



Women end in 22nd as men lose to Belgium

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Maria Tsaptsinos won two matches on the day as England women sealed a 22nd-place finish at the European Championships.

The 18-year-old Reading player took the deciding match as England beat Italy 3-2 and later put England 1-0 up in their final positional play-off against Lithuania. However, Lithuania came back to win the next three matches and claim 21st spot.

In the first match, England had to come from behind as Tsaptsinos lost 3-1 to world No 336 Denisa Zancaner (6-11, 9-11, 11-8, 10-12) in the opening rubber.

But Kelly Sibley won at a canter over Chiara Colantoni (11-3, 11-2, 11-7) and Lois Peake, ranked 626, overcame Georgia Piccolin (No 348) in almost as impressive fashion – 11-8, 11-7, 11-8.

Zancaner pulled Italy level by beating Sibley in four (6-11, 11-8, 11-6, 11-5) but Tsaptsinos recovered from losing a close first set against Colantoni to win it 3-1 (11-13, 11-6, 11-6, 11-6).

Tsaptsinos gave England the perfect start against Lithuania, recovering from losing the opening set to Ugne Baskutyte to clinch a 3-1 result (10-12, 14-12, 11-7, 11-7).

Peake made a good start against Egle Stuckyte but saw her opponent, ranked No 294, come back to win 3-1 (9-11, 11-6, 11-6, 11-6). And Karina Le Fevre then found it tough against Ruta Paskauskiene, who lived up to her top-100 status with an 11-4, 11-2, 11-6 victory.

Needing to win to keep England in it, Tsaptsinos stormed into a 2-0 lead against Stuckyte. The third saw the girls go point for point deep into the teens before Stuckyte took it 18-16, which opened the way for her to come back and clinch it 3-2 (7-11, 6-11, 18-16, 11-5, 11-7).

Meanwhile, England men's quest to win the Challenge Division is over as they lost 3-1 to Belgium. Fortunately, a proposed reorganisation of the European game means they could not have won promotion, even had they taken the Challenge Division crown.

England are guaranteed to finish in the bracket of 11th-20th positions which means they will be in pot two for the draw for qualifying for the next European Championships. Subject to confirmation, qualifying is set to feature home and away ties among groups of three countries – one drawn from each of three pots covering teams which finish 1st-10th, 11th-20th and 21st-30th at these championships.

Against Belgium, it all started well enough for England, even though they were missing Liam Pitchford, who was rested because of a niggle. Andrew Baggaley, leading the side off, won the first match in fine style as he beat Robin Devos 11-5, 11-4, 11-5.

But then it all began to go wrong as Cedric Nuytinck in particular proved a real thorn in England's side.

He first came from a set down to defeat Paul Drinkhall 3-1 (8-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7) and then, after Lauric Jean had seen off Sam Walker in three straight (9, 7, 7), Nuytinck completed victory by overcoming Baggaley 3-0 (11-7, 11-7, 11-9).

England's final match will be at 6am tomorrow UK time against Italy for 19th and 20th positions.

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