

Ma Long replaces Zhang Jike in World Cup

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Ma Long last two visits to England have resulted in Championship wins

The players list has been confirmed for the 2012 Liebherr Men's World Cup and it includes one big shock: the absence of Olympic Champion and defending World Cup Champion Zhang Jike.

Twenty-four year old Zhang Jike, whose excellent season has seen him to world number 1 after securing all the 'Grand Slam' major titles will no longer be defending his title at the Echo Arena 28-30th September but, will instead be replaced by Chinese team-mate Ma Long in Liverpool.

Ma Long, who only a year ago had a 51-match unbeaten run, will now become the new favourite for the tournament ahead of his Chinese compatriot Xu Xin and European challengers such as the experienced Timo Boll and Vladimir Samsonov.

Long in particular will be on a mission to reclaim the limelight from his 2012 Olympic gold medal winning team-mate when he takes part next month for the 33rd Men's World Cup. In fact, on his last appearance in England, Ma Long was in unstoppable form as he cruised to the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals singles title at ExCeL.

However, the 23-year-old was replaced at the top of the world ranking by Zhang Jike earlier this year and lost his Olympic singles place after a defeat to 17-year-old Koki Niwa from Japan in the Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament.

There's no better way to begin his march back to the top than to take Zhang Jike's title from him in Liverpool as the beginning of a comeback for one of the most exciting and aggressive players in the world of table tennis.

Zhang Jike's omission will also provide added hope for potential title rivals like Boll, Samsonov and 2011's losing semi-finalist Joo Saehyuk as the field draws closer together ahead of the competition.

Two further changes from the invitation list previously published are the absences from the Japanese pair of Jun Mizutani and Koki Niwa, who will instead be replaced by Adrian Crisan and Marcos Freitas. The two new reserve players will be 40-year-old Chen Weixing from Austria and 31-year-old Tang Peng from Hong Kong.

England's Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford will both be in attendance at the Echo Arena as they look to cause more surprises on the international stage. Tickets [available here](#).

Confirmed player list:

European Rep: Timo Boll (Germany)

Asian Rep: Xu Xin (China)

Latin American Rep: Thiago Monteiro (Brazil)

African Rep: Ahmed Saleh (Egypt)

Oceania Rep: William Hinzell (Australia)

North American Rep: Pierre-Luc Theriault (Canada)

Host Nation Rep: Paul Drinkhall (England)

World Ranking Places:

Ma Long (China)

Chuang Chih-Yuan (Chinese Taipei)

Dimitrij Ovtcharov (Germany)

Joo Saehyuk (South Korea)

Oh Sangeun (South Korea)

Gao Ning (Singapore)

Vladimir Samsonov (Belarus)

Jiang Tianyi (Hong Kong)

Adrian Crisan (Romania)

Marcos Freitas (Portugal)

ITTF Wildcard: Liam Pitchford (England)

ITTF Wildcard: Michael Maze (Denmark)

Reserve no.1: Chen Weixing (Austria)

Reserve no.2: Tang Peng (Hong Kong)

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