



England miss out on top Euro division

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England men's ambitions of playing in the top division at the European Championships later this year were ended in Slovakia tonight – while the women's team lost in Spain.

The men, who lost the first leg 3-1 at home last week, won 3-2 in the return but will have to settle for playing in the second tier at the Championships in Luxembourg.

Liam Pitchford gave England hope when he came from 2-1 down to beat Lubomir Pistej 3-2 (11-4, 9-11, 5-11, 11-4, 11-9) in the first match to reduce the deficit to 3-2 overall.

When Paul Drinkhall took a 2-0 lead against Peter Sereda, it looked as if the tie would be all-square. However, his opponent came back to take it 3-2 (5-11, 9-11, 11-8, 12-10, 12-10) to put Slovakia 4-2 ahead, overcoming two Drinkhall match points in the fifth.

It left England needing to win all three remaining ties, starting with Sam Walker against Wang Yang. It was a tough task on paper against renowned defender and world No 64 Wang and a 3-0 defeat (11-7, 11-4, 12-10) sealed England's fate.

There was still victory on the night to play for and David McBeath was given his chance in match No 4 against Pistej and he made light of a 84-place difference in world rankings to make it 2-2 on the night with a 3-1 (11-9, 11-9, 8-11, 11-8) victory.

It was then left to Pitchford to defeat Bai He in three straight (11-9, 11-9, 13-11) to give England a positive outcome on the night.

In Spain, England women went into the return leg trailing 3-0, and it was a repeat scoreline – though every match went to a deciding game.

Maria Tsapsinos was first up against Maria Xiao and led 2-0 before seeing her opponent recover to win 3-2

(7-11, 9-11, 11-9, 11-4, 11-9).

Tin-Tin Ho, by contrast, fought back from 2-0 down to Galia Dvorak but was unable to complete the comeback as th Spaniard won it 11-8, 11-6, 12-14, 9-11, 11-8.

In the final match, Karina Le Fevre also held a 2-0 advantage but again saw the host nation player claw back. In this case, it was Claudia Carmel who won 7-11, 4-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-7.

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