

GREAT BRITAIN



Baku 2015 Water Polo Media Pack

@ENGWaterPolo

GREAT BRITAIN

Meet the players and head coach who will be representing GB at this summer's European Games in Baku



Grace Rowland



Lucy Shaw



Beth Ward



Kathy Rogers



Hayley Price



Lara Partridge



Mhairi Nurthen



Verity McCoy - Vice Captain



Fleur Kennedy



Sophie Jackson



Hannah Edwards



Dani Brazier



Izzy Dean - Captain



Nick Buller - Head Coach

**Additional members of
Great Britain Water Polo**

**Team manager /
Assistant Coach:
Sue Webb**

**Assistant Coach:
Ant McGuinness**

**Team Doctor:
Adrian Lim**

**Physio:
Victoria O'Donnell**

BAKU FIXTURES

Baku local times shown (GMT +4hrs)



**Friday, June 12th, 13.45
Greece v Great Britain**



**Saturday, June 13th, 16.45
Great Britain v Germany**



**Sunday, June 14th, 16.45
Netherlands v Great Britain**



**Monday, June 15th, 15.00
Great Britain v Israel**



**Tuesday, June 16th, 18.00
Hungary v Great Britain**



COACH'S REPORT

Head coach Nick Buller talks about the tough qualifying process and how he's aiming for a top 10 finish in the European Games

GBR
WATER POLO

GBR
WATER POLO

Qualifying for the Baku European Games was a fantastic result. The tournament in Nice was a great occasion and to finish in the top two was fully deserved after all the hard work the team has put in over the past few years.

First up in qualifying was Portugal, who we beat comfortably 26-3. We then faced a really difficult game against the Czech Republic the following morning.

If you look at the histories of the two sides, the Czechs would have been clear favourites, as they have finished as high as 2nd before in a European Championships and have a much better pedigree.

As expected, the match was tough and although we drew 8-8, it's a game we maybe should have won. But to then face France that afternoon, after they'd had the morning off, was even tougher.

Under very difficult circumstances, including the start being delayed, we played brilliantly, but we just came up short and lost by a single goal.

The girls then responded magnificently with a great performance in our final game against Switzerland. We dominated each quarter to win 30-0, meaning we needed the French to beat the Czechs, so we would qualify on goal difference.

We watched that match from the stands and everyone was nervous, but France won 14-7, meaning we were going through.

When the girls realised they'd qualified, they were ecstatic. There's a great video of them counting down the last 10 seconds of the France v Czech Republic game.

The celebrations were great to see and they fully deserve to be going to Baku as

it's everything they've trained for and all their efforts ultimately paid off.

As with qualifying, the tournament in Baku will have its challenges and the level of competition will be even higher.

It's well known the funding for GB water polo was cut to zero and we'll be facing countries like Hungary, Netherlands and Greece who all have well-established professional set-ups.

With no financial backing, the conditions in this country are very difficult. To get the squad together we have to rely on the parents, or family, to get the players to training, as they're the ones who have to pay for the girls to travel to sessions.

Another challenge is our girls are currently in the middle of taking their exams. We'd have liked to have spent more time together in May, but it hasn't been possible because they've had to study. Some will also be sitting their exams out in Baku at the British Embassy.

We'll have to work the training around their studying and it's something we've

had to look at. Their education is the most important thing in these girls' lives, but water polo comes a very close second.

In Baku we will be aiming to finish as high as possible and I think a top 10 finish would be a great achievement. Teams like Hungary, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Russia and Greece all have well-funded professional set-ups and are training twice a day, all year round. Germany have invested massively for Baku as well, as they also see these Games as a huge prize.

Ultimately, this tournament is part of a journey for this GB team. We will learn from every game and we will be better for the next one, so I have no doubt we will come away from Baku as a much stronger team.

After seeing what the London 2012 women's team achieved [qualifying for two European Championships, one World Championships and reaching the quarter-finals of London 2012], our attitude is if funding can be found, why can't these girls go on and achieve the same, if not more? It's not going to happen over night, but they've shown us they're more than capable and the talent is there.

