

Miracles Required! – and it was so close at times

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Day three of the World Individual Table Tennis Championships at the Ahoy Stadium in Rotterdam and as was commented yesterday it would take a miracle for any of our players to progress. And was a miracle close to coming? – The answer to that is an emphatic yes.

Joanna Parker faced World No 29 Yuka Ishigaki of Japan, a defender like herself, honours were even over the first two games, the Japanese took the first and Joanna replied to take the second. In the third game at about 3-5, after close to half an hour of play already, expedite was called. Joanna took the third to take a 2-1 lead. Every game was a close one from then on, Ishigaki took the next two, and Joanna took the sixth to setup a final game contest. All looked done and dusted for the Japanese player as she moved to 10-7 ahead but Joanna responded to level at 10 all. The match finally drew to a close at 15-13 to the World No 29 after 1 hour 20 minutes of an intense contest but not before Joanna was unable to take any of three match points that came her way.

What Joanna would have given for a bit of luck on one of those match points and Liam Pitchford was ruing his fate in game five of his match with another Japanese Niwa Koki, the world no 76, the match stood at 2 all after 4 games and Koki won the fifth 11-6, comfortable you might say but at least 4 maybe 5 of his points came from unreturnable nets and edges, on such small margins things here are decided, who knows, if Liam has taken a 3-2 lead instead of his opponent things might have been different.

Everybody else found opponents too good for them, Kelly Sibley was dominated by Ma Eum Song of Korea the World No 72, Kelly felt the key was that she just could not keep the serve return tight enough to stop the Korean dominating for the whole match. Vladimir Samsonov showed why he is No 8 seed at this event as Paul Drinkhall tried virtually every shot in the book at times but the languid Belarusian did what he does best absorbing everything that was thrown at him and exploding every now and then with an immense backhand or forehand.

Andrew Baggaley started well against the World no 68 Carlos Machado of Spain, the first two games were shared but more and more the quick attacking Spaniard was starting to dominate, three more close games ensued all going to Machado for a 4-1 win.

Three doubles games also were comfortably won by Asian opponents, in the Mixed Doubles last 64, Cheung Yuk and Jiang Huajun a Hong Kong pair were dominant against Joanna Parker and Paul Drinkhall winning in four straight games. At the same stage Kelly Sibley and Darius Knight found a Taipei pair to hot to handle as well. Huang Sheng-Sheng and Huang Yi-Hua again won in four straight games.

The final match for England at these championships was our Womens Double pair, Kelly Sibley and Joanna Parker, their opponents the Japanese No 1 doubles pair, no 3 seeds for the event, Ai Fukuhara and Kasumi Ishikawa. The Japanese pair showed why they have such an exalted seeding, the English pair were comfortably defeated in 4 straight games.

Other items of interest today were decided at the ITTF AGM

The 2014 Team Championships will be held in Tokio. Qatar had planned to bid for this but conceded this event to the Japanese association in light of the recent disaster in Japan as the Japanese Association felt that a major international championships would serve to help in the rebuilding of the Japanese nation.

6 new nations were added to the ITTF family, Wallis and Futuna, Curacao, Tokelau, Antigua-Barbuda, Mozambique and British Virgin Islands are the newly elected members. Curacao replaces Netherlands Antilles which is no longer recognized as one nation but separate islands; Curacao is one of those islands. This makes

the ITTF the second largest sports association in the world as with 215 members it now overtakes Basketball and is just behind Volleyball in first position with 222 member nations.

The AGM also approved a trial of a new method of play, it's very simple, whoever loses the previous point gets to serve next, the intent of this trial is to see if it reduces the domination of the service and its follow up as the this method of play would ensure that a game was always won against the opponents serve.

Results

Mens Singles – Round of 128

NIWA Koki JPN beat PITCHFORD Liam ENG

8-11, 12-10, 10-12, 11-3, 11-6, 11-8

SAMSONOV Vladimir BLR beat DRINKHALL Paul ENG

11-7, 11-6, 11-8, 11-5

BAGGALEY Andrew ENG lost to MACHADO Carlos ESP

9-11, 11-4, 7-11, 9-11, 9-11

Womens Singles – Round of 128

SIBLEY Kelly ENG lost to SONG Ma Eum KOR

8-11, 6-11, 5-11, 8-11

PARKER Joanna ENG lost to ISHIGAKI Yuka JPN

4-11, 11-7, 11-8, 8-11, 11-13, 11-7, 13-15

Womens Doubles – Round of 64

FUKUHARA Ai/ISHIKAWA Kasumi JPN beat PARKER Joanna/SIBLEY Kelly ENG

11-5, 11-8, 11-7, 11-5

Mixed Doubles – Round of 64

CHEUNG Yuk/JIANG Huajun HKG beat DRINKHALL Paul/PARKER Joanna ENG

11-5, 11-4, 11-8, 11-6

HUANG Sheng-Sheng/HUANG Yi-Hua TPE beat KNIGHT Darius/SIBLEY Kelly ENG

11-7, 11-5, 11-6, 11-9

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