



MALTA'S RUGBY SQUAD IN THE BALTICS

Category : Rugby

Malta's international rugby season kicks off this Saturday when the national team face Lithuania away in the European Nations Cup, Division 2A.

For the second consecutive year, the squad under the guidance of coach Damian Neill, is based at a training camp in Cirencester (UK) at the Duke of Gloucester Barracks where 26 hopeful players are undergoing four days of preparation and selection.

On Wednesday evening 22 players will be selected to travel to Siauliai in Lithuania on 28th October accompanied by Neill and team managers, Steve Busuttil, Danny Sacco and Steve Cilia.

While the squad enjoyed huge success last season finishing with its highest ranking to date – 48th in Europe – Damian Neill's men are under no illusions about the challenge ahead.

Malta beat the Baltic squad 22-18 at home in 2002. But, since then the Lithuanians have powered their way to successive victory.

Lithuania is ranked 39th in the IRB world rankings and are also world record holders for consecutive test victories, having won 18 successive matches ending in May this year with defeat to Ukraine.

Injury has taken its toll amongst previous Maltese squad members.

Mike Bonavia sustained an injury during a recent match at Marsa with Kavallieri, Matthew Mirabelli fractured his ankle during the last home win against Latvia and Oliver Sacco will miss this match since he and his wife are expecting their first child.

However, reports from the camp are encouraging with training going particularly well for brand new squad members including Mark Davey, Daniel Holliday, Lloyd Holiday, Andrew Dixon, Sam Borg and Jurgen Pavanello from Valletta RFC.

Returning to the squad are Kyle Mason and Harry Collins (UK) Paul Calgaro (Australia) and Vince Stivala now based at university in England.

Whatever the result, the squad returns to Malta early next week to hone their skills for a crunch home match against Latvia.

In April this year, the Maltese squad beat Latvia 27-10 and there is little doubt the boys will be looking to continue their winning run at home.

Saturday's clash gets underway at 14:30.