

Scotland's hopes for Euro Hockey League rest with Western Wildcats

Western Wildcats warmed-up for Europe by beating Erskine Stewart's Melville at Inverleith Playing Fields last weekend and on Saturday (17.15 Central European Time) they face a stern opening test against former winners and this year's hosts Harvestehuder THC in Europe's top hockey league in Hamburg.

Western come into the event in fine form having won their three opening Premiership games so far this term, scoring 18 goals and conceding one.

The Scots are making their return to the prestige event for the first time in 13 years and they are bidding to get past the first stage for the first time.

And they are excited to be playing the former tournament winners on their home pitch according to captain Rob Harwood.

Western travel with a full squad including Hamish Galt who passed a late fitness test after being sidelined with a hand injury.

Harwood (pictured by **Nigel Duncan**, a member of Scotland's international squad, added: "Playing Harvestehuder at their home pitch will be a brilliant experience. There will be a big crowd and we expect it to be a great spectacle.

"They have a squad full of talented players and it will be a really tough game but, from our point of view, it is important we give a good account of ourselves and we will need to be on top form in order to compete."

He added: "We have a strong squad and great belief in our ability so we can't wait to get going."

Two Western stars have experience in the tournament. Evergreen striker Jonathan Christie and goalkeeper Gavin Somerville, and their coach, former player, Vishal Marwaha, has also played in

the event, the pinnacle of European hockey.

He said: "We are excited to be a part of it and these are the games you want to be involved in."

Three Western players also have international experience as they were in Scotland's Commonwealth Games squad in Birmingham.

They are Callum Duke, Harwood and free-scoring Andrew McConnell who has netted seven goals in domestic competition so far this term.

Western's confidence is on a high having won the Premiership, Scottish Cup and indoor cup last season and they were runners-up in the EuroHockey Club Trophy II with the help of six goals from McConnell.

But they will need to be at their best against Harvestehuder who are making their first appearance in the event since 2016 when they won a bronze medal in Barcelona.

They are previous winners having won gold on their debut in 2014 and a number of players from that squad are still involved including Austrian Michael Körper, one of the competitions most prolific scorers with 20 goals in 12 fixtures.

He netted in the shoot-out to win in the 2014 Grand Final and the team also includes English-born George Farrant, plus South Africans Nick Spooner and Kilian Pöhling, two players from the Argentine and a Welshman, Hywell Jones.