

Brits fall short at Final World Olympic Qualifiers

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Coach Jia Yi Liu could not spur his players to an automatic spot

The Final World Olympic Qualification Tournament in Doha, Qatar ended in disappointment for the Great British Olympic hopefuls as none of the six-man squad managed to seal a place at London 2012.

This result means that the 10 shortlisted players for the Olympics will have to wait on tenterhooks for the host allocation announcement to be made by the British Table Tennis Federation (BTF) and BOA – currently scheduled for May 22nd.

Places at ExCeL in July are at a premium and since none of the British players managed to qualify from the European Qualifiers in Luxembourg in April, or the World Qualifiers in Qatar in May, just one man and one woman will be able to take part in the singles competition in the summer.

Britain's main hopes rested with the men's triumvirate of Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford and Andrew Baggaley who went in search of securing one of the two places available in Doha.

However, respective defeats for Pitchford (against Mihai Bobocica, ITA), Baggaley (verses Allan Bentsen, DEN) and Drinkhall (Carlos Machado, ESP) seemed to have ended their campaigns in the Middle East.

This, as it turned out, was not the case. Late on Saturday night the International Table Tennis Federation confirmed that 10 places had been made available in the competition – therefore giving Drinkhall and Baggaley one more opportunity in their fight for 9th and 10th positions.

Again, however, this proved to be a false omen as both lost dramatic seven-game thrillers 12-10 in the deciding game to all-but end their hopes of automatic qualification for London.

Baggaley's defeat to Konstantinos Papageorgiou (GRE) and Drinkhall's defeat to Yaroslav Zhmudenko (UKR) finally ended the British hopes in Doha after Pitchford, and the trio of girls in attendance; Joanna Parker, Na Liu and Naomi Owen, had already been eliminated.

There was still time for Drinkhall and Baggaley to meet in the play-offs; a match that Drinkhall won 4-1 (11-6, 7-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-9), however, the four-times National Champion's finishing position of 14th was not enough for a spot at the Games.

Luckily, for British table tennis, they had already been allocated a men's and women's singles and team spot at London 2012 so there will be a host presence at the 30th Olympiad come the start of the event in July.

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