

England men top group but women are second

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England men beat Bulgaria 3-0 at the European Championships in Russia today to complete a 100% record in the group stage.

Liam Pitchford started the ball rolling by beating Teodor Alexandrov in three straight (11-4, 12-10, 11-7).

Paul Drinkhall was then taken the distance by Petyo Krastev but was never behind in a 3-2 scoreline (11-8, 6-11, 11-7, 9-11, 11-3).

Andrew Baggaley sealed it by beating Petko Gabrovski 3-1 (11-9, 8-11, 11-5, 11-5).

It means England top Group F, ahead of Italy, who beat Estonia today.



Paul Drinkhall in action in Ekaterinburg. Picture: ITTF

In the women's event, Greece again proved England's downfall as they won 3-2 today – the same scoreline by which England lost to the same opponents a year ago in Lisbon.

However, England recovered to beat Belgium 3-1 and finish second in the group.

As last year, Kelly Sibley got England off to a winning start against Greece, coming from 2-0 down to beat Angeliki Papadaki 3-2 (8-11, 9-11, 11-5, 11-8, 11-9).

It was the reverse scenario for Karina Le Fevre against Aikaterini Toliou as she saw a 2-0 lead overturned, going down in a close fifth which went to deuce (11-5, 11-4, 11-13, 5-11, 11-13).

Maria Tsapsinos restored the English advantage with a 3-1 victory over Maria Christoforaki (11-5, 5-11, 11-9, 11-9), but Toliou then eased past Sibley 11-4, 11-4, 13-11 to tie it up at 2-2.

Le Fevre versus Papadaki was the deciding match-up and it was again decided in three straight as the Greek woman took it 11-7, 11-7, 11-9.

After winning her matches against Finland and Greece, Tsapsinos was handed the responsibility of leading off the tie against Belgium.

And she rose beautifully to the occasion, taking Nathalie Marchetti, at No 338 almost 200 places above Tsapsinos in the rankings, all the way and sealing it 12-10 in the fifth on her second match point. The final scoreline was 11-8, 7-11, 11-13, 11-8, 12-10.

Sibley made it 2-0 by getting past Lisa Lung in three straight (11-8, 11-9, 11-3) but Le Fevre was then overcome by Eline Løyen 3-1 (7-11, 6-11, 11-3, 1-11).

Sibley moved into a 2-0 lead against Marchetti but was pegged back. However, the Leamington player took the decider and clinched the 3-1 win for England with a scoreline of 11-3, 11-7, 7-11, 7-11, 11-6.

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