

Tartan Hearts excited by European challenge

Scotland's women's hockey team have jetted to Germany for the EuroHockey A Division excited by the prospect of facing two teams in the top six in the world.

The Tartan Hearts open their campaign in Germany, ranked No 4 in the world, on Friday (August 18) in front of a sell-out 9,000 crowd at the SparkassenPark in Monchengladbach..

Then they square-up to Ireland, ranked No 13, on Friday and finish their Pool B games with a clash against England, rated No 6, on August 22. All games are at the same venue.

Captain Katie Robertson, who plays for The University of Edinburgh club, is originally from Freuchie in Fife but now lives in Crieff, Perthshire, and she leads a side which includes several members of the Great Britain squad.

However, the majority of the Scottish team is made up of students, office workers, a newly qualified doctor, a lawyer and teachers but Robertson relishes the opportunity which has now arrived after over ten months of intensive training.

Scotland, ranked No 18 in the world, qualified for the championships after a three-game winning run in Dunkirk last summer, beating hosts France on the way, a country who host the Olympic Games next year and who are investing a great deal of cash into creating a team to compete with the best on the greatest sporting stage of them all.

Robertson, a former junior equestrian champion, who quit riding after a fall from a horse competing in Wales when she was 13, said: "This event has come round really quickly. We've had games against teams we would not normally have played again. We've played Australia and China in the build-up and we have great depth in the squad.

"The Great Britain girls are now coming back in as well so everyone feels we are in a good position going into the European championships."

Friends and family are jetting to Germany to cheer on the team and Robertson said: "It will be a great atmosphere, opening game, opening night, and we can't ask for much better.

"We are all really excited about it and this is what as I wee girl I dreamed about, playing in Germany in A Division (of European hockey) in the opening match of a major event, and we all respect the opportunity to play in A Division."

Robertson, who was introduced to hockey at Kilgraston School, Bridge of Earn, by its then hockey director, Pauline Stott, a double Olympian and captain of the Great Britain squad at the Sydney Games in 2000, added: "We have an ideal balance of youth and experience in the team.

"We have experienced internationals, the girls coming back from Great Britain training, and they played Germany recently in the ProLeague, and some of us have played against Ireland and England.

"Now we have to go out there and perform. Yes, we have obvious target games, but all games in the European division are going to be tough. We are going out there to perform and you never know what is going to happen."

Robertson admitted: "The girls are all really excited and everybody will have nerves, but it is up to us to channel that."

PICTURE: Robertson fires for goal against Italy at Peffermill
captured by ***Nigel Duncan***