



When the Box rocked to the world's best

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Posted On: [December 27, 2018](#)

Commonwealth Games gold, Team World Cup bronze, a para world champion and a player into the world's top 20 with a string of impressive victories – it's fair to say 2018 has been an exceptional year for English table tennis.

Here, in part one of our review of the year, we take a look back at the ITTF Team World Cup, which saw the world's best players congregate at the Copper Box Arena on London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in February.

The iconic 'Box that Rocks' from the London 2012 Olympics lived up to its reputation, with thousands of spectators showing their appreciation for some scintillating table tennis.

England, [wearing their new Butterfly kit](#) for the first time, were represented in both the men's and women's competitions. The women's line-up of Kelly Sibley, Tin-Tin Ho and Maria Tsapsinos, with Denise Payet and Charlotte Bardsley completing the squad, were handed a tough draw and were [eliminated in the group stage](#), though they performed creditably against Hong Kong and Singapore.

The men's team of Liam Pitchford, Paul Drinkhall and Sam Walker, with David McBeath and Tom Jarvis also in the squad, were [beaten by Japan](#) in their opening match, despite Liam Pitchford defeating teenage sensation Tomokazu Harimoto, but [victory over Egypt](#) set up a quarter-final against Brazil.

Drinkhall & Walker started the ball rolling by claiming the opening the doubles and Pitchford then continued his sparkling form with victories over world No 16 Hugo Calderano and Eric Jouti to [put England through 3-1](#).

Waiting in the semi-finals were China and it was a pulsating encounter, particularly the match between Pitchford and world no 1 Fan Zhendong, which saw both players trading blows on equal terms, though the Chinese just about had enough at the business end of the games to claw out a 3-1 (11-9, 3-11, 11-9, 11-9) win. Nevertheless, he [spoke after the match of his respect for Pitchford](#) and his relief at having been able to win.

The doubles, and Walker's clash against world and Olympic champion Ma Long, were more one-sided as [China completed a 3-0 victory](#), but England had again shown they could mix it with the best, earning a bronze medal in the process.



The England squad with their bronze medals (picture by Alan Man)

The finals were both contested between China and Japan, in front of an enthusiastic capacity crowd, and it was the Chinese who were celebrating as first the [women won their trophy](#), before the [men completed a double triumph](#).

England did claim one No 1 though as Liam Pitchford led the way in the [official top 10 rallies of the tournament](#) released by the ITTF.

There was also English representation in the finals as umpires Josh Reynolds and Brian Jackson [took charge of the women's and men's finals](#) respectively.

The event, plus the PG Mutual Nationals which followed, were [shown live on the BBC website](#).

There was also the opportunity to give free tickets to a number of local schools as part of the [Team World Cup legacy project](#).

We also worked with some new commercial partners, including British Airways, [who became the Official Airline Partner](#) in a six-figure deal.

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