

Drinkhall and Sibley retain titles

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Paul Drinkhall takes his 4th Men's Singles title

Paul Drinkhall and Kelly Sibley retained their respective men's and women's singles titles at the 2012 English National Table Tennis Championships held at Ponds Forge in Sheffield.

Drinkhall, now a four-times winner of the singles, successfully defended his title against the current English Number One, Liam Pitchford from Derbyshire.

Drinkhall, 22, won 4-1 (7-11, 11-4, 11-6, 11-3, 11-3) against the 18-year-old who had previously beaten fellow Olympic hopefuls Andrew Baggaley (4-1) and Daniel Reed (4-0) in the earlier rounds.

Drinkhall himself had fought his way to the final with wins over Lewis Gray (4-1), David McBeath (4-2), Chris Doran (4-0) and Darius Knight (4-2) respectively.

The final began with plenty of drama as both players fought for ascendancy in their strengths. Drinkhall with his powerful forehand and Pitchford with his sharp backhand.

While Pitchford took the first game, Drinkhall fought back claim the next four in succession as his barrage of forehand bombs continually battered the Derbyshire lad into submission, resulting in one-sided games towards the end of the match.

Both players will now look forward to the Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Luxembourg (11-15th April) where they will be joined by Andrew Baggaley in their pursuit of an Olympic place.

Sibley, meanwhile, won her third women's singles title to cap off a brilliant weekend for the girl from Leamington Spa who also won the women's and mixed doubles to complete a perfect hat-trick.

Sibley beat her main rival, Joanna Parker, 4-1 in an absorbing match of attack versus defence as Sibley's all-conquering powerplay eventually overcoming Parker's defensive consistency.

The English number two (joining fellow number two Drinkhall in upsetting the seeding) won 4-1 (11-6, 3-11, 12-10, 11-9, 11-5).

She had earlier won the women's doubles for the fourth time with Parker 3-1 against Lauren Spink and Emily Bates while she won the mixed doubles with Darius Knight 3-0 against Chris Doran and Hannah Hicks.

Knight, himself an Olympic hopeful, added the men's doubles title to his mixed doubles win. Alongside Daniel Reed – the 2011 winner with Doran, Knight overcame the odds against Pitchford and Drinkhall to win 3-1 and leave Pitchford without a title after Gavin Evans won the under-21s.

The women's under-21s was won by Emma Vickers against Hannah Hicks.

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