



Drinkhall's Mixed message is all positive

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The European Championships kick off in Alicante next week – with half an eye already on the pathway to the Tokyo Olympics.

Mixed doubles joins the Olympic programme in 2020 and the Europeans mark the first step of one potential journey towards qualification.

The top eight pairs in Alicante will go forward automatically to the European Games in Minsk in 2019, with the winners of that event earning a place at the Olympics.

English players feature in two pairs in Alicante and the first of those is the well-known combination of Liam Pitchford and Tin-Tin Ho, silver medallists at the last two editions of the Commonwealth Games.

The other pair has been put together very much with Great Britain and the Olympic pathway in mind, with Paul Drinkhall pairing up with Charlotte Carey of Wales, who made history in July when she became the first Welsh player to enter the world's top 100.

That opened up potential new horizons, not just for left-hander Carey on an individual level but also for the Great Britain set-up and for Drinkhall with both Minsk and Tokyo in mind.

"Yeah, it's going to be interesting," agrees Drinkhall, "and a good challenge to add to everything else. I've never really thought about playing with Charlotte before but with Tokyo not far away and mixed doubles being an event there, we're trying it out.

"I've played mainly with right-handers in the last 10 years – I played with Darius (Knight) a lot when we were younger but probably no left-handers since then.

"It's going to be a bit different but it's exciting and we've got nothing to lose. We're going in with open minds that it will work well and hopefully next season, depending how it's going, we can work towards the European Games and Tokyo."

Drinkhall also believes the singles event is wide open, adding: "I'm in a good place for the singles and on a really good track fitness-wise and mentally.

"I've proved I can beat most if not all the European players and it's a very open tournament. I think I'm in a good place to do well."

Alongside Drinkhall, Pitchford and Ho, England's line-up in Alicante is completed by Sam Walker and Maria Tsaptsinos.

Check out the website tomorrow for Pitchford's thoughts on the Euros.

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