

Bardsley shines as England win

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Charlotte Bardsley won on her senior England debut to complete a brilliant 3-0 win for England women over Greece at Medway Park tonight.

But England men were beaten 3-1 by a battery of three Serbian left-handers in their European Championships Stage 1 clash, despite Tom Jarvis winning the first match.

Stourbridge youngster Bardsley beat Konstantina Paridi in three straight to set the seal on a dominant display from the England trio, with Tin-Tin Ho also winning in three and Maria Tsaptsinos in four to ensure England finished top of their group.

With two matches to entertain a crowd of well over 300, to say England made a fast start is understating it – Ho was 6-0 up against Aikaterini Toliou while the spectators were still settling in to their seats, while Jarvis on the other table went one better to lead Ivor Katic 7-0. Ho went on to take the game for the loss of a solitary point; Jarvis conceded only four.

Ho was quickly into her stride in the second as well, which she took for the loss of four points, ending it with a blistering forehand down the line, her hand a blur of motion.

Jarvis-Katic was a lot closer, though, with never more than two points in it. Jarvis was always in front at the business end of the set, leading 9-7, 10-9 and 11-10 before taking his chance to move 2-0 ahead.

Both players duly kept a stranglehold on their opponents, Ho taking the third game 11-6 and Jarvis 11-5 and England were 1-0 up on both tables with only around 20 minutes on the clock.



Tom Jarvis takes on Ivor Katic (picture by Michael Loveder)

The women kept their feet to the floor all the way. Tsaptsinos edged a tight first game against Georgia Zavitsanou, taking her third game point to win it 12-10, but the second was a more emphatic 11-4.

Zavitsanou fought back in the third, winning three points on the bounce from 8-8, but a brilliant point by Tsaptsinos at 3-1 up in the fourth game turned the tide decisively in her favour as, from a defensive position away from the table, the Englishwoman raced in to hammer a winner. Zavitsanou wilted and it was soon 11-3 to Tsaptsinos and 2-0 to England.

Bardsley, who had got the nod ahead of Denise Payet as third team member, settled very quickly and built to 10-5 ahead of Paridi. Her opponent saved two game points but not the third and Bardsley was on the board. A matching 11-7 scoreline in the second put her in control, though she trailed 5-2 in the third. Without any panic, Bardsley worked her way back to 7-7 and then took the next four to seal England's overall triumph in a smidgen over an hour.

The second men's match finished at the same time, Drinkhall having gone the distance in defeat to Zsolt Peto. The Englishman trailed 1-0 but came back to lead 2-1 in a match that was always close, with plenty of high-speed rallies.

In the end, a 10-5 lead for Peto proved too much to overcome, though Drinkhall did claw back three of the five match points before finally succumbing.

Walker was up against a formidable opponent in the shape of 42-year-old Aleksandar Karakasevic. Middle age may be showing around his middle, but the four-time European mixed doubles champion more than makes up for it with lightning hands and outstanding tactical nous.



Aleksandar Karakasevic (picture by Michael Loveder)

Close for most of the five games, Walker took the first 12-10 but lost the second 13-11 to a delicious drop-shot – not the first or last played by Karakasevic, who then added the third game 11-5.

The fourth saw Walker pull out from 3-4 to 9-4, only for the Serb to win the next five, aided at 7-9 by the ball practically walking along the net before deciding to drop in the Serb's favour. Walker, though, kept up his belief and won the next two to set up a decider.

The Englishman trailed 4-0 and 5-3, but then led 7-5 and seemed to be in pole position to complete victory. But the wily Karakasevic closed to 8-8 and won the next three points, sealing it with a rocket inside-out forehand.

The rollercoaster continued in the fourth tie as Jarvis took on Peto, winning the first 11-6 but then being edged out of the next two. An 11-0 blitz in the fourth seemed to have turned the momentum decisively in Jarvis' favour, but the fifth was nip and tuck. Jarvis led 5-2 at the Serbian timeout but then trailed 6-5, prompting his own timeout.

It seemed to have worked when Jarvis led 9-7, after Peto contested what he thought was an edge at 7-6 up, swiftly ruled as a clear miss by the umpires. Whether the perceived injustice inspired Peto only he will know. What is fact is that he won the next four points and then declined to shake Jarvis' hand – a sad and unnecessary end which saw him booed by the crowd. A pity, as he and Serbia had performed admirably.

Results

Serbia 3 England 1
Tom Jarvis bt Ivor Katic 3-0 (11-4, 12-10, 11-5)
Zsolt Peto bt Paul Drinkhall 3-2 (11-7, 8-11, 9-11, 11-9, 11-8)
Aleksandar Karakasevic bt Sam Walker 3-2 (10-12, 13-11, 11-5, 9-11, 11-8)
Peto bt Jarvis 3-2 (6-11, 12-10, 11-9, 0-11, 11-9)

England 3 Greece 0
Tin-Tin Ho bt Aikaterini Toliou 3-0 (11-1, 11-4, 11-6)
Maria Tsaptsinos bt Georgia Zavitsanou 3-1 (12-10, 11-4, 8-11, 11-3)
Charlotte Bardsley bt Konstantina Paridi 3-0 (11-7, 11-7, 11-7)

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