



Argentina and Spain are first opponents for GB

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Great Britain's men will start their Olympic Qualifying Tournament campaign against Argentina, while GB women face a tie against Spain.

GB men are seeded seventh and will take on the 24th-ranked Argentina side at 7pm on Thursday, with the winners to face either Greece or Croatia on Friday for a place at Tokyo 2020.

Argentina's highest-ranked player is Horacio Cifuentes at #66, with Gaston Alto at #97, Santiago Lorenzo at #321 and Martin Bentancor at #443.

GB are led by Liam Pitchford (#22), with Paul Drinkhall (#68), Sam Walker (#82) and Tom Jarvis (#163) completing the squad.

GB women are ranked 25th and if they manage to get past 14th-ranked Spain at 2.30pm on Wednesday, they will face either Czech Republic (19th) or sixth seeds Austria on Friday.

GB are represented by Tin-Tin Ho and Maria Tsapsinos of England and Charlotte Carey of Wales. Ho and Tsapsinos were both in the England team beaten 3-0 by Spain in the second phase of European Championships qualifying at BATTs in May.

Spain are represented by Maria Xiao (#69), Galia Dvorak (#93), Sofia-Xuan Zhang (#119) and Ana Garcia (#201). For GB, Ho is at 102, Carey at 159 and Tsapsinos at 188.

Nine nations will qualify from the tournament in Gondomar, Portugal, eight of them from the first phase. The winner of each section of the draw will earn their place, meaning two wins will see GB qualify for Tokyo 2020.

If either of the GB teams get through the first match but are beaten in the second, they will compete in a second phase of the competition, with three more victories needed to earn the last of the 16 team slots at the Olympics. The teams which qualify will receive two automatic singles places at the Olympics.

Here's what the GB squad members said ahead of the tournament:

Liam Pitchford

"I'm in pretty good shape and feeling good. We're one of the favourites to qualify but every team can play and it's going to be tough.

"The doubles in a lot of our matches is going to be crucial – winning that first match really helps and there's less pressure on me in the first singles, but even going in 1-0 down, I've proved time and again I can beat the No 1s.

"There's slightly more pressure knowing that if we lose, we're out – we know it's do or die. It would be nice to qualify and get the two singles places and the pressure is off and we can prepare well."

Paul Drinkhall

"The last few months have gone well for us as individuals and this week is going well. I think we've got a good balance and are in a good place to perform. We've got to go there and do it.

"The Team World Cup gave us confidence. We fought together as a team and that's the thing going into the next week – winning or losing in tight matches, we need to be with each other as a team. When we're in that mentality, it's difficult for any team to beat us."

Sam Walker

"The last couple of months of 2019 were quite hard for me in terms of performance and a lack of confidence, but I'm feeling a lot more confident in my game now.

"I'm quite excited and ready to go out and do the best that I can for the team.

"I think we've all done the most that we can to get ourselves into the best place we can and I think we'll do ourselves justice, whatever the outcome.

"Being the top seed in our section gives us confidence – but they're going to be hard matches. I think we can deal with that and as long as we can all perform close to our best, we've got every chance of qualifying."

Tom Jarvis

"I feel optimistic. The team's got a good chance – we're going to be the No 1 seeds in our part of the tournament – but no match is easy there.

"I feel comfortable working with Gavin (coach Gavin Evans). We've had some tough practice but we have a lot of fun in the down-time. It's relaxed off the table but some really good, hard work on the table."

Tin-Tin Ho

"I'm really excited for the Olympic qualifiers, of course it's a very tough competition and I'm sure everyone is participating with the aim of qualifying as are we. I think my preparation has gone well in Linz and I'm really excited to get out there with the team and just do our best."

Charlotte Carey

"It's a great honour to play for Great Britain. Hopefully our combined skills and the team coming together will make us better as one."

Maria Tsaptsinos

"It's a big challenge that the team and I are ready to face head on. We're not just going to show our faces, we're going as a young and hopeful GB squad looking to make a name for ourselves on this high level stage.

"Uniting as Great Britain is only going to strengthen the team and potentially show the competition what we are capable of. I'm really looking forward to the whole experience and especially to see where this team can go and what we can achieve."

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