



Nationals Qualifier: Don't miss chance to join elite

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There is just over a week left to enter the Senior National Championships Qualifying Tournament for your chance to earn a crack at the best players in England.

The tournament on the weekend of January 11-12 will see 10 men and 10 women book their places to rub shoulders with the likes of current national champions Liam Pitchford and Maria Tsapsinos at the Senior Nationals.

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Among those already booked to compete are Graeme Barella from Newcastle, one of the 10 men to qualify through the tournament last year. He and doubles partner Peter Smallcombe ended up playing against Commonwealth Games champions Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall in the doubles.

"I absolutely loved the qualifying competition," said Barella, 26. "The atmosphere was great because everybody knew what was on the line – it's such a prestigious thing to play at the Nationals.

"I earmark it as one of the events I want to do well at – it's a top priority."

The Qualifying Tournament is being played at the same venue as the Nationals themselves, the David Ross Sports Village at the University of Nottingham, and is open to any players who are eligible to represent England and who hold a Player Licence membership of Table Tennis England. Entries close on December 16.

Day one of the event will comprise group stages, with the focus on day two turning to a progressive knockout system, which will see the top male and top female players ranked from 1 to 32, with the top 10 men and top 10 women going forward to the Senior National Championships from February 28 to March 1.

Barella added: "I liked the format, fighting through the groups and then to get into the top 10. It was a great

feeling to qualify and get the chance to play the best.

“Me and Peter getting to play against Paul and Liam was definitely a highlight of last year. I remember going to the call area before walking on to court and we were chatting to them. I grew up playing tournaments with Liam and it was good to catch up with him again. The chance to play some of the top players was great.”

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