

Hicks/Doran defeat favourites in semi

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Hannah Hicks and Chris Doran pulled off one of the biggest shocks at the National Championships with their victory over four-times winners Joanna Parker and Paul Drinkhall.

Parker and Drinkhall were looking for their fifth consecutive title – to equal the record set by Alex Perry and Helen Lower, however, the determined Hicks and Doran fought hammer and tong to deny them the honour.

Doran, in particular, was playing like a man possessed and was constantly returning Drinkhall's powerful forehands in order to give his partner, Hicks the chance to attack.

Thoroughly pumped up, the underdogs took the lead after the first game with an 11-5 opening game although they were pegged back in the second as the favourites levelled at 1-1 with an 11-4 game.

If they thought the tide would turn at that stage they were proved wrong as Doran and Hicks fought back once more to take another surprise lead after winning game three 11-8.

The fourth game proved to be decisive. It was close throughout until Drinkhall and Parker had the first game point at 10-9. It was saved by Doran and Hicks but straight after the number one seeds earned another game point. Every sinew was being stretched including the vocal chords from all four players as a huge roar met the leveller at 11-11 from Doran.

Finally, Doran and Hicks pulled out their first match point and took it immediately. Drinkhall's serve was smashed back by Doran who fell to the floor in celebration as they won 3-1 (11-5, 4-11, 11-8, 13-11).

Meeting them in the final will be second seeds Kelly Sibley and Darius Knight after they were triumphant over Lauren Spink and Liam Pitchford in the other semi-final.

In a topsy-turvy match where both sets of players would drop in and out of form there was never much between them and that proved the case as the match headed into a fifth and deciding game.

This came after Pitchford and Spink raced out of the traps to take the first game 11-7 but suffered in the second and third games as Knight and Sibley retaliated to lead 2-1 after 11-8 and 11-6 games respectively.

Pitchford and Spink forced the deciding game after winning a close and tense fourth game 11-9, the nature of the game loss making Knight throw his bat on the table in anger – earning him a yellow card.

It would spur Knight on though and with his consistent partner Sibley, they won the final game 11-7 and now become the new favourites for the title. However, with the spirit Doran and Hicks showed you would never write them off.

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