

England's men promoted at World Team Champs

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England's men celebrate promotion to the Championships Division

England's men have been promoted back into the Championship Division of the World Team Championships following a 3-2 victory over Slovakia in Tokyo, Japan.

The men's quartet of Liam Pitchford, Paul Drinkhall, Daniel Reed and Sam Walker will now compete in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for the 2016 World Team Championships in the top tier of world table tennis for the first time since the event was held in Manchester 1997.

The route to promotion didn't come easily though as back-to-back tests against Nigeria and Slovakia tested to the men to their max on day six of the tournament.

In their first fixture of the day, Group G winners England, found themselves 2-0 down to Nigeria after wins for Quadri Aruna and Segun Toriola over Drinkhall and Pitchford respectively. However, Reed's 3-0 victory over Ojo Onaolapo began the fightback before both Pitchford and Drinkhall won 3-1 in their reverse fixtures to ensure England received a berth in the semi-finals and setup a promotion play-off with Slovakia.

When the sides previously met in Group G, England emerged with a comfortable 3-0 victory but the Slovakian side had been energised by their impressive 3-1 win over Iran in the previous round and proceeded to take a 2-1 lead after Lubomir Pistej and Peter Sereda beat Drinkhall and Reed respectively – the defeat to Sereda was Reed's first loss of the tournament and included a battling third game in which he saved six match points.

However, rather than ebb away, the English men returned stronger and levelled the scores with Pitchford's second win of the match. The 20-year-old was sublime during his 3-0 win which provided four-time National Champion Drinkhall with the chance to seal a historic promotion to the top division.

Duly, Drinkhall delivered in style. He won all three games against Thomas Keinath to spur ecstatic scenes as Pitchford, Reed and Walker invaded the court to embrace their compatriot following a truly epic team effort.



Paul Drinkhall salutes the support after his final victory

Afterwards, Drinkhall said: "It's just been a great team performance and we are happy to go to the first division but we've still got another match tomorrow and hopefully we can come out as winners.

"Playing Keinath was a new thing for me. I just used what Pitchford did against him and that was being on top of him and switch to his forehand if possible, and the tactics paid off. I got a great start, totally different to my first match, so it was good to come through."

His team-mate Reed added: "In the match against Nigeria my opponent was really aggressive and I just wanted to make sure that I was the first one to attack.

"Sereda played really well and after I saved match points in the third set, I managed to take him to five, but he was too good."

Performance Coach Alan Cooke said: "They've done what they came here to do and the players are very, very pleased, as you would expect.

"They're quite tired too. It's been a heavy day with a lot of five-set matches, and a long day – we didn't have time to go back to the hotel after the Nigeria match, so we had to stay at the hall all day."

Even when England were 2-0 down to Nigeria, Cooke believed they could keep the dream alive.

"I still felt confident that we would win that match, we just needed to keep the composure," he said. "To be fair to Nigeria, they played really well, to the top of their level. But Danny Reed did a good job and changed the momentum of the match and won really convincingly, and then Liam wanted to make amends for his defeat, which he did, and then the same for Paul."

It was a rollercoaster against Slovakia too, and Cooke said: "We kind of expected that. We beat them in the group, but the matches were tight, and you know it's going to be a bit different when there's something at stake.

"The key was not to panic (at 2-1 down) and wait for our chances – you've just to keep fighting. Everybody kept calm and focused and they got some great support from the sides."

England can now look forward to facing Italy in the final of the Challenge Division (08:30 Sunday on itTV) before taking on the likes of China, Germany, Japan and South Korea when the team championships return in 2016.

Unfortunately, the story was not the same for the English women. Their 3-1 defeat to Lithuania, the same opponent they lost to in the group, denied them a chance to play for a place in the Championships Division. Despite Joanna Drinkhall's opening victory over Ieva Venslaviciute, the women were unable to pick up any more wins as a double from Ruta Paskauskiene ended the girl's hopes.

Watch full highlights of the [win vs Slovakia here](#)

Click here to see the [men's knockout draw](#) and [women's knockout draw](#)

Find previous reports from the 2014 World Championships Group Stages [here](#).

Latest 2014 World Team Championships, Tokyo (JPN) Scores:

Challenge Division:

Men's Semi-Final (Promotion match):

England 3-2 Slovakia

Liam Pitchford bt Thomas Keinath 3-0 (12-10, 12-10, 11-8)
Lubomir Pistej bt Paul Drinkhall 3-2 (11-2, 11-2, 6-11, 9-11, 12-10)
Peter Sereda bt Daniel Reed 3-2 (11-8, 11-8, 16-18, 4-11, 11-7)
Liam Pitchford bt Lubomir Pistej 3-0 (11-8, 11-9, 11-8)
Paul Drinkhall bt Thomas Keinath 3-0 (11-5, 11-7, 12-10)

Men's Quarter-Final:

England 3-2 Nigeria

Quadri Aruna bt Paul Drinkhall 3-1 (12-10, 6-11, 11-9, 11-6)
Segun Toriola bt Liam Pitchford 3-2 (10-12, 12-10, 8-11, 11-6, 11-6)
Daniel Reed bt Ojo Onaolapo 3-0 (11-5, 11-7, 11-6)
Liam Pitchford bt Quadri Aruna 3-1 (11-5, 6-11, 11-5, 11-6)
Paul Drinkhall bt Segun Toriola 3-1 (11-6, 9-11, 11-5, 11-9)

Women's Quarter-Final:

England 1-3 Lithuania

Joanna Drinkhall bt Ieva Venslaviciute 3-0 (11-6, 11-4, 12-10)
Ruta Paskauskiene bt Tin-Tin Ho 3-0 (12-10, 11-9, 11-7)
Egle Stuckyte bt Kelly Sibley 3-2 (11-8, 5-11, 5-11, 14-12, 11-6)
Ruta Paskauskiene bt Joanna Drinkhall 3-0 (11-5, 11-6, 11-8)

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