



GB Olympic dream over – for now

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Great Britain will have to win the second stage of the Olympic Qualifying Tournament if they are to compete at the Tokyo Olympics after defeat to Croatia tonight.

The Balkan country won 3-0 – though two of the matches went to a decider – to book their place in Japan, meaning Britain must win three matches across tomorrow and Sunday to secure the final place on offer.

They start with a match against Hungary at 4pm on Saturday and, if they win that, face the winners of Czech Republic versus India at 10am on Sunday. The final, if they make it, is at 7pm on Sunday.

Seventh-ranked GB knew it would be tough against a Croatia team just two places below them, and they were even more up against it when Andrej Gacina & Frane Kojic took the opening doubles against Paul Drinkhall & Sam Walker.

Apart from the middle game it was tight, and the British pair saved five match points as they tried to take it into a fourth – the third of them, having been 10-7 down, when a service fault was called against Croatia.

There was one game point for Britain before Croatia finally took their sixth match point to win 15-13.

Liam Pitchford won the first and third games against world No 32 Tomislav Pucar to raise hopes that GB would level the score. However, Pucar won the next two and put Croatia one match from Tokyo.

That match was between Drinkhall and Gacina, the Englishman buoyed by the knowledge that he had a 4-1 head-to-head record against his opponent, including beating him in the last 32 of the Rio Olympics in 2016.

Again, Britain led 2-1, but again Croatia staged a recovery and it was, in the end, an emphatic 11-2 scoreline in the decider.

Croatia were perhaps inspired by the performance of two of their neighbours – Slovenia and Serbia also both made it through to the Olympics by defeating India and Hong Kong respectively.

Also through are South Korea, Sweden, France, Portugal and Chinese Taipei.

Watch the matches

[Drinkhall & Walker vs Gacina & Kojic](#)

[Pitchford vs Pucar](#)

[Drinkhall vs Gacina](#)

Results

Croatia 3 Great Britain 0

Andrej Gacina & Frane Kojic bt Paul Drinkhall & Sam Walker 3-0 (11-9, 11-2, 15-13)

Tomislav Pucar bt Liam Pitchford 3-2 (7-11, 11-6, 9-11, 11-6, 11-8)

Gacina bt Drinkhall 3-2 (11-9, 7-11, 5-11, 11-7, 11-2)

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