

Glasgow 2014: Jo relishes No 1 'honour'

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Joanna Drinkhall (front, centre) at Lilleshall with the women's squad and Head Performance Coach Nick Jarvis. Picture courtesy of Steve Parkin

Joanna Drinkhall is relishing the responsibility of leading the line as England's women try to make up for their Delhi heartache.

The English No 1 says she is determined to set the tone for the team as they bid to improve on their fourth-place finish four years ago, and insists she will not feel any pressure despite the team's expectations to get on the podium in Glasgow.

"I've been the number one for a while but it's not really pressure, it's an honour really," said the 27-year-old from Chertsey.

"I've worked my way there. It's not like someone's shoved me there and said 'okay, you're the leader you have to perform'.

"I've got there from hard work and learning about the game, so I don't see it as pressure – it's quite natural to me.

"If the player that goes out there first in the team event plays well and puts in a good performance – not necessarily win but play with positive attitude – I've seen it happen that the whole team feeds off of it. I guess that's what I try to do.

"The team event is big because last time we finished fourth, which is the worst place to finish. Wwe were all absolutely gutted as we finished fourth by literally two points in the end – it was horrible. To get a medal in the team would be great."

Despite missing out on that team medal, Drinkhall did return from India with a bronze from the mixed doubles alongside her now husband, Paul.

And her experiences of four years ago have made her hungry for more in Scotland.

"In my first games (Melbourne 2006), I just turned up and wanted the experience, I didn't have the medals necessarily in mind because at the time the team wasn't quite as ambitious," she said.

"But then, getting the flavour of medals in Delhi, winning bronze with Paul, has made me realise that I've got a good chance of winning medals.

"It's a totally different mentality going into the games – we're seeded higher, so in a way there's expectation on us there.

"But it's good expectation to win medals – it's nice to know you can win medals and it's a good mentality to go in there with."

Drinkhall, who plays for the TT Saint-Quentin club in France, believes Tin-Tin Ho, the only débutant in the team, also has that mentality.

"It's nice having someone come into the team with such ambition," said Drinkhall.

"Sometimes it's hard for a younger playing coming into a senior team to fill that third space that can be initially

overwhelming. We need someone there who wants to win who wants to win medals and Tin-Tin's exactly that.

"She's really hungry and really driven that brings a great atmosphere to the team – she has a real positive energy."

Whatever happens in Glasgow, Drinkhall is not planning to have any regrets, and hinted that she will not stick rigidly to her defensive style.

"I've always been able to attack, it's just always stayed in the training hall," she said. "My backhand's very natural to me but my forehand side isn't quite as natural so I used to just stick to the chopping.

"As I'm getting older I think I'm a bit freer in my head as I realise 'just go for it' – if it's the right shot to play then you go for it and see what happens afterwards, whereas if you don't go for it you come off the table thinking 'if I'd tried this'.

By Russell Moore (July 10th, 2014)

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