



England quartet shortlisted for ITTF awards

Author: Paul Stimpson

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An amazing year for England on the world stage has put Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford, Sam Walker and Alan Cooke in the running for more ITTF awards.

The three Leopards players are collectively nominated in the 2016 Breakthrough Star Award for their performance at the World Team Championships in Kuala Lumpur, where they won England's first medal since 1983, as well as for reaching the Olympics quarter-finals in GB colours.

Cooke, the coach who has guided them as they hit those heights, is nominated in the ITTF Star Coach Award.

The players are up against Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto, who won World Tour Japan Open Under-21 title and became the world No 1 under-18 player at the age of 12, and 16-year-old Miu Hirano, also of Japan, who became the youngest ever winner of the Women's World Cup.

The other nominees in the coach category are France's Patrick Chila, who led Emmanuel Lebesson and Simon Gauzy to the European Championships men's singles final, and Liu Guoliang of China, who was the men's team coach as they won the World Team Championships, Olympic and Men's World Cup titles.

Both awards will be decided by an expert judging panel and the winners will be revealed at a presentation ceremony in Qatar on December 8.

Walker has already been [nominated in the Star Point Award](#), which will be decided by public vote.

Table Tennis England Chief Executive Sara Sutcliffe said:

"This is a huge feather in the cap of the players and Alan.

"The performances of English players on the world stage were beginning to be noticed even before they won bronze in Kuala Lumpur. Afterwards, no one was under any illusions about our ability to compete against any

opposition.

"Their achievements are all the more remarkable considering that they have happened largely with only a small amount of performance funding.

"Paul, Liam, Sam and Alan richly deserve their time in the spotlight – as do all the nominees – and we'll be keeping our fingers crossed on awards night."

Head of Talent & Performance Simon Mills said:

"It is clear that the ITTF and others are recognising that the programme of support that we have put in place using our small amounts of funding to best effect has made a massive difference. However none of this year's achievements would have happened without the hard work put in by Alan and the players on and off the table.

"While we've made great strides, we know there is still a lot of room to improve and we will be doing all we can to build on these results and achieve even better ones in the years ahead."

Coach Cooke said he was "surprised but honoured" to have been nominated. He added:

"I'm humbled in the sense that it's as a result of the performances of the players.

"I'm delighted the players have been nominated too. The boys have gone out there and put in some huge performances which we're all very proud of, but there's a big team behind all of us – we've had a lot of backing from Table Tennis England all the way."

The players are also delighted to have been nominated. Paul said:

"It's good to get the recognition. The players have come together and put on some great performances but it's not just about us and the coach – the support of everybody else at Table Tennis England and Team GB, doing the right thing back-stage, makes it easier for the players.

"What's exciting is I think we can get better and better in the future."

Liam said:

"It's nice to know we've been recognised for the results we've had this year, we're all really proud to have been nominated and hopefully we'll win!

"Cookie has been a big part of that, he's brought us together as a team and he definitely deserves his nomination too."

Sam's reaction was:

"It feels great to be recognised for our results this season, we've had the best season in terms of results as a team so far.

"We've come along way together and I'm looking forward to hopefully even more success in the future with Paul, Liam and Alan. We couldn't have come as far as we have without Alan , so it's wonderful that he's got the recognition for the coach of the season as well.

"It's been a fantastic season for me personally, so this is like the icing on the cake!

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