

England face crunch Czech tie

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England's men face a massive tie in the Czech Republic on Tuesday night to earn promotion from the Challenge Division in the final round of Joola European Qualification matches.

Playing against the group leaders, the Czechs, England must beat the hosts 3-0 and then wait on the result of Romania's match against Slovakia to see if they have earned promotion.

Making the trip to Jaromer for the 5pm (GMT) start is new English National Champion Liam Pitchford, alongside losing finalist Paul Drinkhall and the final squad member Daniel Reed.

It won't be easy for the trio as the Czech Republic have picked a strong side to ensure they finish top of the group and play in the Championships Division in October's European Championships in Schwechat, Austria (4-13th October).

The hosts have called upon Dimitrij Prokopcov (93), Pavel Sirucek (134), Lubomir Jancarik (141) and Michal Obeslo (254).

However, there is hope for the travelling English squad to pull off the crucial victory as, the last time the sides met in the 2011 European Championships, it was England who emerged 3-2 victors after Pitchford's double over Prokopcov and Tomas Tregler.

The in-form 19-year-old will have to repeat the dose if England are to be promoted on Tuesday night.

Also taking place in the Czech Republic is the English women's final match in the Championships Division. Although it seems certain that they will be demoted to the Challenge Division for October, they could restore some hope with a win on Tuesday.

Their match in Hodonin, which also starts at 5pm, will see Joanna Parker, Kelly Sibley and Hannah Hicks face a young Czech side in the forms of Hana Matelova (216), Katerina Penkavova (179), Renata Strbikova (83) and Dana Cechova (109) while Iveta Vacenovska (25) and Lenka Harabaszova (287) are also included in the squad.

England squad for European Championships Qualification Match vs Czech Republic (12th March)

Men:

Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford, Andrew Baggaley* and Daniel Reed

Coach: Jia Yi Liu

Women:

Joanna Parker, Kelly Sibley and Hannah Hicks
Coach: Alan Cooke

*Teams Update: Please note that Andrew Baggaley is no longer playing in this qualification match due to illness.

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