



I'll respond to pressure of seniors, says Maria

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Maria Tsaptsinos is ready to up her game as she prepares to make her senior England debut at the European Championships.

Tsaptsinos will feature alongside Kelly Sibley, Karina Le Fevre and Lois Peake in the team competition at the championships in Ekaterinburg, Russia, which begin on Friday.

England will play in the second tier – the Challenge Division – and will face Greece, Belgium and Finland in the group stage as they begin their campaign for promotion to the Championship Division.

And the Reading 18-year-old is thrilled to get her first chance to play at the highest level.

"It's great to get my first senior call-up," she said. "It's the Europeans and it's much bigger than what I've done before so I know I've got to get prepared for it.

"There's a lot more pressure now I'm moving up – I'm not a junior any more so I have to up my game and be prepared for what lies ahead."

Tsaptsinos has been on familiar ground before flying out to Russia today as she and the other women's team members have been training at the Kingfisher club in Reading.

She said she particularly aspires to reach the same standard as England No 1 Sibley, who beat her in the National Championships final in March.

Tsaptsinos was concentrating on her A Levels at the time of the Nationals and will start at Nottingham University after returning from Russia – where Sibley has a coaching role.

"Kelly's much better than me at the moment, because I was focusing on my A Levels and it's hard to compete with people who are training full time," said Tsaptsinos.

"But it's good I'll get to practise more with her now, before the Europeans and at Nottingham as well and hopefully I won't have to look up to her because I'll raise my standard and be able to compete with her."

First the focus is on Russia, and Tsaptsinos admitted she was unsure what to expect.

"I don't really know the senior circuit so I'm not 100 per cent sure what we can achieve as a team – I've got to get my bearings a bit first," she said. "But I don't see why we can't do well. It's hard work and time spent on the table

that means we can compete.

"I just want to keep improving and get the best wins I can. Selection is good, but I want to get the results as well."

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