

England Men see off Bulgaria

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Our England men's team managed to overcome the Bulgarians, 3-1, in a tough Joola European Championships Qualification away fixture held in Sofia. The England squad were missing Liam Pitchford through injury but still included Paul Drinkhall, Andrew Baggaley and Daniel Reed. The Bulgarians have been struggling in the Challenge Division and are yet to get a win, but still managed to make life tough for the English.

The first match between Petko Gabrovski (435) and Andrew Baggaley (137) proved to be an incredibly close encounter. Gabrovski went in front, 11-8, but Baggaley brought the match level in an even closer game, 11-9, before going behind again in a reverse result. Baggaley held his nerve and took the final two games, 11-7 and 11-8, to give England the initial advantage.

In what proved to be a clever tactical decision the Bulgarians chose their highest ranked player, Stanislav Golovanov (243), as their number two, meaning that he would face England's number one Paul Drinkhall (101). Disappointingly, Golovanov brought the tie back to 1-1 by beating Drinkhall in just 3 games, although they were all tight, 11-7, 11-9, 11-8.

Daniel Reed (230) took full advantage of his 512 ranking places higher than Petyo Krtev (742) to restore England's lead, however there must have been a few nervy moments. Reed raced to a 1-0 lead, 11-4, before being pegged back in the second, 11-9. Making light work of the next game, 11-2, Reed restored his lead and then he will have been glad to avoid a fifth and final game by seeing out an 11-9 game to win 3-1.

Despite Drinkhall's surprise defeat earlier, England must have been confident as Drinkhall took on Gabrovski but the Bulgarian was not going out without a fight. Gabrovski put the English no.1 under immense pressure, taking the first two games 11-9 and 11-6 but to Paul's credit he pulled himself together and took the final three matches, 11-7, 11-5, 11-7, making it 3-2 and a 3-1 victory to England.

England remain in third position, equal points with Romania on 7, while Bulgaria remain in fifth, equal points with Netherlands on 4.

Results

Andrew Baggaley bt Petko Gabrovski 3-2 (8-11, 11-9, 9-11, 11-7, 11-8)

Stanislav Golovanov bt Paul Drinkhall 3-0 (11-7, 11-9, 11-8)

Daniel Reed bt Petyo Krtev 3-1 (11-4, 9-11, 11-2, 11-9)

Paul Drinkhall bt Petko Gabrovski 3-2 (9-11, 6-11, 11-7, 11-5, 11-7)

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