

# To qualify or not to qualify? The question remains in Doha.

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Drama in Doha, Qatar at the Final World Olympic Qualification Tournament as it appears there may be ten qualifying from the event and not two.

This gives Paul Drinkhall and Andrew Baggaley another chance after they lost their respective matches in the main draw.

While Baggaley lost 4-0 to the experienced Allan Bentsen, Paul Drinkhall recovered from 3-1 down to level 3-3 with Spain's Carlos Machado before eventually succumbing 11-5 in the seventh game.

However, they may still get another shot at qualifying.

The eight remaining quarter-finalists have all taken their place at London 2012 while it appears two more spots may be available in the 9-16 play-off. The ITTF site said: "Defeats but the door is not totally closed on the vanquished; ten places in total in London may well prove the concluding scenario to the men."

This may also yet see Drinkhall and Baggaley face each other in direct competition for a place in London. However, Na Liu's hopes were finished after defeat to Sara Ramirez from Spain.

In the previous round Baggaley had produced an incredible comeback win against world number 87 Petr Korbel (CZE) after fighting back from 3-1 and match point down in the fifth.

The match began with an incredible 42 point opening game – almost enough to play an entire match. The game was a scrappy affair until at 9-8 the first flowing rally came which Korbel won after forcing Baggaley deep.

After that the Englishman saved the first of four game points he faced at 10-9, but, more importantly, failed to take seven game points of his own to give Korbel a dramatic 22-20 first game.

The second game started much better for Baggaley – leading both 4-0 and 7-3 before he was pegged back to 9-9 and he visibly showed his frustration. He missed the first game point opportunity, but after Korbel also missed one, a lucky net helped Baggaley to a 13-11 game and a 1-1 share of the match.

Things didn't work out in the third game, however, as Baggaley fell 7-2 behind before a big edge sealed the game for the Czech player 11-6 – adding to the world number 147's exasperation.

Despite recovering in game four to level at 9-9 with good defence, the Englishman went wide on game point to gift Korbel a 3-1 lead and seemingly the match. At 4-1 down in the fifth Baggaley's shot hit the net and for the first time the Milton Keynes man looked beaten but he recovered excellently to win the game 12-10 and keep his hopes alive after saving a match point at 9-10.

Baggaley again found himself 3-0 down at the start of the sixth but once more fought back to lead 10-9. Although he couldn't take that point, a sharp cross table forehand followed by Korbel's duff into the net meant he leveled the match at 3-3 with another 12-10 game.

The decider started in the same fashion as the previous game with Korbel moving 3-0 ahead. At the change the Czech player led 5-3 but that was the last point he won as Baggaley stormed to eight consecutive points – sealing the match when Korbel netted, and raising his arms in sheer delight at the wonderful performance he had pulled off.

Drinkhall, meanwhile had a less tumultuous but still passionate win against Italian Niagol Stoyanov.

He set-off where he meant to continue with a 4-0 lead in game one and an efficient serve and smash routine gave him a 6-3 lead. After a rapid cross-table forehand game him a 10-7 lead he wrapped up game one on the next point.

In game two the English number two seemed to lack his usual power which allowed Stoyanov to level 1-1 with an 11-7 game but Drinkhall was back to his best in the following game – racing from 4-3 to 9-3 en-route to an 11-6 game and 2-1 lead.

Game four seemed lost at once stage when he dropped from 3-1 ahead to 9-3 behind but Drinkhall superbly came back to level at 9-9 with help from an almighty net cord at 7-9. Eventually the four-times National Champion held his nerve for 12-10.

Another tight game ensued in the fifth as, from 6-2 up Drinkhall fell 6-8 behind before recovering to get two match points at 10-8. He failed to take either but won a third at 11-10 where he promptly called timeout.

That tactic also failed as the game continued in a rich vein of passion and agony as match point after match point was chalked off by his Italian opponent. Eventually on the sixth time of asking, Drinkhall sealed the game 15-13 and the match 4-1.

The news was not so good for Liam Pitchford whose dreams ended with a 4-1 defeat by in-form Italian Mihai Bobocica.

Despite taking the first game 11-9, Pitchford constantly frustrated himself and looked to his coach, the heavens and his bat for answers. They never game as Bobocica went 3-1 ahead with 11-8, 11-5 and 11-4 games.

With the English number one's body language at his lowest he fought back from 5-9 to 7-9 in the fifth only to endure the longest and most impressive rally of the match before agonisingly netting with his opponent raising his hand in apology.

That spelt the end of the road for Pitchford who lost game five 11-9 and he must now hope to be selected by the BTTF selection panel.

## **Results:**

### **Men's Singles Round of 32:**

Paul Drinkhall bt Niagol Stoyanov (ITA, 160) 4-1 (11-7, 7-11, 11-6, 12-10, 15-13)

Mihai Bobocica (ITA, 99) bt Liam Pitchford 4-1 (9-11, 11-8, 11-5, 11-4, 11-9)

Andrew Baggaley bt Petr Korbel (CZE, 87) bt 4-3 (20-22, 13-11, 6-11, 9-11, 12-10, 12-10, 11-5)

### **Men's Singles Round of 16:**

Carlos Machado (ESP, 103) bt Paul Drinkhall 4-3 (11-5, 9-11, 11-6, 11-7, 8-11, 6-11, 11-5)

Allan Bentsen (DEN, 133) bt Andrew Baggaley 4-0 (11-9, 11-5, 11-8, 11-8)

### **Women's Singles Round of 16:**

Sara Ramirez (ESP, 113) bt Na Liu 4-1 (11-6, 11-4, 4-11, 11-9, 11-2)

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