

Women promoted, men relegated at Euros

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The England Women's team have officially been promoted from the European Challenge division to the European Championship division without even needing to play their final fixture against France.

The girls' victory over Portugal at the INTERSPORT European Championships in Poland meant they go into the 17-18th place play-off which is good enough for both them, and the French side, to gain entry into the top division for next season.

The English girls have been excellent throughout the tournament, winning every game so far, with the English numbers one and two, Joanna Parker and Kelly Sibley, remaining unbeaten throughout.

Their final match takes place tonight at 7pm UK time and their coach, Alan Cooke, hopes they can now relax and feel the pride they deserve.

He said: "We did what we set out to do. The girls can now relax and play with a bit of freedom – it's a free match." He added: "The girls have achieved the goal we have set ourselves 12 months ago. We were in the same position 12 months ago and narrowly missed out so this is a great feeling."

Cooke was also full of praise for each of the trio; Joanna Parker, Kelly Sibley and Emily Bates. He reserved special praise for Bates, who had to step in at short notice to fulfill the role.

He explained: "It's nice Emily stepped in and she took her chance with some good performances. We're disappointed obviously for Hannah [Hicks] who fell ill just before the tournament but it's given Emily a chance and to be fair to her she played well."

With the team event nearly at an end Cooke hopes his team can now take their group success and translate that into individual honours: "They're very pleased with the way they've played. Hopefully they can push on and get some good results in the individuals now."

However, while the women celebrated the men were being commiserated as their loss to France meant they dropped out of the top tier.

In the new system, England had to finish 10th but narrowly missed out. Their final match against Slovenia will now decide who finishes 11-12th.

Both sides will have entries in the singles tournament which begins tomorrow (we believe the draw will be tonight as the players have already been seeded). The doubles fixtures are also out with the stand-out fixture facing Darius Knight and Daniel Reed against Pavel Sirucek and his partner from the Czech Republic again while Welsh girls Charlotte Carey and Naomi Owen face Wu (17) and Ivancan (55) from Germany.

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