

Who's who in Team GB's Olympic draw

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The draw was made Wednesday afternoon for the Olympic table tennis singles and team events but who have Team GB actually drawn?

Sure, we know that Paul Drinkhall will face either Ibrahim Al-Hasan or Saheed Idowu, Joanna Parker will play Caroline Kumahara or Yasmin Hassan Farah, the men's team will play Portugal and the women's team will face DPR Korea, but who are all these players?

This article will provide you with information on all the players Team GB drew in Wednesday's draw.

All photographs below courtesy of the ITTF

Ibrahim Al-Hasan (World Rank: 228)

Ibrahim Al-Hasan is the Kuwaiti number 1 and the most likely player to face the English number 1 Paul Drinkhall in the first round of the Olympic Games. The pair have met once before but it was five years ago at a junior event and, as Drinkhall acknowledges, has 'no relevance now'.

- ✗ The 25-year-old was the first table tennis player to qualify for the Olympic Games through a tournament after the first 28 players were selected on world ranking. Al-Hasan won the West Asia Olympic Qualification Tournament where he won all seven of his final stage round-robin matches to qualify as Champion – only the winner made it to London 2012. This was over a year ago on June 30th. His greatest win came in the Moroccan Open last season when he beat Jean Michel-Saive (BEL) 4-1 (14-12, 11-8, 13-11, 7-11, 11-9).

Saheed Idowu (WR 423)

Saheed Idowu is from Congo Brazzaville and is the same age as potential opponent Paul Drinkhall at 22-years-old.

- ✗ Idowu finished 10th in the All Africa Games, which doubled up as the Olympic Qualification Tournament for Africa when it was held in Maputo, Mozambique. The top six qualified but, since other players in the top ten were members of countries that already had their allocation of two athletes, Idowu was able to gain the final available space from Africa in 10th. He will join two Egyptians, two Nigerians and his team-mate from Congo, Suraju Saka, who beat him in the final play-off match.

Caroline Kumahara (WR 192)

Caroline Kumahara is the youngest of all the potential opponents for Team GB at the Olympic Games as she celebrates her 17th birthday on Friday.

- ✗ The Brazilian is a success in South America as the current highest ranking Brazilian woman on the ITTF world rankings and her nickname: 'a Princesinha do tenis de mesa Brasileiro' – The Princess of Brazilian table tennis' shows what high esteem she is held in. Kumahara has only played one of the GB squad which is when she beat reserve player Naomi Owen from Wales at the Austrian Open. It was a seven-game thriller that ended 4-3 (7-11, 12-10, 11-9, 11-8, 10-12, 7-11, 14-12) to the young South American.

Yasmin Hassan Farah (unranked)

Little is known of Yasmin Hassan Farah on the international circuit as the player from Djibouti is not a regular on the Pro Tour.

- ✗ However, her inclusion in the Olympic Games is down to her selection from the Tripartite Commission Invitation Place, which awards countries with six or fewer participating athletes in the two previous Games an extra place to ensure the Olympics has a worldwide appeal. She becomes the sixth athlete from Djibouti at London 2012 with half of the team competing in track and field events. She won't be alone in the arena though – the 18-year-old's father Farah Hassan Farah is the President of the Djibouti Table Tennis Federation and also was her coach.

TEAM EVENTS

Portugal

Marcos Freitas (WR 31), Tiago Apolonia (WR 34) and Joao Monteiro (WR 39).

The English team will know the Portuguese players well from the European and ITTF circuit with Tiago Apolonia also a team-mate of Liam Pitchford at TTF Liebherr Ochsenhausen in the Bundesliga where Paul Drinkhall, Andrew Baggaley and Darius Knight will ply their trade next season.

25-year-old Apolonia, known as 'the kid' won the Austrian Open in 2010, beating Germany's Timo Boll in the final, which remains his greatest achievement. 28-year-old Monteiro or 'Monti' was the first Portuguese

✘ player to qualify for the Olympic Games when he attended in Beijing 2008.

Freitas, 24, has played the most matches against the Team GB stars but only two matches between the sets of players have taken place in the last three years. The scores are level at 1-1 after Drinkhall beat Monteiro 4-3 (11-7, 6-11, 10-12, 11-6, 9-11, 11-3, 11-6) at the 2010 Polish Open before Freitas beat Pitchford 4-2 (11-3, 9-11, 5-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-6) in the European Olympic Qualification Tournament in Luxembourg this April.

How to beat them? Perhaps superstition. Monteiro always enters the arena after his opponent and lets him choose the side of the coin for the toss as well as touching his towel before the match begins. Apolonia, meanwhile says: "I have some [superstitions] but I prefer to keep it private."

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Ri Myong Sun (WR 34), Kim Jong (WR 53) and Ri Mi Gyong (WR 63)

As expected the North Korean's record in international table tennis is a rarity with tournament entries few and far between and usually reserved for World Championships or Asian tournaments.

However, as the eighth seeds they may prove to be the dark horses at the event and could even spark a surprise for some of the higher ranked nations if they play to the top of their games.

✘ Sun, a 20-year-old from the capital Pyongyang, has played just 36 matches on the ITTF circuit but with 28 wins, she has a fair record, including her last victory over world number 6 Kasumi Ishikawa from Japan.

Jong is 23 and from the South Hamgyong Province but with just over 60 matches to her name she is not well known. The fewest games belongs to Gyong who has only played 25 at 21-years-old on the ITTF circuit but she did manage to beat Li Jie (WR 28) from Netherlands.

None of the Team GB girls has ever played any of the North Korean girls so this will be a real experience for both sides.

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