'A top 10 finish would be a great achievement'



PLAYER BIOS...



Beth Ward

Beth Ward
Age: 16
Position: Driver
Home town: Plymouth
Beth has been involved in the England talent programme for the last two years. Scored five goals in qualifying in Nice.



Kathy Rogers

Kathy Rogers
Age: 16
Position: Centre-back
Home town: New Milton
Kathy has been competing for GB for four years having taken up water polo at the age of eight. Scored 11 goals in qualifying.



Mhairi Nurthen

Mhairi Nurthen
Age: 17
Position: Driver
Home town: Wallington
Mhairi's career highlight was playing at the 2014 European Club Championships in Imperia, Italy. Scored two goals in qualifying.



Fleur Kennedy

Fleur Kennedy
Age: 16
Position: Centre-forward
Home town: Wolverhampton
Fleur names her selection for the Baku 2015 European Games as her career highlight. Scored eight goals in qualifying.



Sophie Jackson

Sophie Jackson
Age: 15
Position: Goalkeeper
Home town: Halifax
Sophie has been representing GB for one year, having taken up water polo at the age of 11 after getting involved in a monthly session at her local swimming club.



Lucy Shaw

Lucy Shaw
Age: 16
Position: Driver
Home town: Wallasey
Twitter: @lucyshawww
Lucy names her selection for the Baku 2015 European Games as her career highlight. Scored seven goals in qualifying.



Hayley Price

Hayley Price
Age: 16
Position: Goalkeeper
Home town: Manchester
Twitter: @hayleyprice98
Hayley names her selection for the Baku 2015 European Games as her career highlight.



Lara Partridge

Lara Partridge
Age: 17
Position: Centre-back/Driver
Home town: Crawley
Twitter: @lara_partridge
With the England talent programme for three years having taken up water polo aged 11. Scored three goals in qualifying.



Verity McCoy - Vice Captain

Verity McCoy
Age: 16
Position: Centre-back
Home town: Liverpool
Twitter: @VerityMcCoy1
Verity has been representing GB for three years having taken up water polo at secondary school. Scored five goals in qualifying.



Izzy Dean - Captain

Izzy Dean
Age: 16
Position: Driver
Home town: London
Names her selection for the Baku 2015 European Games as her career highlight. Scored nine goals in qualifying. Captain since August 2014.



Hannah Edwards

Hannah Edwards
Age: 17
Position: Driver
Home town: Dundee
Twitter: @hannah_edwards3
Hannah has been involved in the England talent programme for three years. Scored five goals in qualifying.



Dani Brazier

Dani Brazier
Age: 16
Position: Centre-forward
Home town: Chelmsford
Twitter: @danibrazier
Has competed for GB for the last three years, having taken up the sport in 2011 aged 12. Scored seven goals in qualifying and was voted player of the tournament in a pre-qualifying tournament in Slovakia.



Grace Rowland

Grace Rowland
Age: 17
Position: Driver
Home town: Greater Manchester
Twitter: @gracerowland98
Grace has competed for GB for the last three years. Top GB scorer in qualifying with 14 goals. Won the senior club British Champs with Liverpool in 2015.

CAPTAIN IZZY DEAN

GB captain Izzy Dean explains what it means to be a part of Team GB at the Baku 2015 European Games



The qualifying tournament in Nice was a great experience and playing against such tough international opposition was great preparation for the European Games. We were ranked third in France, so

it was an incredible achievement to upset the odds by finishing second.

Knowing we will be representing Team GB out in Azerbaijan is a fantastic feeling, but I doubt it will really sink in until we play our opening match against Greece.

Individually, every one in our squad has invaluable personal strengths, whether that's speed, endurance or a powerful shot.

We're all very close and one of our greatest strengths is our teamwork, as we all support and complement each other.

Over the past few months, we've been training really hard for Baku – with our clubs and also when we've been able to all get together – in

Cardiff and Crystal Palace.

As well as preparing for the Games, a lot of us are busy with exams, so managing revision and training has been a challenge, but we'll be ready for every game.

