

# World Junior Championships Preview

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England's trio of young players will head to the Volkswagen World Junior Championships in Bahrain this week but might they be returning with medals in tow?

England's number 1, Liam Pitchford, will lead the charge in Manama, Bahrain as he has good chances of medal success in both the singles and mixed doubles events.

Pitchford (200) is the ninth highest ranked male player in the tournament, which runs from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> November. A few shocks and a nice draw might allow him to fight for a place in the semi-finals if he hits the form he did at the European Championships in Poland when he beat four of the world top 100.

Equally, when he partners German Petrissa Solja in the mixed doubles, he has a great chance of reaching the latter stages. Pitchford and Solja played together last year in Bratislava, Slovakia as they reached the quarter-finals before losing out to the Chinese pair of Zhou Yu and Yi Fangxian (now world ranked 143 and 63 respectively).

Solja is the world number 99 and the seventh highest ranked player in the women's competition meaning the pair are the 4<sup>th</sup> seeds in the mixed doubles. Their main challenge is likely to come in the form of Chinese pair Gaoyuan Lin (51) and Yuling Zhu (26) so avoiding this pair in the early rounds is all-important. In fact, the top three mixed doubles partnerships are all-Chinese so it down to Pitchford and Solja to break that dominance if they are to medal.

Interestingly the Japanese pair of Koki Niwa (26) and Kasumi Ishikawa (7), who are the men's and women's respective first seeds, have not decided to enter the mixed doubles, which makes it much easier for Pitchford and Solja's hopes. Ishikawa will be at the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals in the singles, doubles and under-21s so her absence opens a door for the other competitors in Bahrain.

Aside from Pitchford, England are also represented by Gavin Evans (42<sup>nd</sup> seed) and Sean Cullen (52<sup>nd</sup> seed) who have both been to a World Junior Championships before. Evans, of course, was previously a European Champion before surgery on his hip but he will be hoping to re-kindle his form in Bahrain.

Cullen also has had previous success in Europe as a European team silver medalist and European Junior Consolation gold medalist.

Both players will also be in mixed doubles action as Cullen partners Tessy Gonderinger (LUX) (35<sup>th</sup> seeds) and Evans joins German Nina Mittelham (30<sup>th</sup> seeds). In the boys' doubles Cullen will partner Pitchford in the all-England team (9<sup>th</sup> seeds).

The three English boys will begin their campaigns by competing together in the team event for which England are seeded 11<sup>th</sup> – well behind the powerful looking sides of China and Japan.

**Draws:**

**Team:**

England vs Canada (winner will face Belgium in Round 2)



The Venue in Manama for the Championships

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