



England aces 'Russell up' some support in Russia

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England's players had their own cheerleader at the recent European Championships, in the shape of York League player Russell Barton.

The 47-year-old booked the trip to Ekaterinburg in deepest Russia to see the continent's best players perform – and made sure England's finest had some vocal support during their matches.

He even managed to get a 'selfie' with Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford and Sam Walker, plus photos of himself with both finalists and some of the other top seeds.

"I wanted to see how the professionals played and I saw on the internet that the European Championships was happening in Russia and I thought that sounded interesting," he said.

"I really loved it, it was absolutely fantastic.

"Meeting the lads was great! I saw them practising and I recognised Paul Drinkhall, so I went up to them and said 'hiya lads, I'm from the UK.' I think they were a bit shocked because they don't normally get anyone supporting them.

"I got pictures with Marcos Freitas, Vladimir Samsonov and Dimitrij Ovtcharov as well. I wanted to see Marcos win it because he's left-handed like me and he's fast and attacking and that's my sort of style."

Sadly for Russell, Freitas was beaten in the final by Ovtcharov.

Russell, a coach driver who plays for Bootham F in Division Three of the York League, returned to the sport three years ago to help with weight control. He is a former bowls player to a good level (winning the Civil Service national triples championships) and also ran two London Marathons.

And he already has his eye on another table tennis-related trip.

"The standard of some of the countries was amazing," he said. "I think my next trip will be to China. There's something about Asian countries where the game just lifts again – I'd love to see them play.

"And it would be fantastic to have a big event like the European Championships in this country."

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