

Revised squad for Commonwealth Championships

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The England team selected for the upcoming Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships in New Delhi, India has unfortunately witnessed some changes. Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall are now no longer available to feature for England and are replaced by Sam Walker and Chris Doran respectively.

Whilst Liam has had several high profile wins this season on the International circuit he has also been producing similar performances in the German Bundesliga, competing for TTF Liebherr Ochsenhausen. Paul has also had some key victories in Germany, beating the likes of Patrick Franziska.

Both players' performances for their clubs have resulted in reaching the play-offs for the Bundesliga title. The play-offs, however, clash with the championships in India as the 2nd leg is to be played on the opening day of the Commonwealth Championships. This is an extremely important set of fixtures for the German club and the players' employers with significant prize money and television coverage. As a result, this selection has resulted in both players having to be withdrawn from the England team.

This is clearly disappointing for England and the principle of country before club is something that must be treasured and protected where possible. In this case it has not been and is a precedent that the ETTA will work to avoid in future.

Over the past six months the new performance leadership team, Nick Jarvis and Jon Pett, have visited the German clubs to build stronger relationships for English players and open a dialogue on many subjects, including the issue of club versus country selection. Both clubs had been aware of the issue relating to the Commonwealth Championships and had appeared supportive of England, and were going to seek approval to reschedule their play-off fixture to a week earlier; this change would have resulted in no clash and both players availability for India. Despite discussions between England and the German clubs it is unfortunate that this issue has not been resolved.

This is obviously not an ideal situation for England, but in the modern professional world of table tennis issues can arise between country and club; something also witnessed in many other sports. As the players' employers the German clubs have contractual control over each player's programmes England have little control at this point in time. This is usually avoidable as most International fixtures/events fall outside of club fixtures and as such clashes can be avoided.

Ultimately the timing of the Commonwealth Championships has impacted on the England team as it clashes directly with the Bundesliga which is far from acceptable but out of the ETTA's hands, with support from either

the ETTU or ITTF unavailable.

If the event was managed by the ETTU or ITTF (European and World Championships for example) this would simply not happen. The staging of the event in India is ultimately the single biggest reason for the unavailability of English players, and forces England to not send their best team. The event takes place within a few days of the World Championships in Paris, requiring players to compete on separate continents in an extremely short space of time; simply put the event in Delhi does not offer the best preparation for a World Championship. One must also now question the need for a Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships given the sports consistent inclusion in the Commonwealth Games (in Glasgow in 2014) and Olympics?

This change does however provide a chance for one of England's leading Juniors to press his claim for inclusion in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Sam Walker's impressive run at the 2012/13 English Senior National Table Tennis Championships and performances on the ITTF Global Junior circuit have led to his selection for India.



Walker, who plays the majority of his table tennis in Germany with club TTC Seligenstadt, performed consistently well at the Senior Nationals, picking up significant victories against rival England Internationals, winning the U21 Men's title and reaching the Men's Singles semi-final, where he eventually lost to Paul Drinkhall. He will now head to India, as well as Paris for the World Individual Championships, in May to push his claim for a senior England place on a consistent basis.

Chris Doran also gets his chance as he returns to the international fold after a brief absence following competing at the cadet and junior levels for England over his short career.

Doran, only 21-years-old still, has coupled his studies with Nottingham Trent University with his table tennis training, which has seen him perform impressively at both the recent Senior National Championships as well as across the Grand Prix series.

He currently leads the Grand Prix standings after victories at the Tees Sport Newcastle GP, North Herts GP, NatWest Jersey GP and Tees Sport Blackpool GP putting him ahead of the likes of Ryan Jenkins, Gavin Runggay, Paul McCreery and the rejuvenated Mike O'Driscoll.

His run at the Senior National Championships was cut short in a thrilling match with Walker, which you can watch below.



Revised England squads for Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships (New Delhi, India 5-10th May 2013)

Men:

Andrew Baggaley, Danny Reed, Chris Doran and Sam Walker

Women:

Joanna Parker, Kelly Sibley, Tin-Tin Ho and Hannah Hicks

Coaches:

Jia Yi Liu, Alan Cooke and Nick Jarvis

Physiotherapist:

Katharine Scullard

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