

# Drinkhall injury hands Pistej Heritage Oil title

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Trophy winners Xiao Xin Yang and Lubomir Pistej. Picture by Huet Bartels

Lubomir Pistej is the 2015 Heritage Oil Cup champion after England's Paul Drinkhall had to retire from the final with an ankle injury.

The match was delicately poised at 1-1 and deuce when the England No 1 appeared to twist an ankle during an athletic rally.

He was unable to continue, leaving the world No 124 from Slovakia to take the title.

Paul said: "It was a long rally and I ended up going over on my ankle. At the time it felt horrendous but I'm able to walk on it now. It's slightly swollen – how bad it is, I don't know yet, but hopefully it's nothing too bad.

"It was shaping up to be a great game and I felt I had been getting better and better and the crowd started getting involved. I felt I would have gone on to win it – though obviously he would say the same thing.

"But it was a good tournament overall for me and for table tennis and there were no easy matches."

More than 200 spectators were at the K2 and, with a stellar entry list, there was much expectation.



Paul Drinkhall in action at the K2. Picture by Michael Loveder

As well as Drinkhall and Pistej, the field included Adam Pattantyus (WR 64), Ryan Jenkins (Wales No 1), Gavin Rumgay (Scotland No 1), Gavin Maguire (Ireland No 2), England aces Danny Reed and Darius Knight, Pawel Chmiel (Poland), Piotr Chmiel (Poland), Zolt Sel (Serbia), Chris Doran (England) and David McBeath (England).

In the Women's event: Xiao Xin Yang (WR 43), Fangxian Yi (China), Zhen Deng (China), Petra Lovas (Hungary), Antonina Szymanska (Poland), Daria Luczakowska (Poland), Agnes Le Lannic (France), Ana Neves (Portugal) and Charlotte Carey (Wales) in certainly the strongest line up seen in Great Britain this year.

The format involved groups of four players competing on the Saturday, with the top two progressing to the knockout on the Sunday. This pitched some very high calibre players against each other even at the group stages.

In the morning Piotr Chmiel laid his claim to the title with a 3-1 victory over Knight. Jenkins and Reed produced a classic encounter with Ryan squeezing out Danny 3-2 in a pulsating match of real high quality.

In the Women's event, last year's semi-finalist Le Lannic edged out Luczakowska 11-9 in the 5<sup>th</sup> while her team mate Szymanska defeated the much talked about 15-year-old student from China, Deng, 3-1.

The afternoon saw one of the classic games of the weekend with Drinkhall against Doran. A routine victory was expected by many but Chris was having none of it in a spectacular match with superb rallies galore.

With the score level at 2-2, the match continued with long high-quality rallies that saw Doran finally deliver a match point in his favour. Drinkhall, appearing very calm throughout, was equal to the task and save two further match points, with one shot played almost from the floor. Then Drinkhall finally seized his chance to go match point up and converted in style at the first time of asking – a 15-13 scoreline in the fifth would not have been predicted by any in the hall.

McBeath had earlier been defeated by Drinkhall, which meant he and Doran were realistically battling out for a place in the draw. But Doran's good form deserted him as McBeath claimed a routine victory.

Rumgay lost to Pistej in the afternoon while Pattantyus, who had earlier in the year beaten the World No 10 Chih-Yuan Chuang at the World Championships, and Pawel Chmiel were also delivering a classic match of defence versus attack with some awesome points. In the end Pattantyus won 11-8 in the fifth after being 2-0 down.

By the end of the afternoon we had our set of qualifiers for the knockout stages scheduled for the following day. First up was Knight versus Pawel Chmiel but unfortunately Knight did not show, giving Pawel a bye to the quarter final.

Next up was Rumgay versus Jenkins, a classic with both players exchanging powerful shots in long rallies. On this occasion it was not to be Jenkins' day as Rumgay took the win. McBeath battled valiantly against one of the Polish twin brothers Piotr Chmiel but went down 3-1.

At the quarter-final stage, Drinkhall faced the other Polish twin brother Pawel Chmiel and delivered a 3-1 victory against an opponent who left no doubt in any of the onlookers minds that he was of very high calibre. Rumgay, who had been in scintillating form. took little time in despatching Zolt Sel in three straight.

Pistej claimed his semi-final spot against Piotr Chmiel in a match that could easily have gone the other way before Reed and Pattantyus met in the last quarter-final, an opportunity for Reed to avenge his defeat at the same stage in the competition last year. Reed started the brighter of the two and took up a 2-0 lead but, just like last year, Pattantyus clawed his way back and ended up victor, 11-8 in the fifth.

The first semi-final saw Rumgay meet Drinkhall and the latter showed his top form to win it 3-0. In the other semi-final Pistej showed what a versatile forehand he has as he beat Pattantyus to set up the prospect of a thrilling final – the last time the two had met was at the World Team Championships in Japan last year, Pistej winning 11-9 in the fifth. But Paul's unfortunate injury deprived the event of the big finale.

Meanwhile, in the Women's event, Xiao Xin Yang made quick work of Lovas, 11-2, 11-6, 11-3 and Fangxian Yi (last year's winner) came from 2-0 down to beat Szymanska 11-3 in the fifth.

The former world No 44 (Fangxian Yi) versus the current No 43 produced some outstanding table tennis and after going 1-0 down Xiao Xin Yang proved what a competitor she is with a 3-1 victory.

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