

Difficult decisions ahead for Letchford

Simon Letchford, head coach for women's elite development programme, England and Great Britain hockey, was in reflective mode as he stood on the pitch at Glasgow's National Hockey Centre following his side's narrow win over a young Scotland combine in the second of two weekend challenge clashes.

Letchford now has to make difficult decisions about who boards the plane to Chile for the up-coming world under-21 championships, but he was delighted to get two competitive games north of the Border as part of his build-up.

The talented England side lost the first game 3-1 at Uddingston against a stronger Scottish side but the 3-2 victory under the lights in Glasgow 24-hours later was pleasing for the coach.

He said: "Yes, I am happy with that. The challenge was that we wanted to win and we are always talking about performance being more important than victories and that is true, but but victories should be a by-product of playing well.

"You need to learn to win as well so I am happy that we won

this evening (Monday).”

He conceded: “Scotland played a slightly less experienced side than they did on Sunday night which gave us more opportunity, but we have five or six under-18 players here and their learning curve has been pretty steep. They were better than they were on Sunday (in the first game).

“We have got three more camps before we get on the plane to Chile in late November for the Junior World Cup which goes through the back of November and into December and there is a little pressure on as a few of them know that it is one side of the line or the other.”

Letchford admitted that selection was tough and added: “It is the worst part of the job. It is truly a horrible thing to have to go through for player, for parents and coaches and it is now but not yet.

“However, it is really important to play competitive games. That is easy if you are in Germany or Holland, Belgium, France, you can cross the border and play each other on a regular basis and it is really great to have the opportunity to come up here (to Scotland) and play against seniors.

“You get a physical challenge and a bit more experience than you do in an age-group environment. Yes, invaluable for us.”

The facts are that Maddie Axford netted a double and Georgie Gardens a single in a tight game played in perfect conditions in Glasgow.

Scotland’s strikes came from stand-in skipper Eve Pearson, who is now playing in Germany, netting on her 22nd birthday, and the oldest member of the Scotland side on the night, Watsonians player, Ellie Wilson, aged 23.

Chris Duncan, Scotland’s coach, said that he was absolutely delighted with both games. He added: “On Sunday, we had more

experienced players but on Monday we had younger players and the oldest player was 23.

“We have brought 11 new players into our squad and we have given them opportunities to play.”

Duncan added: “On Monday, we had an entire under-21 backline playing and that is exciting for us. Yes, we always want to win, which is important to us, but, at the same time, it is about working on things we do in training.

“I said in the huddle at the end, it is another journey and this is the start and I am really pleased with the hockey we played during the two games which gives us a barometer to work from.”

PICTURE: Scotland on the attack against England at Glasgow’s National Hockey Centre. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***