

Spain triple-header for Scots hockey women

Scotland's senior women's hockey team edged Spain 2-1 last summer in the European A Division in Germany, and they jet to Spain on Monday for three matches against their hosts who are preparing for the Olympic Games in Paris having recently qualified.

It's a tough test for the new-look squad who will parade some fresh faces as bosses look to extend their Pathway development process by allowing young talent to rub shoulders with experienced internationals.

Chris Duncan (pictured during training last weekend at Peffermill), head coach, and his assistant, Jimmy Culnane, will not be able to call on Scotland's Great Britain squad players for this trip, and results are not top of the agenda.

However, the Spanish are still smarting from a 2-1 defeat by in Monchengladbach last summer. Duncan has yet to confirm the travelling party heading for the popular resort of Benalmadena on the Costa del Sol, but they have already had training at windswept and rain-soaked Peffermill Playing Fields, home of The University of Edinburgh, a contrast to the conditions they hope for in Spain.

Culnane said: "We are off to Spain for three games and they

are coming off the back of an Olympic qualifier and rebuilding and it should be a good trip. There might be a bit of a legacy from their defeat by us in Germany, but both groups have agendas that are looking forward.

“We are introducing some fresh faces and, for the Spanish, they are looking forward to the Olympics. The big picture is the important thing for us, this is our starting point for this summer and the European qualifiers, and we are very lucky to have the opportunity to play a quality side at this time of the year.”

Duncan said that Scotland have made a big change to the way their Pathway into the senior squad is structured and he added: “We are trying to identify those players with a high potential.

“It is great to see a new look around the squad, there is real energy, real vibrance and it is massively exciting as we are not just looking at the next few weeks or the next few months, we are looking much further ahead and how we can be a sustainable nation, playing teams at the top of the tree.

“We are also attempting to show young players with talent that there is a way into the senior team and that it is not so far away. Take Eve Pearson, she has played in the Commonwealth Games at the age of 21, she has also played in the European A Division.

“We have 18 and 19-year-olds in the squad and the years flash by and we must make sure that they get the opportunity to play and that they are ready to compete. It is also not just what we do with the senior team, it is about how successful the under-21 squad is and also through our age-groups so we create a stronger nation, not just a strong senior international team.”

Duncan also wants to stoke ambition with players in club sides, the ambition that they could possibly aspire to being

named in an international squad, and he said: "One of the biggest drawbacks we have is that we do not spend as much time as we would like with our athletes, but if the element of competition flows down into the domestic game then we benefit.

"We want that competition, we want people to see that they can challenge and we want more people to put their hand up to say: 'I want to be part of it.'"