



## Drinkhalls back in style; Paul and Tin-Tin take singles

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Paul Drinkhall won his sixth Men's Singles title, Tin-Tin Ho her second Women's Singles and Commonwealth Games gold medallists Paul & Jo Drinkhall won the Mixed Doubles on their return to competition for the first time since Glasgow 2014 as the PG Mutual Championships finals day produced some dazzling play.

The Drinkhalls beat England team-mates Walker & Ho 3-0 (12-10, 14-12, 11-6) in the final in Nottingham in Jo's first event since the birth of the couple's second child Bonnie.

Drinkhall won the Men's Singles, beating Walker 4-2 (9-11, 11-6, 9-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-8) in a repeat of last year's final. The beaten semi-finalists were Liam Pitchford, who lost to Walker, and Danny Reed, who led Drinkhall 3-1 before his opponent came back to take it 4-3.

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Ho won the Women's Singles against Kelly Sibley, triumphing 4-1 (12-10, 6-11, 12-10, 11-5, 11-4). Bronze medals went to Denise Payet and Maria Tsaptsinos.

England's top two Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford won the Men's Doubles 3-0 (11-6, 14-12, 12-10) against Chris Doran & Mike O'Driscoll.

Jo Drinkhall also reached the Women's Doubles final alongside Sibley but they were beaten 3-0 (11-6, 11-9, 11-8) by defending champions Ho & Tsaptsinos.

The Swaythling Club Fair Play Award was presented to Tin-Tin Ho by Diane and Ebby Scholer.

The final stages of the event were broadcast live on TheSPORTbible Facebook page, with well over half a million viewers watching.

All pictures by Alan Man

## Men's Singles

Paul Drinkhall moved into joint second place on the all-time list with his sixth title, beating Sam Walker in the last match, as he had last year.

And as last year, Walker led in his quest for a first title before his England colleague found another gear, going on to win 4-2 (9-11, 11-6, 9-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-8).

Drinkhall, who moved level with Alan Cooke and Denis Neale in the hall of fame, said:

"Obviously it's great to win another national title but I don't really think about the all-time list because you can't really compare eras.

"I didn't feel I was playing as well as last year and sometimes I had to remind myself to enjoy it.

"I was over-thinking and over-focused, especially against Helshan (Weerasinghe) and Danny (Reed) and I was reminding myself that if I relax and enjoy it, my game comes more naturally and I play my best.

Drinkhall found himself 3-1 down in his semi-final against fellow Teessider Danny Reed, who was performing on home territory as a student here.

But as he had against Helshan Weerasinghe from a similar position in the quarters, Drinkhall imposed his game on the occasion and took back the initiative to end up a 4-3 (11-8, 9-11, 11-13, 12-14, 11-6, 11-5, 11-7) victor.

Walker had again beaten second seed Liam Pitchford in the semi-finals, as he had last year.

He edged a tight first 13-11 but Pitchford levelled and it promised to be another lengthy encounter. But Walker got his nose in front in each of the subsequent three games and kept it there, ending up winning it 4-1 (13-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-8, 11-6).



# Women's Singles



Tin-Tin Ho again overcame top seed Kelly Sibley in the final to retain the title she won for the first time last year.

Five-time champion Sibley had her chances – she led 10-9 in the first and 10-8 in the third, either side of winning the second 11-6 when Ho put a serve off the table.

But rather than a possible 3-0 score, it was 1-2 and Ho then took charge to win the next two and complete a 4-1 triumph (12-10, 6-11, 12-10, 11-5, 11-4).

The winner said:

“The final was really tough so it was very good for me to win that. I’ve been working a lot on my mentality, so it’s good to see that it’s paying off, helping me to build confidence for future matches.

“I’ll take the same mentality that I had coming into these Championships, into the qualifier in Slovenia on Tuesday.”

Ho saw off surprise package Denise Payet in the last four, though it was the younger player who made the faster start, opening up a 6-1 lead and edging to 9-5 ahead before Ho found her range and took six points in a row to win the first.

The 15-year-old from Enfield had her moments, but was never in the match after that as Ho imposed her game and won 4-0 (9, 5, 7, 9).

Sibley saw off Maria Tspatsinos in the semis with a victory that was anything but routine despite what the 4-1 aggregate score suggests.

The English No 1 was pushed all the way by Tspatsinos, saving three game points in the second set after having

trailed 7-10 to her trainee – Sibley is head coach at the University of Nottingham, where Tsaptsinos is a student.

Tspatsinos did claw back the fourth game 15-13 in an absorbing set, saving three match points on the way, but was finally worn down by the top seed in the fifth as it ended 11-9, 14-12, 11-7, 13-15, 11-3.

## Men's Doubles



It was a repeat result from last year as Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall won at the expense of Mike O'Driscoll & Chris Doran.

But the manner of the victory was a little different as their opponents ran them much closer than last year, particularly in sets two and three, either of which they could have nicked.

But it was ultimately a fifth triumph in a row for the top seeds, by a 3-0 margin (11-6, 14-12, 12-10).





Pitchford said:

"We've been playing together for so long and we were good players but I think now we're real doubles partners and play really well together and at the Commonwealths, we're aiming to go better than fourth place last time."

The beaten pair were again philosophical in defeat. O'Driscoll said:

"We're much happier with that. It started off exactly the same as last year and we thought 'here we go again', but we played well yesterday and thought if we played as well again, we could push them – and in the end we were unlucky not to get a game.

"At the end of the day, their top game is too strong and they don't give you any time, but it was competitive and we were happy with that."

Chris Doran added:

"If you take out the first 10 points, it was competitive. If we're being honest, they have higher quality in all their shots and they won nearly every point when they got in first. But if we could get the points on our terms, we had a chance.

"It's quick against either of them in singles but in doubles it's quicker and you never get any respite.

"I think in the last couple of years they've really gelled and are a genuine threat to anyone, especially in Europe."

## Women's Doubles



There was to be no double for Jo Drinkhall on her return as she & Kelly Sibley were beaten in three by defending champions Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos.

The victors were determined to hold on to the crown for the third successive year and deny their opponents seventh title as they won it 3-0 (11-6, 11-9, 11-8).

It was a measure of revenge having lost to the same opponents in the 2014 final.

Tsaptsinos said:

"It was a good final. We were looking for revenge from three years ago. We tried to dominate as best we could and I think both sides played equally as well as each other. "We had our tactics, we knew what we had to do and we stuck to it."

## Mixed doubles





Well, it was written in the stars, wasn't it? Paul and Jo Drinkhall's comeback ended with the trophy as they played together for the first time since THAT match in Glasgow in 2014.

Up against defending champions Sam Walker & Tin-Tin Ho, the golden couple saw their opponents save three game points in the first, while both couples had chances to win the second. The third was more one-sided as the Drinkhalls won it 12-10, 14-12, 11-6.

Jo Drinkhall said:

"We had no expectations coming into it, really, other than just wanting to enjoy it, and I really have enjoyed myself.

"I'm so pleased to win the mixed and I think we played so well, especially in the final. I think we came together better than ever, it really felt natural. Sam and Tin-Tin are a really good doubles pair, so to win 3-0, we have to have played well.

Paul added:

"We were here to enjoy it but we are both very competitive people. We played quite well yesterday and found a way to win matches but today we played really well. I was attacking, Jo was mixing up the spins and they struggled. It was bringing back memories from Glasgow."



# Watch the replay

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