



## Drinkhall's Aussie odyssey stands him in good stead

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Paul Drinkhall says his run to the semi-finals of the Australian Open has kick-started his preparation for the Commonwealth Games next year.

The English No 1, ranked world No 45 going into the event at Gold Coast, where next year's Games will be held, beat two players ranked above him en route to the last four.

Having won his qualifying group with routine 4-0 victories over Cheng Zhiyang of New Zealand and Wade Townsend of the host nation, Drinkhall sunk world No 28 Alex Shibaev of Russia 4-2 (11-7, 11-9, 8-11, 3-11, 11-8, 11-7) in the first round.

He followed up by defeating Tristan Flore of France, ranked No 50, 4-2 (11-9, 6-11, 6-11, 13-11, 11-8, 11-8) in the last 16 and Yuya Oshima of Japan 4-2 (11-8, 7-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-4, 11-8) in the quarters. Oshima is up to No 19 in the latest rankings.

But world No 12 Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus was too strong in the last four, prevailing 4-1 (11-8, 11-4, 11-6, 7-11, 11-7) and going on to win the tournament.

Drinkhall said:

It's been a great competition overall. I think it's one of the strongest tournaments where I've managed to get so far and it was good to do that here, where the Commonwealth Games are going to be next year – I can come back here with confidence.

Losing out to Vladimir Samsonov, I obviously wasn't happy but he's a great player and I've always struggled with his style. Each time I play him, I learn something, so hopefully one of these days I'll take him down!

Drinkhall travelled to Australia from Malaysia, where he had played in the first round of the new T2 championships, which features some of the world's best players, male and female, representing four different teams and with matches being played to a timed format.

Drinkhall is representing Team Rossi, managed by German legend Jorg Roskopf and European No 1 Dimitrij Ovtcharov also in the line-up.

The first round of fixtures saw Team Rossi draw one and lose two, with Drinkhall's matches including defeats to Ovtcharov and world No 6 Timo Boll.

He was heading straight back to Asia from Australia for the second round.

Drinkhall said:

It's interesting – a bit weird the first time, it took a while to settle in. It's great to be a part of it with all the top players who are there, and it obviously helped me before coming out to Australia. Hopefully, I can go back and carry on that form.

And he believes the T2 series, which runs every month for the rest of the year, can also help his Commonwealth Games preparations.

He said:

It's a lot of travelling, so I need to manage it well, but table tennis-wise it's great to be around all the top players pretty much once a month, getting to practise with them and play against them.

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