

Drinkhall breaks into the world's top 50

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Paul Drinkhall celebrates one of his impressive victories in Russia last month

Paul Drinkhall's brilliant run to the final of the Russian Open has seen him move up to a career high of 45 in the ITTF rankings.

The 24-year-old rises from No 80 – in the process leapfrogging Liam Pitchford to become the highest-ranked English player.

It is on the back of a string of stellar results at the Russian Open last month, where he beat top-25 players Eonrae Cho (KOR) and Marcos Freitas (POR) before seeing off then world No 5 Dimitrij Ovtcharov (GER). He was then beaten in the final by Japan's Koki Niwa.

Pitchford remains in the top 50 but drops six places to No 49, while the Chesterfield player is No 9 on the under-21 list.

Andrew Baggaley drops 11 places to No 163, Danny Reed is No 189, Darius Knight No 248 and Sam Walker No 283.

On the women's list, Joanna Drinkhall remains the highest-ranked English player at No 121, with Kelly Sibley at 157 and Tin-Tin Ho, currently competing at the World Junior Championships in China, at No 221.

Paul Drinkhall's feat comes just over 10 years since his England senior debut in a European League match at the Hoops Basketball Centre, Barrow-in-Furness, against the Netherlands on November 2, 2004.

At the tender age of 14, he went on the table when the score was 2-2 and won the decider against Barry Wijers to give England the victory. The other team members were Alan Cooke and Andrew Rushton and the match was watched by a crowd of 600.

Drinkhall had donned an England shirt at the Six Nations in September of that year, but only played in the individual event, in which England caps were not awarded.

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(additional information from Diane Webb)

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