

2012 National Championships – Sign up now

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The 2011/12 English National Championships are closing in on us – but have you signed up yet?



Last year's Singles Champions Paul Drinkhall and Kelly Sibley

Hundreds of English table tennis players and fans will be converging on Ponds Forge International Sports Centre in Sheffield during March for the 2011/12 English National Championships that will precede the Olympic Games in a busy and exciting year for table tennis.

The prospects for the next National Championships are already looking fascinating with a number of runs, contests and records to be continued, renewed or broken when the players start their campaigns on Friday 2nd March.

Starting 'at the top', this could prove to be a crucial tournament for the Olympic hopefuls as the final decision for Team GB Olympic selection beckons in May – what a time it would be to win the Men's Singles event.

Who starts as favourite? Paul Drinkhall and Andrew Baggaley are separated by a lick of paint in the latest World Rankings while youngster Liam Pitchford is leaving top world players in his wake. What about Darius Knight – the only English player to qualify by right for the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals or Chris Doran and Daniel Reed, who won the doubles event in Sheffield last year?

Certainly 2011 was an eye-opener with Paul Drinkhall beating Andrew Baggaley in the semi-finals on his way to his third national title (after [beating Reed in the final](#)) which put him level with Baggaley – although some way behind record-holder Desmond Douglas who has 11 singles titles to his name. Drinkhall and Baggaley have shared the last five singles titles between them so is it time for Pitchford, Knight or the others who are all yet to win one?

In the women's tournament it's more of a two-horse race. Three of the last four finals have been contested between [Kelly Sibley and Joanna Parker](#) (each with two wins) and yet again they appear the pair to beat. In recent years Emma Vickers, Emily Bates and Lauren Spink have all reached semi-finals but can anyone pull off the big shock?

In the Under-21's events it's a tale of two opposites. In the Boy's competition Liam Pitchford will start as a strong favourite as Paul Drinkhall and Darius Knight have both passed over the age limit this year. However, in the Girl's competition it's a more open affair. Last year's winner Hannah Hicks will hope to defend her title but she will face fresh pressure from runner-up Emily Bates as well as other junior players such as Yolanda King, Jessica Dawson and Tressa Armitage.

After a successful year for the cadets and juniors it will be interesting to see how far they can go too. Portugal Youth Open Champion Tin-Tin Ho will be closely followed as well as Helshan Weerasinghe and triple Junior Nationals Champion Sam Walker.

The Men's Doubles saw a [shock win last year](#) for Daniel Reed and Chris Doran over Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford while in the Women's Doubles [Joanna Parker and Kelly Sibley won their third title](#).

Finally, this year's Mixed Doubles competition will see Drinkhall and Parker look to equal Alex Perry and Helen Lower's record of five consecutive victories when they team up once again.

There will also be Veterans and a Disability tournament when it all begins in early March.

And there's only one way to be part of the action yourself. Complete the [entry form on Spotlight](#) for your chance to be part of one of the most exciting events in the English table tennis calendar this year.

Also don't forget to enter the Doncaster Grand Prix in the last weekend on February (Sat 25th-26th) by completing the [entry form here](#), be quick as the entry closes in just over a month's time.

By Russell Moore

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