

2012 European Championships Preview

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It's one week until the 2012 European Championships in Denmark (17–21st October) with eight English players en route to the Jyske Bank Boxen arena in Herning.



World number 85 Paul Drinkhall will lead the English attack in Scandinavia as the final seeded player (no. 32) for the Men's Singles competition in the provisional list.

The 22-year-old's previous best was a last 32 finish in St. Petersburg, Russia 2009, but recently he has re-found his best form to once again trouble the European elite.

Drinkhall said: "It would be a good achievement for me if I could get to the last 16 in the singles. I have been in the top 100 for a few months, I feel more confident in my game and if I play free then I can beat anybody, so why put pressure on myself?"

Last year, however, it was the then 18-year-old Liam Pitchford who overshadowed the defending National Champion with astonishing victories over both [Vladimir Samsonov \(BLR, 9\)](#) and [Alexey Smirnov \(RUS, 20\)](#).



The Chesterfield-born teenager is hopeful of replicating his form from Poland 2011 to once again have a good run at the European Championships.

He said: "I had a good tournament last year so it's obviously going to be difficult to match those results this year but I'm confident and I believe I can do it so we'll see.

To be honest I haven't been in the greatest form recently and I haven't played many matches so my confidence has been a bit low, but I played a tournament this week to get some match practice for the Euros and I felt pretty good so that has boosted my confidence."

The youngster will take a lot from his experiences at the recent [Liebherr Men's World Cup in Liverpool](#) where he rubbed shoulders with many of the best players in the world.

Pitchford explained: "It was a great experience and one which I was really lucky to get so I just took everything I could from it. I didn't play great there but every match got a little bit better – I will be raring to go when the Europeans start."

Alongside Drinkhall and Pitchford will be fellow Olympian Andrew Baggaley as well as seasoned internationals Danny Reed and Darius Knight who have plenty to prove in Denmark next week.

New Head Performance Coach Nick Jarvis set out his expectations for the men at the Championships: "I'm optimistic in the sense that Paul and Liam, in particular, are on the brink of becoming top performers at this level. I cannot predict where they will finish at this event but I do expect them to be playing their best table tennis.

The other male players have something to prove, so I am hopeful they too put in their best performances."



It will be tough for the men in a high class field including five players in the world's top twenty; defending Champion Timo Boll (GER, 5), his compatriot and Olympic Games bronze medalist Dimitrij Ovtcharov (GER, 10), the experienced Vladimir Samsonov (BLR, 12), the host nation's favourite Michael Maze (DEN, 15) and Romania's Adrian Crisan (ROU, 20).

You can expect the passionate 4,500 crowd at the Jyske Bank Boxen arena to be fully vocal when their hero Maze is at the table and big things are expected of the 2009 European Champion on home soil.



There are no team events in 2012 (these are held biennially) so the English women this year will focus on their singles performances after [winning promotion to the Championship Division](#) as a team last time out in Poland.



Joanna Parker will lead the way after a successful Olympics in a year where she has set numerous personal world ranking bests.

The current world number 117's game is improving all the time with the addition of extra attacking shots to compliment her combative defensive style. With regular teammate Kelly Sibley also returning to form last month with a victory over Bernadette Szocs (ROU, 81), the girls will be setting their sights high in Herning.

The final team member is 14-year-old Tin-Tin Ho, the youngest female competitor at the Championships. Her 2012 has seen her win cadet tournaments in Portugal and France as well as a [Youth European Championships bronze medal](#) in July.



Naturally, the youngster's expectations differ to those of her peers.

She said: "I just want to do as well and learn as much as I can. Hopefully win as many as I can." She added: "I will have to try my very best at making sure all my shots are good quality. Also, just relax when I play and enjoy it."

Tin-Tin actually jets straight off from the event to Guam for the World Cadet Challenge where [she has been picked to play for Europe](#) against the likes of Asia, America and Africa.

The European Championships will provide excellent practice for the cadet ahead of yet another big competition in her fledgling career. She explained: "The Europeans and the pre-European camp in Sheffield will both be great ways of preparation for the Cadet Challenge as I will be training and playing against seniors instead of cadets."

Head Performance Coach Nick Jarvis also believes that alongside Parker and Sibley, the European Championships will provide the youngster with a perfect learning opportunity.

He said: "Jo and Kelly have experience and our young star Tin-Tin is just 14-years-old but has gained selection for this event by right. The experience will give her a better understanding of what she needs to do on her pathway to being a top world class senior."

The 2012 Women's Singles in Denmark is likely to once more be dominated by 'foreign' Europeans with five of the top eight seeds originally from Asia. However, favourites Shen Yanfei (ESP, 9) and Wu Jiaduo (GER, 16) will face stern competition from Elizabeta Samara (ROU, 23) who recently finished as runner-up in the Volkswagen Women's World Cup.



Full England Squad Details:

Men:

Paul Drinkhall (Age 22, WR 85)
Andrew Baggaley (29, 136)
Liam Pitchford (19, 137)
Daniel Reed (22, 229)
Darius Knight (22, 256)

Women:

Joanna Parker (25, 117)

Kelly Sibley (24, 181)
Tin-Tin Ho (14, 434)

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