

Proud Helshan ready for Youth Olympics chance

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Helshan in action at the 2013 School Games (Tony Marshall/PA Wire)

Sixteen-year-old Helshan Weerasinghe expressed his pride at being selected to represent Great Britain at the ITTF Youth Olympic Games Continental Qualification in Hodonin, Czech Republic (February 9-11, 2014).

The newly crowned Junior Masters Champion will join Welsh girl Charlotte Carey at the event after they were selected by the British Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) following nominations from their respective home countries.

The English Junior No. 1 said: "I'm proud. I've performed well domestically for a while, so I've proudly competed for England as a result. But this will be the first time I will compete for GB, so I'm excited. It should be a really valuable experience.

"The fact that I'm representing GB makes me more confident, and I know that my opponents will also be in a similar situation, as they will be the sole player from their country too."

The tournament in Hodonin is one route for European players hoping to qualify for the 2014 Second Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing, China (August 17-28). Further opportunities will present themselves via ITTF selected competitions designated as 'Road to Nanjing Series' events.

Each National Olympic Association is allowed to enter just one boy and one girl for the qualification process, which means the pressure is intense on those chosen to compete.

However, as a regular international, the Cambridge-born star plans to use his experience and thorough preparation to plot a path through to the main event in China later this year.

He said: "The main aim is to qualify, but it's important not to look too far ahead and do everything I can in terms of preparation so I can be in the best condition for the tournament.

"Having competed for England over the last few years, I know most of the opponents fairly well, which gives me added confidence going into qualification."

For Helshan, a place at the Youth Olympic Games would be the highlight of his burgeoning career but, rather than settle for junior success, the youngster already has eyes on a place at the senior Olympic Games for his ambitious future.

"It would definitely be a highlight and it would also be a stepping-stone for my career so I will concentrate on the qualifying first and try not to look too far ahead." Helshan explained, "It is certainly one of my main ambitions and experience at a Youth Olympics would definitely be valuable for me if I have the honour of competing for Great Britain again."

BTTF Selections, ITTF YOG Continental Qualification for Europe:

Boy: Helshan Weerasinghe (ENG)

Girl: Charlotte Carey (WAL)

Coaches: Matthew Stanforth and Ryan Jenkins

Written by Russell Moore (February 4, 2014)

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