

No room for error for Scotland women in EuroHockey qualifiers in France

Scotland make two changes from their Commonwealth Games squad as they aim to book their status amongst the elite of women's European hockey.

Emily Dark, the 22-year-old, Tayside-based player, who won the Premiership and Scottish Cup with Edinburgh side Watsonians last season, replaces, Dundee-born but Glasgow-based, Becky Ward (Western Wildcats), who has retired from international hockey, in the 18-strong squad.

Perth-born Ruth Blaikie, who lives in Amsterdam, comes in for newly-qualified dentist Millie Steiger (Clydesdale Western) from Sorn in Ayrshire who is unavailable because of work commitments.

Blaikie starred for Scotland in the recent under-21 European Championship in Ghent and should earn her first senior cap during the tournament.

Scotland are ranked above all their opponents at No 17 in the world and open their campaign in Dunkirk against Austria, rated No 31, on August 24 followed by hosts France, ranked No 25, on August 25 and finish against Switzerland, rated No 40, on August 27.

Scotland must win all of the games to cement their place in the top flight. Second and third place will qualify for EuroHockey Championship II and bottom place team qualifies for EuroHockey Championship III.

Chris Duncan, Scotland's head coach, said that this summer has always been about the EuroHockey qualifiers.

He added: "We were excited to compete at the Commonwealth Games and put on a good showing, finishing sixth

"However, if we want to keep moving forward towards our goal of becoming a top ten nation, then we have to play against the

best teams and that means qualifying for the EuroHockey Championships.”

Duncan, who is also director of hockey at The Edinburgh Academy, said: “It’s going to be a big challenge (in France), but playing in Birmingham against Australia, ranked No 3 in the world, New Zealand, rated No 8, Canada, ranked 15, South Africa (No 20) and Kenya (No 37) sets a great standard for this event.

“Now, we need to bring the pace and quality of our play in the Commonwealth Games to Dunkirk and, maintaining that standard, can make us very difficult to come up against.”

He added: “Ruth (Blaikie) plays in the third tier of hockey in Holland and is a like-for-like replacement for Millie (Steiger) in midfield and she was, according to reports, outstanding in the Europeans last month. This is a great opportunity for her.

“Emily (Dark) comes in for Becky (Ward) and her set-piece plays are an option for us, but this is going to be a tough tournament for us, everybody needs to be focused for all games, and we need to win all our fixtures, there is no other option.”

Scotland: Amy Costello (The University of Edinburgh), Amy Gibson (Der Club An Der Alster, Germany), Bronwyn Shields (Clydesdale Western), Charlotte Watson (Loughborough University), Ellie Wilson, Sarah Jamieson and Emily Dark (Watsonians HC), Eve Pearson, Jess Ross, Katie Robertson, Louise Campbell (The University of Edinburgh), Fiona Burnet, Nicola Cochrane and Jen Eadie (Wimbledon), Heather McEwan (Royal Victory, Belgium), Robyn Collins (Surbiton HC), Ruth Blaikie (AMVJ, Holland), Sarah Robertson (captain, Hampstead & Westminster)