



Kelly's eye is on a double challenge

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Kelly Sibley is preparing for two big challenges – on and off the table.

The 2014 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist leads the England women's team into the European Championships which start in Russia on Friday, with promotion the target.

She will then tackle the Great Birmingham Run on October 18, raising money for Cancer Research, having been inspired by her niece Flo, who is fighting leukaemia.

Table tennis preparations have obviously been first and foremost for the 27-year-old player, who has been training alongside team-mates Karina Le Fevre, Maria Tsapsinos and Lois Peake before leaving for Ekaterinburg.

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.

Sibley said: "It's starting to come together and I'm really looking forward to it. I've been doing pre-season training at the University of Nottingham and doing some sessions in the gym.

"There are some strong teams in that division and we're going to have to play our best table tennis to get promotion.

"We lost to Greece at the last European Championships and obviously we'll be looking to get revenge against them.

"Any of the teams at that level can beat anybody but if we put in some good performances and stay focused then we can be fighting for that promotion place."

Le Fevre and Ho also represented England at Glasgow 2014, but there is a first senior call-up for 18-year-olds Tsapsinos and Peake – who was a late call-up for the injured Tin-Tin Ho.

"It's good to have the young players coming through into senior level," said Sibley.

"Our bench is quite active and vocal and all the players respond well to that positive attitude. Maria's perfect to come in because she'll play with a good positive attitude and is quite aggressive on the table, so hopefully she will go out and really show she deserves her place."

After returning from Russia, the half-marathon Great Birmingham Run looms on the horizon.

Sibley will again be part of RunTeamFlo, a group of eight runners raising money for Cancer Research UK. The team was launched last year after Sibley's four-year-old niece Flo was diagnosed with leukaemia. The aim was to raise £2,500 but the amount donated through Justgiving.com now stands at an amazing £23,900.



Kelly Sibley and Laura Snow with Kelly's niece

Flo after last year's Great Birmingham Run

"It's just overwhelming that people are sending their money," said Sibley. "We set a target of £2,500 last year which I thought was a bit much, but we smashed it and it just kept going and going and going.

"It's amazing really and I feel quite proud that we've raised that money – and it will make a difference. I'm very thankful to everyone who's sent money.

"Flo's doing okay and she's just started school but we still have to monitor everything, she's not clear yet. Everyone's really proud of her – she just took it all in her stride. She's amazing and, touch wood, if she keeps responding she'll get through it."

Sibley is also entered into next year's London Marathon for the same cause and she added: "No one else is brave enough or silly enough to run that with me – but I don't even want to think about it yet!"

To donate to RunTeamFlo, visit www.justgiving.com/RunTeamFlo/

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