

# Table tennis Olympic Qualifiers

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Liam Pitchford has already beaten four of the players who have qualified for 2012

Yesterday the Middle Asian Olympic Qualifying tournament came to a climactic end with the host nation, Iran, claiming both Olympic spots in Tehran.

Noshad Alamiyan and Neda Shahsavari became the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> people to qualify for the Olympic Games this summer while there are still seven qualifying tournaments that remain before the tournament begins.

So, who is heading to the ExCeL?

The first list to look at is the Direct Qualifiers list from the ITTF World Rankings. There are 28 men and women on this list including the Chinese quartet of Wang Hao, Zhang Jike, Li Xiaoxia and Guo Yan – the respective mens' and womens' ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals Doubles Champions.

Other strong Asian hopes include the Japanese players of Jun Mizutani, Seiya Kishikawa, Kasumi Ishikawa and Ai Fukuhara, who will hope to mount a strong challenge on the medals on offer at ExCeL.

However, there are plenty of European challengers for the prize as well from a wide variety of nations.

Clearly top of the list is Germany's Timo Boll who will have his eyes on a medal despite being injured recently. His team-mate Dimitrij Ovtcharov will also fancy his chances on any given day.

Then there are a list of male players who will hope to progress far in the tournament: Vladimir Samsonov (Belarus), Michael Maze (Denmark), Alexey Smirnov (Russia), Adrien Mattenet (France), Werner Schlager (Austria), Kalinikos Kreanga (Greece), Jorgen Persson (Sweden), Adrian Crisan (Romania) and Jean-Michel Saive (Belgium) just proving how deep and diverse the European talent lies at the moment.

In the women's singles Europe again has several hopefuls: Jiaduo Wu (Germany), Li Jiao (Netherlands), Yanfei Shen (Spain), Viktoria Pavlovich (Belarus), Krisztina Toth (Hungary) and Daniela Dodean (Romania) among others.

Outside of this world ranking list, players are qualifying from all over the world to take part in July.

Players from West Asia (including Lebanon's Tvin Carole Moumjoghlian) join those from Africa (including Grand Finals attendees from Egypt; Omar Assar and Nadeeen El-Dawlatly) and Pan-America (world top 100 player Liu Song).

So what about Britain?

Of course, we have our host nation allocations but many of our players feel they can qualify by their own right when the European Qualifying Tournament in Luxembourg takes place in April.

If that fails to happen then they can still qualify in the Final World Qualification Tournament in Qatar – a last chance saloon for any players in the world who haven't yet sealed their entry to the Olympic Games.

But, don't be led to thinking that we are just 'glad to be part of the show'. In fact, Paul Drinkhall, Andrew Baggaley and Liam Pitchford have all pulled off big wins against players on this list.

Drinkhall has beaten Smirnov, Baggaley has beaten Saive while Pitchford has beaten Smirnov, Samsonov, Ning and Song! (Results listed below). With many more places up for grabs before the Games begin, be sure to keep an eye on our [Players page](#) for all the latest news on table tennis at the Olympics.

#### **Austrian Open Round of 32**

Drinkhall bt Smirnov 4-3 (7-11, 12-10, 4-11, 11-8, 11-2, 6-11, 11-6)

#### **Polish Open Round of 64**

Baggaley bt Saive 4-2 (9-11, 11-7, 12-10, 15-17, 11-9, 12-10)

#### **English Open Qual Groups**

Pitchford bt Song 4-3 (11-9, 8-11, 11-7, 8-11, 15-13, 6-11, 12-10)

#### **Commonwealth Games Team Final**

Pitchford bt Ning 3-2 (4-11, 6-11, 11-8, 11-9, 13-11)

#### **European Championships Team Group**

Pitchford bt Samsonov 3-2 (11-8, 6-11, 11-8, 4-11, 11-7)

#### **European Championships Round of 64**

Pitchford bt Smirnov 4-3 (12-14, 11-9, 6-11, 11-5, 11-4, 10-12, 12-10)

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