

# **Brave Scots hockey women give hosts Spain a scare**

**Chris Duncan believes that Scotland's senior women can do "real damage" to teams higher in the world rankings if they can continue the form they displayed in the final game of a three Test series against Spain who recently qualified for the Olympic Games.**

The new-look Tartan Hearts, with a number of young players experiencing playing against a top ten nation for the first time and minus their Great Britain players, lost 2-1 in Benalmadena in the final game.

Edinburgh-based Duncan, Scotland's head coach, said: "We were so close, we played brilliantly."

Spain, ranked No 7 in the world, only place below England, and a side who beat the full Great Britain side recently in the Olympic qualifiers, won 5-0 in the opening game against the Scots, ranked No 17, on Wednesday and 3-1 in the second clash on Thursday, but Duncan said: "This (on Friday) was a real contest and it had that competitive buzz to it.

"Although it is frustrating to lose, the improvement we made over the three games was fantastic."

Goalkeeper Jess Buchanan (Exeter University) was outstanding in the triple-header and, overall, Duncan added: "We've seen a

big jump up in our play. These performances have not only been good for the new players in the squad, but also for those taking on leadership positions.

“We’ve played a top side who beat GB three weeks ago and, if we bring this tempo to the games against teams around us in the rankings, we’ll do a lot of damage. This has definitely been a worthwhile trip.”

In the final game, the Scots were undone by a late goal and it was the hosts who broke the deadlock from a penalty corner early on as Scotland struggled to find a rhythm after two hard matches in two days.

Scotland, however, upped their game and bagged a well-deserved equaliser. Ellie Mackenzie (Loughborough University) won the ball in the press and carried it forward before picking out Sophie Hinds (The University of Edinburgh) who eased into the circle and calmly flicked the ball into the back of the net for 1-1.

The Scots continued to cause problems and were electric on the break but they could not find a way through and the sides were deadlocked at 1-1 at the half-time break.

Duncan’s squad continued their controlled possession in the early stages of the second-half and had the ball in the back of the net for a second time, Heather McEwan, who plays club hockey in Belgium with Royal Victory, finishing off a move, but it was ruled out for hitting a foot in the build-up.

However, Scotland continued to press and Lunjika Nyirenda (The University of Edinburgh) attacked down the right, but the Spanish goalkeeper blocked her shot.

Scotland remained in determined mood and continued to drive forward. Watsonians striker Sarah Jamieson picked out Ruth Blaikie (The University of Edinburgh) and the Perth-born player fired a shot across goal which narrowly missed the

target.

Then, Eve Pearson (Grossflottbeker, Germany) found Zara Kennedy (The University of Edinburgh) who deflected the ball inches wide.

However, with three minutes left, Scotland were caught out as Spain scored on a counter-attack despite two tremendous saves by Buchanan.

PICTURE: A focused Sophie Hinds warming-up for Scotland in Glasgow. Ruth Blakie is behind her. Picture by ***Nigel Duncan***