

# 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, 11-8, 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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