



England teams get off to flying start in Russia

Author: Paul Stimpson

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England's men and women's teams both made winning starts to their European Championships campaigns today.

The men saw off Estonia 3-0 and then overcame a tricky Italian side 3-1, while the women beat Finland 3-0 in Ekaterinburg, Russia.

The men were first in action and Liam Pitchford gave them the perfect start with a 3-0 (11-5, 11-7, 11-5) win over Aleksandr Smirnov and Andrew Baggaley followed up with an even more emphatic 11-4, 11-2, 11-6 victory against Aleksandr Lusin.

Paul Drinkhall was a little more inconvenienced by Vallot Vainula, claiming a 3-1 triumph (11-3, 9-11, 11-8, 11-4) to seal the overall match result.

The Italians were always likely to be sterner opponents and so it proved as Niagol Stoyanov defeated Pitchford 3-1 (11-4, 7-11, 11-2, 11-6) to put his country ahead.

When the live scoring system showed Drinkhall 2-0 down to Mihai Bobocica, it looked as if England faced an uphill task. Thankfully, it was a glitch and he was actually 2-0 up – and he went on to win 3-1 (11-6, 11-9, 5-11, 11-8).

Baggaley then put England in front, though it took a while to shake off a determined Leonardo Mutti 3-1 (11-8, 17-19, 11-8, 11-9).

And Pitchford closed off the match, coming from a set down to defeat Bobocica 3-1 (5-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-4).

England play their final group match against Bulgaria at 9am tomorrow, UK time.

Karina Le Fevre was the first on the table for the women as they took on Finland and she registered a 3-1 win over Annika Lundstrom (11-9, 5-11, 11-7, 11-7).

Kelly Sibley made it 2-0 by beating Anna Kirichenko 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-7) and Maria Tsapsinos, winning her first senior international cap, completed the scoreline with a rapid 3-0 (11-2, 11-7, 11-3) triumph against Pihla Eriksson.

England next play Greece at 6am UK time on Saturday and then finish up against Belgium at 3pm.

Meanwhile, the event's opening ceremony took place this evening at the Ekaterinburg Museum of Architecture

and Design.



A scene from the opening ceremony

The championships were officially opened by swimming legend Alexander Popov, a four time Olympic gold-medallist and six-time world champion at a superb ceremony including dignitaries, cultural dancers and spectacular fireworks.

Table Tennis England Chairman Sandra Deaton and Chief Executive Sara Sutcliffe attended on behalf of the organisation.

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