

England learn 2014 World Team Championships draw

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England's

men and women have learned their groups for the 2014 World Team Table Tennis Championships in Tokyo, Japan (April 28 – May 5) after the draw was made in the Japanese capital last weekend.

Both England squads have competed in Division Two of the World Team Championships since their last appearances in the top flight – the women in Russia 2010 and the men in Manchester 1997. However, a vastly improved and youthful-looking England team are hopeful of completing a double promotion campaign in East Asia this time around.

England's men, now led by 20-year-old Liam Pitchford, who burst into the world's top 100 this season, will feature as the top seeds in Group G where they will face Slovakia, Turkey, Thailand, Congo Brazzaville and Israel.

Two years ago in the Westfalenhallen, Dortmund (GER) Pitchford, alongside Paul Drinkhall, Andrew Baggaley and Daniel Reed comfortably won their group but fell to a Sharath Kamal Achanta-inspired India 3-1 to deny the quartet of a place in the top division.

Pitchford (wr 54), Drinkhall (135) and Baggaley (153) will this time be joined by 18-year-old Sam Walker (245) as they look to go one step further in Tokyo this spring. Their toughest group opponents will come in the forms of Slovakia (Thomas Keinath 100 and Lubomir Pistej 145) and Turkey (Li Ahmet 63 and Bora Vang 73) while they could face the Czech Republic (Dimitrij Prokopcov 82), India (Achanta 54) or Egypt (Omar Assar 78) in crucial play-off fixtures during the latter stages.



England's women have made just one change from the side that competed in Germany in 2012 with Tin-Tin Ho (wr 243) replacing Jessica Dawson. Drawn in Group F, the English girls will also be top seeds as they face Lithuania, Malaysia, Wales, Colombia and Israel on their campaign for a promotion to the Championships Division.

Although Joanna Drinkhall (124), Kelly Sibley (146) and Hannah Hicks (345) suffered defeats to both India and Italy in Dortmund, they will fancy their chances in Tokyo with Lithuania's Ruta Paskauskiene (104) the only player in Group F ranked higher than either Drinkhall or Sibley.

Like the men, their biggest challenge will come from the other Division Two top seeds; Thailand, Brazil and India – should their paths cross in the play-offs. England's no. 1 and 2, Drinkhall and Sibley, will hope to avenge their respective defeats to Mouma Das and expunge the memories of the side's 3-2 loss in the groups, which proved decisive in the girls' hopes last time out.

Schedules for the group matches have also been released with details below. Note: all times are provided in Greenwich Mean Time which is nine hours behind the Japanese time zone.

World Team Table Tennis Championships, Tokyo, Japan (April 28 – May 5, 2014) Fixtures:

Men's Group G:

April 28th: England v Thailand (08:30 GMT)
April 29th: England v Congo Brazzaville (02:00)
April 29th: England v Turkey (08:30)
April 30th: England v Slovakia (09:30)
May 1st: England v Israel (05:00)

Women's Group F:

April 28th: England v Wales (05:00)
April 29th: England v Colombia (02:00)
April 29th: England v Malaysia (08:30)
April 30th: England v Lithuania (08:30)
May 1st: England v Israel (02:00)

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