We always expected a tough draw for Baku and we're under no illusions how difficult our group is, especially with Hungary, Holland and current champions Greece in it.

We can expect every opponent we face to be fast, physical and tough, but we will give it our all and we're aiming to do as well as we can in every match.

Whatever the result, simply being part of the first European Games is a huge achievement.

THE ROAD TO BAKU

Here's how Great Britain sealed qualification for Baku after finishing second in qualifying in Nice



Thursday, March 12th
Portugal 3 - 26 Great Britain



Shaw (5), Ward (2), Rowland (5), Kennedy (3), Edwards (2), Dean (5), Rogers (1), & Brazier (3)



Friday, March 13th
Czech Republic 8 - 8 Great Britain



Rowland (1), Kennedy (2), Edwards (1), Dean (1), Rogers (2) & Brazier (1)



Friday, March 13th
France 13 - 12 Great Britain



Rowland (4), Kennedy (1), Edwards (1), Dean (1), Rogers (1), McCoy (2) & Brazier (2)



Sunday, March 15th
Switzerland 0 - 30 Great Britain



Shaw (2), Ward (3), Partridge (3), Rowland (4), Kennedy (2), Edwards (1), Nurthen (2), Dean (2), Rogers (7), McCoy (3) & Brazier (1)

TOP SCORERS: Grace Rowland (14), Katherine Rogers (11), Izzy Dean (9), Fleur Kennedy (8), Danica Brazier (7), Lucy Shaw (7), Verity McCoy (5), Hannah Edwards (5), Bethany Ward (5), Larissa Partridge (3), Mhairi Nurthen (2).

GOALKEEPERS: Hayley Price & Sophie Jackson

GROUP A

Final Standings (Top two qualify for Baku 2015)

Pos	Team	P	W	T	L	GF	GA	PTS
1	France	4	4	0	0	69	23	12
2	Great Britain	4	2	1	1	76	24	7
3	Czech Republic	4	2	1	1	43	33	7
4	Portugal	4	1	0	3	16	61	3
5	Switzerland	4	0	0	4	11	74	0

COUNTDOWN TO BAKU

Here's how the Great Britain girls spent their final month of preparations ahead of the European Games


Coach Nick Buller and his squad faced a busy final few weeks as they fine-tuned their preparations for this summer's inaugural tournament. After dramatically securing their ticket to Azerbaijan in April with a second-place finish in qualifying in Nice, the team have worked tirelessly as they aim to make an impact in the former Soviet state.

"This last month has been all about training together as much as possible and working hard on our tactics," reveals Nick. "The girls have improved a lot over the past few years and we can't wait for the Games to begin."

Following on from the squad announcement in April, the girls met in Cardiff for the first of three intensive training camps. After a day in the Welsh capital, the team trained at the National Sports Centre in Crystal Palace, before travelling to Birmingham to receive their British Olympic Association kit at the NEC.

A tough game against a London 2012/Coventry mixed-side, who finished second in this year's women's British Championships, was also played at Loughborough University at the end of May.

The squad depart for Baku on



1ST EUROPEAN GAMES - BAKU 2015

12 – 21 June 2015

Water Polo

Draw



MEN				WOMEN	
Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group A	Group B
ITA	HUN	MNE	SRB	GRE	ESP
RUS	AZE	CRO	ESP	NED	ITA
FRA	GER	GRE	SVK	HUN	RUS
UKR	ROU	TUR	MLT	GER	SVK
				ISR	FRA
				GBR	SRB

Monday, June 8th, and the opening game of the tournament will take place on Friday, June 12th.

Great Britain have been drawn in Group A alongside Greece, Netherlands, Hungary, Germany and Israel, while Group B consists of Spain, Italy, Russia, Slovakia, France and Serbia. The top three from each will progress to the knockout stages, while the remaining teams will play

crossover classification games.

"We'll be looking for a top 10 finish," says Nick. "But we'll take one match at a time and look to win each game we play."

