

Close But No Cigar

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England fought back from two down to come within touching distance of a first Commonwealth Games table tennis medal in the women's team bronze match in Delhi this morning.

But after a marathon three-hour session that came down to the final set of a see-saw fifth and final match, it was Malaysia's players who were celebrating while Kelly Sibley and her team-mates Joanna Parker and Hannah Hicks were left in tears.

It was a gripping effort from the England team against the dynamic Malaysians, but in the end they fell just short of the prized medal. Nevertheless, fourth is a massive improvement for England in this event after finishing ninth in 2006.

"It's a bit emotional; it's really disappointing to miss out on bronze," said Parker. "We were two-nil down and fought back to two-all.

"But in the end the deciding game didn't go our way. Perhaps, we didn't play as well as we can, which is disappointing."

After defeats in the first two matches for Sibley and Parker, who was distraught after her five-set loss, it was down to Hicks to keep England in the match.

Just 19, the paddler showed nerves of steel. Winning high pressure points at the crucial moments, she kept England alive with a three-set victory, 12-10, 13-11, 12-10.

That brought Parker back to the table with England now 2-1 down. Another Rotherham resident, the 23-year-old performed like a player reforged after her earlier disappointment, producing a dominant straight-sets win to put England on level terms.

Now it was all down to Sibley. Playing Sock Khim Ng, the 22-year-old from Leamington Spa held her own in a see-saw game in which she fell from one-up to 2-1 down before clawing her way back to two sets apiece.

It was all in vain, however, as she lost the final set narrowly, 11-8.

"To come so close to a medal shows our potential," said Parker. "We're still a very young team and hopefully we'll be together for a number of years."

England's hopes now fall to the men's team who play India in the semi-finals at 4pm Delhi time today.

"We'll definitely be sticking around to support the guys," said Parker. "We're all part of the same team and we'll be fully behind them this afternoon."

By Commonwealth England

From courtside

Unfortunately the women lost to Malaysia in the 3rd/4th playoff 2-3. A very closely fought match with four of the games going to five sets. The results are as follows:

Kelly Sibley v Lee Wei Beh 8,-2,11,-11,-9 (Kelly was 2-1 and 10-8 up in the fourth game)

Joanna Parker v Sock Khim Ng 7,-6,-7,10,-9

Hannah Hicks v Xiao Jun Fan 10,11,10

Joanna Parker v Lee Wei Beh 7,4,10

Kelly Sibley v Sock Khim Ng -7, 9,-9, 7, -8

A very long match which lasted 3hours 15 mins. The three English girls were disappointed but every credit to them as they fought hard throughout the match.

By Jill Parker

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