

Spanish defeat leaves England on edge

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England's women fell to defeat in Gateshead which virtually consigns them to relegation from the Championship Division of the European Championships.

Although they will have the chance to redeem themselves in Schwechat, Austria later this year, they will be disappointed to miss out on the chance to start the Championships in the top tier after working so hard in Poland 2011.

The match began with the crucial fixture of Joanna Parker against Sara Ramirez, one that eventually proved decisive.

The English number 1 fell 2-0 behind early on to the higher ranked Ramirez but fought back gallantly in games three and four – holding her nerve 11-9 in the fourth to level 2-2 in the evening's opening fixture.

However, despite taking a 3-0 lead in the decider, a timeout for Ramirez changed the flow of the match and amazingly the Spanish girl won 11 straight points to race to the victory.

Parker reflected on the missed opportunity: "We knew it was going to be tough. If we had won it [her match] it would've been a massive boost. To be honest I didn't play my best game tonight, I think there were a few factors affecting my game.

"She [Ramirez] realised the momentum was with me. She called a great timeout and I couldn't find my game after that. I paid the ultimate price."

A 1-0 Spanish lead was then competently converted into a commanding 2-0 advantage as world number 8, Yanfei Shen, made the most of her 500 place world ranking differential over Hannah Hicks to win in style.

Her short, punchy action was deadly accurate and too consistent for the young English girl who was quickly swept aside by her illustrious opponent.

That left Kelly Sibley to try and salvage the match against Galia Dvorak in the third encounter.

After losing a dramatic opening game 17-15, where the English girl missed out on five game points, Sibley fought back to level at 1-1 with another tight game – this time 11-9.

However, that was as good as it got for the English number 2, and her team, as Dvorak battled her way through games three and four to seal another win for Spain and leave England bottom of the Championship Division.

Coach Alan Cooke was realistic about the team's expectations. He said: "I think we had some good matches but

we were playing against a world class team. Overall it was not a bad performance.”

He added: “We are looking more long-term than just tonight’s result. We’ve got the Commonwealth Championships and in just over a year, the Commonwealth Games.

“We know it was going to be tough all along. It’s a different pressure when you’re playing players much higher ranked than yourself.”

Video provided by Sportsbyte.org Twitter: @SportsByte

European Championships Qualifying Result

Women’s Championship Division Group B

Spain 3-0 England

Sara Ramirez (75) bt Joanna Parker (130) 3-2 (12-10, 11-5, 7-11, 9-11, 11-3)

Yanfei Shen (8) bt Hannah Hicks (534) 3-0 (11-5, 11-3, 11-3)

Galia Dvorak (137) bt Kelly Sibley (205) 3-1 (17-15, 9-11, 11-8, 11-7)

By Russell Moore

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