● You can follow the GB girls in Baku on Twitter @ENGWaterPolo and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/EnglandWaterPolo



GREAT BRITAIN WATER POLO

Here's a brief background on the recently-formed England Water Polo set-up in Great Britain and a look at why the future's looking bright again for the sport in the UK

Following funding decisions by UK Sport in early 2014, Water Polo along with many other team sports saw a sudden withdrawal in funding. This meant the senior men's and women's GB water polo teams were disbanded, as the funding for coaching, admin and support staff had vanished.

With the sport in dire straits nationally, and in the absence of a senior international presence, the creation of England Water Polo has brought new hope for the sport.

Established by the ASA in 2015, with the support of British Swimming, England Water Polo is the new volunteer-led governing body for water polo, and is working to develop a secure pathway in England for water polo players to make the transition from club water polo through to international level.

England Water Polo's current focus is supporting the national junior GB water polo teams, invigorating the junior performance pathway for athletes up to age 18, and creating a new performance pathway for the 18-21 year olds.

A further objective is the reforming of senior England Water Polo teams and reinvigoration of the national British Water Polo Championships.

Our remaining junior national water polo teams have been self-funded since 2014, and 2015 sees GB's junior teams returning and succeeding in international comps. The GB Women's U17 Water Polo Team has qualified through to the 1st European Games held under the auspices of the Olympic Committee in Baku in June, while the GB Women's U20 Water Polo Team will be competing in August at the FINA World Champs in Mexico. However, to date, all the team costs such as travel, hotels and coaches' expenses have been met by the athletes and their fundraising efforts.

Toughest sport in the world

The widely reported Bleacher Report suggests water polo is amongst the most difficult combining high levels of endurance, speed, strength, agility, skill and of course physicality.

GB water polo is even tougher

Unfortunately in the UK, the water polo experience is even tougher for national teams looking to make an impact on the international stage. Leading up to London 2012, the Women's National team received £2.4 million from UK Sport over two years to fund their campaign to the Olympic Games. Thereafter that senior funding was reduced to nil. While post-2012, the ASA continues to fund development of junior water polo athletes, decisions by UK Sport to focus funding on a sport's Olympic medal prospects has left senior water polo out in the cold. The challenge becomes one of creating an un-funded senior program from scratch to offer our talented juniors the opportunity to represent GB at senior level.

GB teams shine through adversity

GB junior water polo teams continue to show the depth of new talent in the sport in this country and offer a glimpse of how successful future senior GB teams could be. In March 2015, the GB U17 women's team fought through a tough qualification tournament in Nice, France, beating Portugal, Switzerland, drawing with the Czechs and losing by just one goal to the eventual winners, France, to qualify to be one of the 12 teams in Baku. Meantime, the men's junior team only just missed out on the opportunity to join the women's team in Baku, when they lost a crucial game by one goal in Malta.

Mindful of the strength of the opposition they will face, GB's coach Nick Buller is aiming to

finish in the top 10 in Baku this summer and then plans to build from there in the following seasons.

The Baku multi-sport European Games event, organised by the European Olympic Committee, and broadcast to 176 million people across the world, will see the GB team competing in a 10-day water polo tournament. Drawn in Group A against world leading teams Hungary, Greece and the Netherlands, and also Germany and Israel, the GB team will be at the top table of international polo.

Following the Baku games, the GB U20 women's team will travel to the FINA world champs to be held in Merida, Mexico, in August.

A bright future for GB Water Polo

In the face of funding and staffing cuts, the inspiring performance of our junior athletes pays tribute to their ability, hard work and dedication, and promises much for the future. Despite the challenges of the sport – both physical and financial – their example and the new leadership and vision for the sport in England gives hope for the future of water polo.

England Water Polo, as the sport's governing body in England, the largest of the three countries, manages the junior talent development program which is attended by athletes from all three countries and from which the GB team is selected. England Water Polo also provides leadership for the sport both in England and, in conjunction with Scottish and Welsh water polo, for Great Britain.





For further information about
England Water Polo, visit
www.facebook.com/EnglandWaterPolo
Twitter @ENGwaterpolo

Contact in UK/Baku:

Chris Dean
England Water Polo Comms Lead
Mobile: +44 790 5556 370
Email: cd@englandwaterpolo.org