

Women's hockey – France 4, Scotland 1 in Marseille

Scotland women's head coach Chris Duncan challenged his squad to defy the sweltering heat and put on a show against a French side heading towards the Paris Olympic Games in 2024.

The Tartan Hearts lost 4-1 in the first of two tests as the thermometer hit nearly 40°C in Marseilles and the second clash is on Saturday at 11am local time.

The girls admitted they shed litres of fluid during the game and they certainly competed in spells, but the heat-sapping temperature meant they were unable to maintain their normal ball-winning intensity.

Scotland had chances but the cutting edge was missing and that is key as the squad continue their build-up to the EuroHockey Championships, Group A, in Germany in August.

The French undoubtedly had a point to prove as they were edged by Scotland in Durkirk last summer for a slot among the top flight of European hockey in Mönchengladbach.

Duncan said that Scotland's ball-winning has been pivotal in their development so far and added: "We played better in the second half (when the temperature dropped) and we have more to show on Saturday."

The coaching staff kept out of the sun on Friday with a series

of meetings but up-beat Duncan continues to take a long-term view and said: "This series is about building, not just for this year, but for the long-term, and this (series) is part of our journey."

Scotland are likely to face high temperatures in Germany and the games in France were agreed to as part of that acclimatisation process.

Yes, Scotland may slip down the rankings from 17 with Thursday's defeat to a country several slots below them in the world, but rankings will fluctuate, particularly during pre-Olympic year, as teams experiment.

And the coach added: "The work done here will help push us forward towards where we want to be. We will debrief and learn for Saturday to try and put on a show that characterises who we want to be."

Dundee-raised Charlotte Watson grabbed Scotland's only goal of the match and it arrived in the third quarter with Scotland 2-0 down at the time. She calmly slotted low past the French goalkeeper after Amy Costello had flicked the ball on from a penalty corner and it was stopped on the line by a defender's body.

Earlier, Marie Simon had opened the scoring with a deflection on the left side of the D following a penalty corner award and Eve Verzura made it 2-0 from another penalty corner deflection.

Watson's goal lifted spirits but Verzura killed Scotland's hopes with her second and France's third from another penalty corner to make it 3-1 and Yohanna Lhopital finished the scoring in the final quarter to make it 4-1.



France v Scotland in Marseille PHOTO Jacques Ginola