



## First job done in GB Olympic bid

**Author:** Paul Stimpson

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They didn't have everything their own way, but Great Britain cleared the first hurdle towards Olympic team qualification as they beat Argentina 3-0 in Portugal tonight.

Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford won their singles matches 3-0, after the opening doubles had gone 3-2 in favour of GB, who now face Croatia tomorrow, with the winners securing their place at Tokyo 2020.

The opening doubles pitted Paul Drinkhall & Sam Walker against Gaston Alto & Horacio Cifuentes and it was characterised by each pair taking it in turns to open up ultimately game-winning leads.

The Argentine pair led the first 5-1 and, after Britain pegged it back to 7-7, eventually won it 12-10. Drinkhall & Walker led the second 5-0 but then trailed 8-9 and faced a game point at 10-11, saved by a quite brilliant Walker forehand winner from a seemingly hopeless position.

Britain won that game 13-11 but then trailed the next 6-1 on their way to losing 11-4 – a pattern almost reversed in game four when GB turned a 6-0 lead into an 11-4 conversion.

In the decider, Drinkhall & Walker bucked the trend by opening up the lead for the second game running, sealing it 11-6 to put that important first point on the board.

If the doubles was nip-and-tuck, the contrast in the singles was marked. Liam Pitchford was next on against 19-year-old Martin Bentancor and blitzed the first game 11-1 against an opponent who appeared overawed.

Whether or not Bentancor was nervous, it does not take away from Pitchford's thoroughly commanding display. He would have been expected to put away an opponent ranked at 443, but he did so with disdain – his variety, power, placement and particularly his serve posing questions the youngster could not answer as he took the next two 11-7, 11-5.

On paper, Drinkhall versus Cifuentes was close – Paul at 68 ranked two places below his opponent. There seemed a much bigger gulf, however, as the British player won the first two games for the combined loss of

eight points (5 then 3).

The third saw Cifuentes dig deep to try to keep his country in it, leading 8-4 and 10-8 and having three further game points. But Drinkhall saved them all with positive play and took his own first chance, sealing the game, the match and the tie 15-13.

Croatia, meanwhile, defeated Greece 3-1 and will face Great Britain in that all-important play-off tomorrow. It will take place at 7pm and be live streamed on itTV on table two. [Click here to watch it.](#)

## Watch the matches

[Paul Drinkhall & Sam Walker vs Gaston Alto & Horacio Cifuentes](#)

[Liam Pitchford vs Martin Bentancor](#)

[Paul Drinkhall vs Horacio Cifuentes](#)

## Results

### **Great Britain 3 Argentina 0**

Paul Drinkhall & Sam Walker bt Gaston Alto & Horacio Cifuentes 3-2 (10-12, 13-11, 4-11, 11-4, 11-6)

Liam Pitchford bt Martin Bentancor 3-0 (11-1, 11-7, 11-5)

Drinkhall bt Cifuentes 3-0 (11-5, 11-3, 15-13)

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