



Full-strength England upbeat ahead of Euros

Author: Paul Stimpson

Posted On: August 29, 2019

England are aiming for their best finish at the European Team Championships since 2011 when this year's tournament gets under way in Nantes on Tuesday.

That was the year that an England squad comprising Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford, Darius Knight and Danny Reed ended in 11th place in Gdansk – just failing to preserve their status in the top division.

Since then, England have not competed at the top level and finished between 19th and 25th positions at the subsequent editions of the Championships.

A change of format meant England had the chance to qualify to play in the top division this time, [a chance they took at the Stage 2 qualifiers in May](#). England women were unable to qualify.

They have been drawn against Luxembourg and Belarus in the group stage – the team winning the group will qualify for the quarter-finals.

If you want to watch the action from France, Eurosport will be broadcasting the competition Friday onwards. All group matches (Tuesday to Thursday) will be streamed live on [ettu.tv](#).

England go in with a full-strength team as Liam Pitchford, Paul Drinkhall, Sam Walker and Tom Jarvis comprise the squad, with Pitchford heading to Nantes after his debut in the Japanese T League tomorrow.

The rest of the team are in good heart, with Walker and Jarvis in particular having picked up big victories in recent weeks.

Walker defeated world No 46 Benedikt Duda of Germany at the recent Czech Open, where Drinkhall also lost 4-3 in a high-quality match to China's world No 28 Zeng Peifeng.

Walker said: "At the Czech Open, I played pretty well and Paul seemed to be finding some form – and Liam's always got quality."

"We've managed to get quite a good draw and if we can all put in a performance, we've got a chance to do some damage.

"The previous time I played Duda, he beat me in the seventh and this time I beat him in the seventh, so it was good to get one back on him and obviously it does give me confidence which I can take into the Europeans."

England's first match is against Luxembourg at 4pm on Tuesday and they then tackle a Belarus team featuring the legendary Vladimir Samsonov at 10am on Thursday.

Walker added: "It's not just a case of getting past Samsonov – obviously if we can beat him it would give us a major boost, but they have other good players.

"But we beat Belarus at the World Championships last year and Liam beat Samsonov in that match. If we can put in another performance like that, it should be winnable."

Jarvis has been buoyed by winning the singles bronze medal at the Commonwealth Championships, where he also defeated world No 32 Sharath Achanta of India in the team final, in which England won silver.

Jarvis, now ranked inside the world's top 200, said: "I'm the No 4 ranked and in the past my role has been to support the team, but I'll prepare as if I'm playing and will always be ready to come in and play if Marcus (coach Marcus Sjoberg) decides that's best, or one of the other guys has a problem.

"We were in the semi-finals of the World Cup and the quarters of the World Championships last year, so anything is possible. Of course, the goal is medals, but we're not looking that far ahead and we just need to try to get through the group first.

"We're going to have to play well no matter who we are playing. It's a good group with a chance to win – but we're taking nothing for granted."

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