

# Drinkhall ends Walker's run in semis

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Paul Drinkhall finally ended Sam Walker's incredible run at the 2012/13 English Senior National Championships after edging a monumental six-game contest.

Walker's talent can no longer be in doubt after a number of spectacular victories, including his epic seven-game comeback to defeat Chris Doran in the quarter-final.

However, it was the English no. 1 who struck first in the semi-final with a tense 11-9 game. Walker's character was tested, but it was a test that he came through in the second – seeing a 9-6 lead evaporate to 9-9, but recovering enough composure to still take the game 11-9.

His frequent beaming backhands were matching Drinkhall's aggressive forehands throughout the match although a 7-0 deficit in the third game was too much to recover as he slipped 2-1 behind. It got worse in the fourth game when the defending champion overturned a 4-7 deficit to win 11-7 and open up a 3-1 lead.

However, Walker's fighting spirit was there for all to see as he worked his way back into the match with a dominant fifth game 11-4. Leading 9-7 in the sixth, it appeared as though the Under 21s Champion would force a decider but Drinkhall came back and with a bullet forehand sealed a tense win, 11-9 in the sixth.

Facing Drinkhall in the final is his final opponent from 2011/12, Liam Pitchford.

The 19-year-old, clearly recovered from the hip injury he had over winter, got the better of Andrew Baggaley in six games. It was a repeat of last year's quarter-finals where the youngster won in five.

This time Baggaley was determined to progress and came out of the blocks rapidly to win the first two games. The first was a straightforward 11-9 while in the second, he recovered from 8-3 down to win the game 11-9, some help coming from a lucky net on game point.

However, after that, the English no. 2 began to wrestle back control and unleashed his array of backhand strokes, both powerful and controlled to get level at 2-2.

From there it was no looking back despite the brilliant effort put in by Baggaley who was chasing everything down as he fell to a six games defeat 4-2 (9-11, 9-11, 11-7, 11-8, 11-8, 11-9).

## Quarter-Finals



Sam Walker displayed extraordinary mental strength to fight back from three games down to beat Chris Doran 4-3 in an outstanding quarter-final.

Doran had stormed the first two games 11-3 with his exceptional retrieval skills frustrating the Under 21s Champion. Walker then led 9-6 in the third game, only to see Doran recover and win it 12-10 opening up a seemingly unsurmountable 3-0 gap.

However, everything changed within a couple of points in the fourth game. A fine edge at 10-10 gifted Walker a crucial point, which he then sealed next up to take the game 12-10 and begin his comeback. After sealing the fifth and sixth games 11-9 and 11-8, the match was set up for a climactic finish.

By this stage Walker was in control and opened up a 9-3 lead before finally securing the ultimate comeback 11-7 to the delirium of his watching fans in the crowd.

The other three matches in the quarter-finals were straightforward 4-0 wins, beginning with Liam Pitchford's comfortable defeat of Darius Knight.

Although all the first three games were close, Pitchford had extra nerve in each one to seal a dominant advantage. After a settling 11-8 opening game, the English no. 2 won the next 12-10 and the third 11-9. In the fourth Knight was a beaten man and succumbed 11-5 to be knocked out in the last eight.

English no. 1 Drinkhall wasted no time in seeing off his quarter-final opponent David McBeath in four straight games. Charging from the off, the defending champion was professional in every aspect of his game and quickly raced to a 2-0 lead with 11-4 and 11-3 games.

Although McBeath fought back in the third, his resistance was meaningless as the dominant Drinkhall powered through two more games to secure a quick-fire berth into the last four.

Thirty-year-old Andrew Baggaley was also comfortable in his quarter-final progression. He stunned former European Cadet Champion Gavin Evans in the first game, taking a clean sweep of all 11 points to constitute the perfect start.

Evans fought back in the second game from 7-4 down to level at 10-10, but Baggaley's experience saw him to a 2-0 lead with a 12-10 game. The story was similar in the third when Evans recovered from 10-4 down to lead 11-10, but once more he fell short at 11-13 to trail 3-0.

The frustrated youngster earned a red card en route to the 4-0 defeat with Baggaley wrapping up the straight games win after an 11-6 end.

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