



England slump to defeat in Athens

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England Leopards endured a disappointing night in Athens as hosts Greece won their European Qualifying tie 3-0 tonight.

It means that whatever the result of March's home match against Netherlands, England are certain to finish second in the group and will need a play-off to determine whether they will qualify for the top division at the Championships later this year.

Paul Drinkhall was first on against Panagiotis Gionis and came off second best as the world No 35 eased to a 3-0 victory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkoYy4V6yGQ>

Liam Pitchford then found himself 2-0 down against Konstantinos Papageorgiou, ranked No 132. The Chesterfield man came back to win the third and fourth and the match hinged on a tight deciding fifth, which Papageorgiou edged 16-14, saving match points on the way, to put the hosts 2-0 ahead.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk8udKeZacl>

Sam Walker had kick-started England's memorable comeback in the home tie at Stoke back in November and his opponent was again Ioannis Sgouropoulos, ranked No 308.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F6GDOAyX9Y>

But there was to be no repeat this time as his young opponent won in three straight to complete the hosts' victory.

Head Coach Alan Cooke said after the match:

"It was disappointing but to be fair the best team won tonight.

"I'm very proud of my team and how they've done in recent times, and this is obviously a setback, but this is life in sport. We'll take some days to absorb what's happened here. They will lick their wounds, learn from this defeat and I'm sure in a few weeks' time, they'll be back fighting at their best."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNTYrKfheB0>

England [face Netherlands in their final group match](#) at Fenton Manor Sports Complex, Stoke-on-Trent on Tuesday March 7. [Click here](#) to buy tickets.

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