

Scotland coach praises squad and staff

The Scotland's women's hockey squad touched down in London early on Wednesday after their flight home from South America and head coach, Chris Duncan, said he was "lost for words" to describe his squad.

They edged Japan 2-0 to claim fifth spot in their debut in the FIH Nations Cup hockey in Chile and, in doing so, rose to a highest ever world ranking.

Scotland are now No 15 on the planet and, significantly, they are seventh in Europe behind The Netherlands (No 1), Belgium (No 3), Germany (No 6), Spain (No 7), England (No 8) and Ireland, ranked No 11.

The Tartan Hearts squad overcame the heat, 34C in one match and 27C in their final game against Japan, after training in temperatures which were, on occasions, sub-zero before flying to South America.

The 34-year-old coach declared: "I could not be more proud of my team."

Edinburgh-based Duncan (pictured during a training session at The University of Edinburgh playing fields at Peffermill) had pre-game called on his squad to produce one final performance in what he called their "cup final", and they did against opponents who defended well and provided a tough challenge in the heat of Santiago.

Japan slip down to No 13 following the defeat by the Scots, and the women from Eastern Asia were ranked No 12 in the world before push-off in Santiago.

Duncan, a former director of hockey at The Edinburgh Academy, said: "I can't express my pride and delight at the way the players have approached this tournament.

"The results are wonderful but the performances are indicative of the growth that they have made, the changes in their belief and their desire to always want more."

Scotland also played Ireland and New Zealand ranked No 10, losing 3-0 to Ireland and 3-1 to New Zealand, in their other Pool B games in Chile and the coach added: "We have competed in every single game we have played here in this tournament and have beaten two sides (Japan and Korea) ranked above us.

"We have done it playing a very unique and very Scottish brand of hockey."

He added: "This group has the capacity to keep getting bigger and they have so much pride about what they do. The way they have gone about their business this week makes the staff and Scottish Hockey and the country proud.

"The staff have done a brilliant job, not just here in Santiago, but in the months in the build-up to this during a pretty cold and dark winter, to get these athletes ready to perform in a tournament of this scale and magnitude.

"To deliver two wins is huge, especially when we are under pressure against teams ranked above us like Korea and Japan, and I am absolutely thrilled for them (the team) in terms of what they have achieved.

"I am excited about what comes next, not just for our group and our senior team, but what this does for the sport in the country."

Goals from Edinburgh-born, former Inverleith player, Amy Costello, an Olympian, who now plays her domestic hockey in The Netherlands, who was appearing in her 151st international game (Great Britain and Scotland combined), and Fiona Burnet, who plays domestic hockey in Spain, in five crucial minutes of the final quarter in Chile secured the win over Japan.