



Drinkhall and Pitchford selected for Rio Olympics

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Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford are heading to Rio for the 2016 Olympics!

The British Olympic Association today officially announced that the top two English players will represent Team GB in table tennis in Brazil this August.

The pair qualified two quota places for Team GB as a result of their International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) ranking and will compete in the men's singles.

It follows near misses for both at the European Olympic Qualification Tournament in Sweden last month, when both were [one win away from qualifying](#), only to fall at the final hurdle.

Drinkhall and Pitchford both represented Team GB at the London 2012 Olympics but this is the first time they have qualified outright. They join a Team GB contingent for Rio which now numbers 63 athletes in seven sports and will eventually number about 350 from 23 sports.

It is the first time Great Britain has qualified two singles players since the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 and the first time any player has qualified outright since Matthew Syed in Sydney in 2000.

Not surprisingly, both players are delighted with their selection.

Drinkhall, who already has experience of Rio having [won last year's test event](#), said: "It's been at the back of our minds almost since London and, the last 12 months, it's really been the main aim to make sure we qualify.

"I speak for everyone that we don't just want to qualify and go there – we believe we can take on the world's best. London was amazing but, table tennis-wise, it was slightly too early for both of us.

"We're in a much better place now and hopefully we can go there and do some damage and make Team GB proud."

Pitchford said: "I was a bit nervous for a few weeks after the qualification tournament, not knowing if we were going to be in and knowing we would be quite close to the line.

"After London I've always said I wanted to qualify in my own right, it's been one of my dreams, so it's amazing to have done it.

"Being in the village and around all the top athletes in London made me want to have that kind of success. It's going to be different not having the majority of the crowd on our side but it's going to be a great experience and hopefully we'll have a better chance of doing well this time."

Pitchford and Drinkhall also represented team GB at the 2015 European Games in Baku and this year were part of the England team which [won bronze medals at the World Team Championships](#) in Kuala Lumpur.

Simon Mills, Team GB's table tennis Team Leader, said: "We are delighted that Team GB have two qualified singles players for the first time in 20 years. It reinforces the big steps the players have made in the last few years.

"We look forward to supporting them to build on their World Team Championships bronze medals."

Mark England, Team GB's Chef de Mission for Rio 2016 said: "I want to congratulate Paul and Liam for their efforts in qualifying and securing their spot onto Team GB for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. It's great to welcome our table tennis athletes to Team GB and to add another sport to our delegation for the Games.

"Having competed at London 2012 and Baku 2015, they both have experience of an Olympic Games and a multi-sport environment, which will no doubt serve them well in the coming months.

"Since London 2012, Liam and Paul have had an exciting few years with some impressive results right at the top end of the sport, so Rio 2016 provides a great opportunity to showcase that talent on the greatest sporting stage of them all."



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