

Nicholls gains Champions League experience

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Damien Nicholls faced Dimitrij Ovtcharov and Alexey Smirnov in Russia

Grand Prix regular Damien Nicholls was not present in Doncaster last weekend, but there was an extraordinary reason for this – Nicholls had been asked to play for his club; AS Pontoise Cergy, in the quarter-finals of the European Champions League!

With French star Adrian Mattenet injured, Nicholls was drafted into the first team to face Russian team Orenburg in Russia against the trio of Vladimir Samsonov, Dimitrij Ovtcharov and Alexey Smirnov.

Although Nicholls ended up losing both his encounters with Ovtcharov and Smirnov respectively, he did take a game off the German and took the Russian to 15-13 in the second game of their match.

Nicholls admitted there was a sense of 'damage limitation' as he faced players in the world top 20. He said:

"It was a big thing at the start, I was quite nervous but when I got into the games I felt I played well. Playing players of that standard I never even thought I had a chance but then as I got into the rallies I definitely felt that I have got a chance.

I thought before the match just get a point or two – just hit a few shots and call it a day. Then I was keeping with them and I felt like I had a real chance. There was never a time when I thought I could beat them but I thought just 'see what happens'".

The experience should stand the English number 11 in good stead for the Senior National Championships that begin on Friday and he's hopeful of success:

"I'm looking forward to it. I've got a good draw – I'm due to play Danny Reed in the last 16 and the last time I played him I beat him and there's always a chance I can do it again. But I'll just take it as it comes."

Nicholls seemingly takes everything in his stride and when questioned about his future, he admitted he hadn't considered looking that far ahead:

"I haven't really thought about it. I'm playing for my club in France so I want as good as average as I can. I won 14 out of 14 games before Christmas but after Christmas I have won two out of four so I want to keep my percentage high.

I'd like to just try and maybe win a Grand Prix. I've won the satellite Jersey Grand Prix but I would like one of the main Grand Prixes."

Nicholls, like many other English players, has benefitted from playing abroad and he thinks it is something that is essential to a player's progression for a successful career in table tennis. He said:

"I was talking to my teammates there (in France) and one was a Portuguese man living in Germany. You need

to get away from the country and practice against a different variety of players.

You can get quite stale and stuck in your old ways and you need to see how different cultures play. The more players that do it then the more it is good to push English table tennis forward.”

The scorecard from the Champions League Quarter-Final can be seen [here](#)

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