



## Top players ready to go for Nationals glory

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The waiting is almost over and the best players in the country are ready for the PG Mutual National Championships.

More than 100 of the top male, female and para players, seniors and under-21s will assemble at the David Ross Sports Village at the University of Nottingham for three days of fierce competition which will see 10 titles up for grabs.

Defending champion Paul Drinkhall is top seed in the men's singles and will be looking for title No 6 – which would take him alongside England coach Alan Cooke into joint second on the all-time list.

His fellow Rio Olympians and World Championships bronze medallists Liam Pitchford and Sam Walker are next in the seedings list, and Walker is looking to go one better than last year, when he defeated Pitchford in the semi-finals before losing to Drinkhall in the final.

Local lad Walker, who hails from Worksop, is keen to add national glory to his recent honours. He said:

"It's very important and has been for a while. I've been in three semi-finals and a final, so I'm getting closer and closer. Hopefully one year soon I can win it and that will be a big moment for me because I would have won every Nationals in the age groups and I would join the long list of top English players who've won it.

"I was disappointed to lose last year, but it's another step. Every year is a step closer, so maybe this year I can take that next step.

"I managed to beat Liam for the first time last year, so that was a really positive thing for me. One of my strengths is that I always believe I can beat anyone on my day."

In the women's singles, five-time champion Kelly Sibley is the top seed but second seed Tin-Tin Ho will also

fancy her chances of defending the title she won for the first time last year.

Her defeat of Sibley in the final is still a source of good memories for the teenager. She said:

"I remember quite a lot about the end of the final because it was my first senior singles title and it was quite a proud moment.

"The match itself was difficult and a lot of the time I wasn't in the winning position. But I just focused on one point at a time and managed to change the momentum.

"It was quite emotional when I actually won. Because I was down a few times and I wasn't really thinking about winning or losing, I think I was in shock a bit at the end.

"I'd really love to defend it this year and I think I've got a good chance. I'll try to play my best and look at the situations as I face them."

The doubles events are notable for the return to competition of Jo Drinkhall in the women's and mixed – partnering Sibley in the former and her husband in the latter, for the first time since they stood on top of the podium at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Meanwhile, in the men's, Drinkhall & Pitchford have reigned supreme for five years and are red-hot favourites to do so again.

Maria Tsapsinos and Tom Jarvis will defend their under-21 singles titles, while a host of Paralympians will compete in the round-robin para events on Saturday, headlined by Rio gold medallist Will Bayley, who takes on team-mates Aaron McKibbin and David Wetherill plus the up-and-coming Billy Shilton.

It promises to be a superb three days of top-level competition and we will be streaming the action live on all three days. We are on the Table Tennis England YouTube and Facebook channels on Friday and Saturday and on Sunday morning, before we switch the TheSPORTbible Facebook page for the men's doubles final at 2.15pm, women's singles at 3pm and men's singles at 4pm.

This builds on our ground-breaking broadcast of the England v Greece match in November, which was seen by more than 2.2 million viewers.

Be sure to keep an eye on our website for the latest results throughout the championships, with regular updates, pictures and videos on Twitter ([#PGMutualNationals](#)), Instagram and Facebook.

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