

Dramatic heart-break in Doha for GB

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Posted On: May 13, 2012



Great Britain's last hopes in Doha of Olympic qualification were dashed as both Andrew Baggaley and Paul Drinkhall suffered agonising seven-game defeats.

Baggaley had fought back from 3-0 down to Greece's Konstantinos Papageorgiou before losing 12-10 in the decider while Drinkhall was 3-2 down to Ukraine's Yaroslav Zhmudenko before also falling 12-10 in the final game.

The heart-break for the pair now means the British players will most likely have to rely on Olympic selection by the BTTF panel and, with only one singles place available, there will be disappointment for those that miss the chance.

If Baggaley and Drinkhall had won their respective matches, their face-off could have been for a place in London after the ITTF reported an extended number to qualify from Qatar, however, after their defeats that contest looks unlikely.

Drinkhall will bemoan a missed opportunity in his match after he saw a match point saved by Zhmudenko. The pair had traded blows throughout the match. Zhmudenko taking the first game 11-8, Drinkhall the second 13-11, the Ukrainian the third 11-6 but the English number two levelled again with an 11-8 game.

When Zhmudenko won the fifth game 11-8 it was win-or-bust for the four-times National Champion but he found an extra level to propel from 3-2 down to win game six 11-4.

This took the match to a see-saw decider. There were never more than two points between the pair throughout the game as it headed to 9-9. On that point Drinkhall set up the first match point at 10-9 but failed to take it and suffered the ultimate heart-break when Zhmudenko claimed the next three points to win the match and knock Drinkhall out for good.

Andrew Baggaley had a similarly painful experience. Despite leading 7-2 in the first game he fell 11-9 to Papageorgiou and it got worse for the three-time National Champion when he fell 3-0 behind to 11-5 and 13-11 games.

However, the Buckinghamshire player dug deep and managed to level the match after three excellent games. He was immaculate in taking game four 11-5 before holding his nerve to win tight fifth and sixth games 13-11 and 12-10 respectively.

When he most needed this form to continue in the decider it left him. From 5-5 the Greek player raced 10-5 to seemingly seal the victory but, with almost inhuman effort, Baggaley saved five consecutive match points to level at 10-10.

Just when the swing seemed to be with the 29-year-old it disappeared again as Papageorgiou took the next two points to condemn Baggaley to a 12-10 defeat.

Results:

Men's Singles:

Yaroslav Zhmudenko (UKR, 101) bt Paul Drinkhall 4-3 (11-8, 11-13, 11-6, 8-11, 11-8, 4-11, 12-10)

Konstantinos Papageorgiou (GRE, 202) bt Andrew Baggaley 4-3 (11-9, 11-5, 13-11, 5-11, 11-13, 10-12, 12-10)

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