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Three stalwarts of the SPAR South African women's hockey team – Fiona Butler, Shelly Russell and Jen Wilson – make a welcome return to the team announced this week for two four-nations tournaments in Europe next month.

“It's very good to have them all back,” said national coach Jenny King. “The Olympic Games are just around the corner, and it's time we started consolidating and playing as a settled team.” Butler and Russell have both recovered from injury and Wilson was rested for a four-nations tournament and a series against Canada earlier this year. The first tournament, to be played in Dublin from June 11 to 15 pits South Africa against Ireland, Germany and Great Britain, and the second, in Rotterdam from Jun 24 to 28, sees South Africa take on the Netherlands, Great Britain and India. “They are both great preparation for the Olympic Games,” said King. “Germany have just finished second to Argentina in the Champions Trophy, and the Netherlands are always very tough competitors. We haven't played Great Britain for a couple of years, so it will be good to test ourselves against them. “Except for India and Ireland, who didn't qualify for the Olympics, we will all be going to Beijing. The Netherlands are in our pool at the Games, with Great Britain and Germany in the other pool, but the experience of playing strong teams like these will be invaluable.” King said the 16-member team for the Olympic Games was scheduled to be announced next week. “But we will be taking two extra players to Europe,” she said. “We need those two extra players to get some experience of being part of the national team, and it also means that we have two players who can step into position if we have any injuries. It also gives us the option of resting players during the European tour.” South Africa may conclude their tour of Ireland with two Test matches, to be played on June 18 and 19. SPAR SA Team. Mariette Rix (WP), Sanani Mangisa (Nor), Cindy Brown (WP), Taryn Hosking (WP), Vidette Ryan (WP), Lenise Marais (WP), Lisa Marie Deetlefs (SG), Fiona Butler (SG), Kate Hector (WP), Marsha Marescia (SG) Capt., Kathleen Taylor (WP), Tarryn Bright (WP), Lesle-Ann George (NW), Jen Wilson (Kzn), Vida Ryan (WP), Shelly Russell (WP), Henna Du Bussion (WP), Farrah Fredericks (WP). **Fixtures -- Dublin: South Africa v Ireland, June 11, South Africa v Great Britain, June 12, South Africa v Germany, June 14. Play-offs June 15. Fixtures -- Rotterdam: South Africa v Netherlands, June 24, South Africa v Great Britain, June 25, South Africa v India, June 27, Play-offs, June 28** Source: BLD Communications