

So close to a superb double for Liam

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A very mixed day for the England Teams at the European Table Tennis Championships in Ostrava in the Czech Republic. Only one win from 4 matches as the England Women overcame Kosovo with little difficulty. Karina Le Fevre got a first run out for the team in this match and completed another of those all 3-0 in games, 3-0 in matches wins.

It was a different story in the afternoon when the Women faced Lithuania with ex European Champion, world no 48 Ruta Paskauskiene leading the way. The Lithuanians played with their order a bit and it worked out perfectly for them, if only just.

First match Joanna Parker against Egle Stukyte, a very reluctant no 1, every movement of her body shouted she didn't want to be facing Joanna, 11-2, 11-5 testified to that, the third game was a better contest but Joanna took it as well, 11-9.

England 1-0 ahead but the next match was world 48 Ruta Paskauskiene who is a very similar style player to Kelly, the matchup has gone Kelly's way in the past but today it was all the Lithuanian who ran out a 3 straight games winner. The speed of the match was superb but it was the Lithuanian on top in that department most of the time.

So to the key match of the contest Hannah Hicks against Lina Misikonyte the Lithuanian No 2, placed there to ensure the win at No 3, Hannah took the first game, and with four game points should have taken the second but it slipped away 13-15. It was the same story in the third game – just 3 game points this time but again the game went away 10-12. After these disappointments it was unsurprising the Hannah fell away in the fourth game making the match score 2-1 to Lithuania.

With Ruta Paskauskiene playing the fourth match Lithuania must have been confident of a 3-1 win, they got it but what a fight it was. Joanna Parker played really superbly and took the first two games but the Lithuanian showed why she is so highly ranked as she reeled off the final three games to take the individual match 3-2 and the match 3-1. The England women face Norway tomorrow in their final group match.

No wins for the Mens team today, Russia were just too strong, Paul Drinkhall had a real battle in the second match with world no 59 Kirill Skachkov which went all the way with the Russian triumphing 12-10 in the fifth set. Darius Knight could not cope with world 24, Alexey Smirnov and Danny Reed had the same problem with world no 54, Fedor Kuzmin both losing in 3 straight sets. 3-0 to Russia in the match.

Second match of the day against Denmark, without their star Michael Maze who is injured.

Liam Pitchford came in for Daruis Knight and was so close to being a real star of the match but in the end that accolade had to go to Danish Veteran Allan Bentsen, world ranked no 98, the 42 year old left hander with a forehand loop to die for was too clever for Paul Drinkhall in the first match.

Liam stepped up to the plate in the next match against Kasper Stenberg and a pulsating 5 game match ensued. Liam winning it 11-9 in the fifth game, a good win this as Stenberg is ranked 60-70 places higher than Liam in the world rankings.

Third up Danny Reed against Jonathan Groth, the games the Dane won were very close, Danny won a comfortable second game but a deuce game and two 11-9 games gave the match to Denmark.

So to the fourth match, Liam Pitchford ranked in the 300's against world 98 Allan Bentsen, Liam fought and fought, the first game went to Bentsen, second went to Liam, third to Bentsen on deuce, fourth to Liam on deuce.

All depended on the final game and it stayed close for a lot of the game but at the end three or four superb Bentsen shots were just too good, powerful, and spinny, for Liam and he had to give way 11-8 in the fifth game. Denmark won 3-1.

England men have finished their group in 4th place and must now play knockout matches to decide the final placings, 8-16.

Results

Womens team

England 3 Kosovo 0

187 PARKER Joanna beat 259 JANJEVA Amare 11:2, 11:4, 11:1

188 SIBLEY Kelly beat 260 SEJDIU Rexhbije 11:3, 11:2, 11:3

189 LE FEVRE Karina beat 258 DOMANIKU Besire 11:9, 11:7, 11:9

Lithuania 3 England 1

271 STUCKYTE Egle 187 lost to PARKER Joanna 2:11, 5:11, 9:11

269 PASKAUSKIENE Ruta beat 188 SIBLEY Kelly 11:6, 11:9, 11:7

270 MISIKONYTE Lina 190 beat HICKS Hannah 9:11, 15:13, 12:10, 11:4

269 PASKAUSKIENE Ruta beat 187 PARKER Joanna 8:11, 11:13, 11:6, 11:7, 11:6

Mens Team

Russia 3 England 0

344 SMIRNOV Alexey beat 192 KNIGHT Darius 11:8, 11:4, 11:5

349 SKACHKOV Kirill beat 191 DRINKHALL Paul 11:7, 7:11, 11:8, 9:11, 12:10

345 KUZMIN Fedor beat 193 REED Daniel 11:9, 11:9, 8:11, 11:9

Denmark 3 England 1

183 BENTSEN Allan 191 beat DRINKHALL Paul 12:10, 8:11, 11:3, 11:8

184 STENBERG Kasper lost to 194 PITCHFORD Liam 11:9, 10:12, 12:14, 11:3, 9:11

185 GROTH Jonathan beat 193 REED Daniel 12:10, 3:11, 11:9, 11:9

183 BENTSEN Allan 194 beat PITCHFORD Liam 11:4, 9:11, 12:10, 14:16, 11:8

Photo, Liam Pitchford, two pulsating 5 game matches against Denmark – courtesy Henk Hommes

By Malcolm Macfarlane

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