

Scotland edge France to stay top of EuroHockey qualifiers

EuroHockey qualifiers: Scotland 2, France 0 (in Dunkirk)

Heather McEwan squeezed the ball home to secure a crucial 2-0 win for Scotland over hosts France in the EuroHockey qualifiers in Dunkirk.

The precious strike, 58 seconds from the end of the third quarter, proved pivotal as desperate France tried to claw their way back into the contest played in ideal, cloudy conditions with a light, sea breeze.

Earlier, Fiona Burnet latched onto a loose ball to slot home five minutes into the same quarter to break the deadlock against the physical French side backed by a large, vocal support.

It was Belgian-based McEwan's first goal in a Test match for the Tartan Hearts and she admitted later that it was all a bit of a blur.

Her counter means Scotland, ranked No 18 in the world, have to beat minnows Switzerland, ranked No 40, in their final game on Saturday to secure a place in the top flight of European hockey.

The Scots edged Austria, ranked No 31, 4-0 on Wednesday in their opener and bustling McEwan, a recent addition to the squad, said the French proved tough opposition added: "We stuck to our game plan and now we know what we have to do, beat Switzerland."

Coach Chris Duncan praised his squad and said: "They made it difficult for us as they have ploughed a lot of money into their programme as France are hosting the Olympic Games in 2024.

“The girls kept their composure and now we have our third cup final coming up. We have won our first two and it is vital that we keep our foot firmly on the pedal to secure our place in the top flight of European hockey.”

He added: “Of all the games we’ve played this year this one had the most pressure as the carrot for success is so significant. We want to be back in A Division so these games have always been the biggest target for us, so it’s great to get back-to-back wins.

“The players were really diligent today and worked hard with the crowd against us that shows great character. Tournament hockey is all about getting wins so we’ll be out to win our final game and finish the tournament strongly.”

PICTURE: Eve Pearson delivering a pass as Scotland beat France 2-0. Courtesy of Scottish Hockey