



Samsonov awaits in first test for England

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England begin their quest to repeat their 2016 World Team Championships bronze medals against Belarus on Sunday.

The squad for the event in Halmstad, Sweden, is the same as featured at the Team World Cup in London in February, with Tom Jarvis rejoining the four – Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford, Sam Walker and David McBeath – who competed at the Commonwealth Games.

England, ranked No 12 in the world team list, are in Group C of the Championships Division and get their campaign under way at 4pm UK time against a nation ranked at 19 and featuring 42-year-old former World No 1 and six-time Olympian Vladimir Samsonov in their ranks.

Monday April 30 is set to be England's toughest day of the group stage as they face sixth-ranked Chinese Taipei at 9am, followed at 6pm by world No 3 team Japan.

The last two group matches are on Tuesday May 1, against Singapore (noon) and on Wednesday May 2 against Belgium (9am). England beat Singapore, who are world ranked 21, in the bronze medal match at the Commonwealths. Belgium are ranked at #14.



England show off their bronze medals at the last World Team Championships in 2016

Meanwhile, the women's team begin the new era without Kelly Sibley in the Second Division against Dominican Republic at 3pm on Sunday. The trio of Tin-Tin Ho, Maria Tsapsinos and Denise Payet then play Switzerland at 3pm on Monday, Chile at 9am on Tuesday, Canada at 6pm on Tuesday and Serbia at 3pm on Wednesday.

England Technical Director Alan Cooke said: "Kelly retiring is going to be a big loss for England table tennis. She's led from the front for many years, not only a very good player but also a very good ambassador for all the young players, with a great fighting spirit and work ethic.

"I'm sad she's retiring, especially on the back of the Commonwealth Games, where she had some great performances, but I'm also pleased she's going out on a high. It's been a pleasure to work with someone who always gave 100%.

"She always brought the team together and I'm sure they've learned a lot from the experience she's brought to the team. They will be sad to see her go but at the same time they are a young team who are developing and have got to make their own way."

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