

Scotland square-up to EuroHockey elite in Germany

Scotland's national women's hockey squad head to A Division next week, the pinnacle for hockey in Europe, having qualified by beating France in Dunkirk.

Their Edinburgh-based coach, Chris Duncan, admitted it feels like yesterday when they qualified, but it was last August, and he added: "It seems like it has flown by.

"I spoke to the girls before our final training session and said that this is the culmination of a really tough ten months of preparation and it is the pinnacle, where everybody wants to be.

"We get to play against two teams ranked in the top five in the world in our qualifying group and we want to test ourselves against the best. We are really excited and we are in a really good place."

Duncan spoke at an eerily silent Peffermill after the girls had departed but in the HockeyPark, Monchengladbach, the squad open their campaign in Pool B on August 18 (19.30) against the hosts, Germany, before a packed house of nearly 10,000 fans.

Then the Tartan Hearts face Ireland 24-hours later (20.15) before squaring-up to England on August 22 (12.30)

Duncan said: "It is a huge change (from Peffermill) but that is what we prepared for. The crowd and that environment and we will try our best to silence the crowd but I think that will

bring extra energy.

“These girls work a lot and have a lot of choices to make to allow themselves to do it, but that intensity provides a different level of energy and we as Scots are underdogs and we love that tag.

“We go into that first game knowing that, for many, it will be the biggest crowd they will have played in front of and the biggest occasion they will have played in, there will be a huge crowd.”

In the last year, Scotland have played New Zealand and Australia in the Commonwealth Games, Australia and China recently in Holland, also England and Ireland, and Duncan said: “We are a team on the rise and the games we have been able to pick up show that the world is taking notice of that.”

The coach added: “We have a responsibility every time we step on the pitch whether it is training, whether it is an uncapped series, whether it is a capped series, whether it is a tournament, and we have to pay homage to the work we are trying to do and to the nation we are trying to be.

“We have competed with Australia and we drew with England 4-4 a few weeks ago and we can compete with the big hitters. We want to be one of them and the mindset that we are Scottish and can mix it with the best in the world is something we want to show when we are out in Germany.

“We know we can compete, we know it is going to be a challenge, but we want to show the world what we are capable of.”