

Doubles champions retain strangleholds in Sheffield

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Men's Doubles:

Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford retained their Men's Doubles title in one of the tightest, most nail-biting finals in memory as they edged out Darius Knight and Andrew Baggaley 3-2 (11-9, 9-11, 10-12, 12-10, 11-9).

The duo, who would also later compete against each other in the Men's Singles Final, kick-started their doubles campaign in a comfortable semi-final victory over Gavin Evans and David McBeath. McBeath and Evans, who had previously also met in the singles with the former coming out with a 4-0 win, were powerless to prevent the favourites winning 3-1 (11-8, 8-11, 11-4, 11-9).

They met the dynamic duo of Baggaley and Knight who had won every match up to that point by a perfect scoreline of 3-0 – including their semi-final victory over Sam Walker and Daniel Reed 3-0 (11-6, 16-14, 11-9). Walker and Reed may again have been affected by their singles meeting just minutes beforehand, during which Walker recovered from 2-0 down to win a classic 4-3 (6-11, 10-12, 11-9, 11-9, 11-8, 2-11, 11-7).

It proved that both pairings were indeed the right combination for the final and throughout the contest there was absolutely nothing to separate between them. After trading 11-9 games, the left-hand/right-hand partnership of Knight and Baggaley picked up a crucial third game 12-10, thanks mainly to an amazing point at 8-9 in which Baggaley struck a shot before falling on the floor, yet recovering to strike two more attempts and level 9-9.

When the second seeds established a 6-3 lead in the fourth game due to back-to-back delicate chops from both Baggaley and Knight the defending champions were forced to take a timeout. Ultimately it worked as Pitchford and Drinkhall clawed their way level with a 12-10 game.

In the deciding end it was Baggaley and Knight who started well again – 3-0 up, but despite another floor-hitting forehand winner from Baggaley, the match still headed to 9-9 with Pitchford standing over two important serves. With a game point secured following the first serve, Drinkhall struck a fine forehand winner directly down the line to clinch a pulsating win.



Women's Doubles:

Joanna Drinkhall and Kelly Sibley maintained their stranglehold on the Women's Doubles by securing their fifth consecutive crown and sixth overall with a 3-1 victory over young pretenders Tin-Tin Ho and Maria Tsaptsinos in the final.

Neither pair had dropped a game en route to the final which included one-sided semi-final wins on Sunday morning at Ponds Forge. The defending champions were competent in their dismissal of Hannah Hicks and Sanja Clements 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-4) while the best-friends combination of Ho and Tsaptsinos pulled off a shock win over the more experienced pair of Karina Le Fevre and Emma Vickers 3-0 (11-6, 11-7, 11-6).

The final itself was a spirited affair with the junior duo taking the task to their illustrious opponents – ensuring the first two-point break in the match only occurred at 10-8 in the first end although it did mean that the five-time champions took the opening game 11-8.

The underdogs continued their brave performance in the second game but were terribly unfortunate at 10-9 up to see a Drinkhall defensive edge clip the net and drop down onto their side. This soon meant that they fell 2-0 behind but didn't give up as their efforts were rewarded with an 11-8 third game and one foot back in the door at 1-2 down.

England's no. 1 and 2 were certainly not having play their own way and had to work hard to create two championship points at 10-8. Despite Ho and Tsaptsinos saving one, a push just wide from the latter of the duo meant that Drinkhall and Sibley secured their fifth consecutive title and continued their dominance over the women's game.

55th Senior English National Table Tennis Championships Doubles Results

Men's Doubles:

Liam Pitchford/Paul Drinkhall bt Andrew Baggaley/Darius Knight 3-2 (11-9, 9-11, 10-12, 12-10, 11-9)

Women's Doubles:

Kelly Sibley/Joanna Drinkhall bt Tin-Tin Ho/Maria Tsaptsinos 3-1 (11-8, 12-10, 8-11, 11-9)

Russell Moore (March 2, 2014)

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