

He added: "We pride ourselves in being the underdog and to be the one who is dictating the tempo is something you have to learn over time. We have to get better at managing that expectation.

"Overall, I was really proud that we were able to go out and

get the job done and we picked up some more valuable ranking points. We have also had great tournament experience this summer, which is also important.”

Three new caps have been introduced to the team this summer, all of which are bedding in really well, and Duncan said it is more than just the outcome, it is also the process which is important.

Looking back at the result against Switzerland, Duncan said: “It is a strange feeling. We have a lot of disappointed girls. It was nice to win but not to concede two goals.

“To be honest, losing those goals was probably the remnants of a long summer. It is hard to be at the top of your game all the time and it is hard to play flamboyant, exciting hockey all of the time.

“When we got to 4-0 everyone recognised it was job done and it is hard not to switch off, but to get to where we want to get to you can’t switch off, However, I am amazingly proud of the group. They have put in a massive effort over the summer and it is just reward to get back to the big time for us.”

The group have played 21 matches since May, winning 15, drawing two and losing four and Duncan said: “One of our biggest values in the programme is people because we work with people.

“They are lawyers, some of them are doctors, others students and we have some teachers and they give up a lot to represent our country and we don’t have them together that much.

“What we have been able to achieve is pretty impressive, but we have a group which cares for each other and works hard for each other and we have had some tough times this summer, but we have also seen some good times too.

“Overall, we have a young team and we have young players in

pivotal areas of the pitch. That means we are piling a lot of pressure on people who are relatively new to the international scene.

“Also, some of our key players are the right side of 30 and we have a group here that we can work with over the next four or five years.”

Duncan will bring the players back into training after a short break and said: “I think one of the problems we have had in Scotland in recent years is that we have given the players too much time off.

“We will give the players the down time they deserve, but we are not going to Monchengladbach next summer to make up the numbers and we do not want to be back at the qualifying tournament in two years time.

“We wanted to medal at the Commonwealth Games this summer. We didn’t manage to do that, but we set high aspirations and we want to go to the Europeans next summer and be in and around those medal matches.

“We have got to use all the time we have. August in Monchengladbach with some of the top teams on the planet. That is some prospect and I can’t wait.”

PICTURE: Scotland women in action earlier this summer against Italy at Peffermill. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***