

Duncan believes Scotland are 'making progress'

Chris Duncan, Scotland women's hockey head coach, was proud of his squad despite losing 3-1 to Olympic-bound Spain in the second of three Test matches in Benalmadena.

The hosts moved into a 2-0 lead but a flowing move ended with Belgian-based Heather McEwan netting for 2-1 before Spain claimed a third. They won the first match 5-0 and the final clash is on Friday.

Duncan said: "This was a hell of a game, a proper contest, and we're proud of the performance."

He said it is exciting to see the progress of the squad in just one day against a side ranked no 7 in the world. Scotland are ten places below their hosts.

Edinburgh-based Duncan added: "You could really see players find their feet at this level. Ultimately, we're not chasing Spain right now, they're seventh in the world and off the back of an Olympic qualifier.

"Our programmes are in different phases. We're chasing the teams just above us in the rankings and games like these will really help us do that.

"So, it's two games down and one to go. It'll be difficult tomorrow (Friday) and a challenge for us to back up today's

performance, but we're making good progress."

Scotland made a solid start to game two and created the first chance, creative play from Fran Lonergan and Bronwyn Shields leading to a penalty corner for the Tartan Hearts, but the Spanish defence stood firm.

It was Spain who took the lead with three minutes of the opening quarter to play following a penalty corner strike and the second quarter saw Spain enjoy periods of possession.

The hosts were rewarded when they doubled their advantage after Scotland lost the ball in the opposition circle. A counter through the middle of the pitch resulted in a penalty stroke and the ball was smashed into the top corner for 2-0.

Sarah Jamieson, however, provided a scare for Spain with an effort which flew inches wide of a post after good work by Georgia Jones and the second half saw Scotland get a foothold following a tweak to their press.

Their efforts were rewarded with a fine goal from a flowing move. Katie Birch, who produced another impressive performance, broke down the left and played a give-and-go with Millie Steiger. She picked out Jones who fed McEwan who finished superbly for 2-1.

The final quarter was edged by Spain and the hosts completed the scoring for a 3-1 win despite the efforts of goalkeeper Jess Buchanan. She produced a number of great stops topped by a double save.

PICTURE: Bronwyn Shields (left) in training with Scotland. She set up an early chance for the Scots in Spain. Picture **Nigel Duncan**