

EUROPEAN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS
DIVISION 3



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MEN'S
UKRAINE
GET THE GOLD

INTERVIEW
SANDRA DENIS
OPENS UP

LUXEMBOURG WRITE ITS STORY

PROMOTED IN DIVISION 2

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Sport is a unique generator of emotions, even more so when you play for your country, and what happened on Saturday morning at the CK Sport Center was a perfect illustration of that. After a grueling contest, which ended with Sandra Denis winning in five games over Dora Rezic in the deciding rubber, the joy for

the home country was as huge as the sadness of the Croatian girls, who had left it all out there. The gap between Divisions 2 and 3 is significant, and staying up will be a tough task. But whatever happens in the future for the Luxembourg women's team, the memory of getting promoted to Division 2 for the first time on home soil cannot be taken away from them.

Jérôme Elhaik

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ETC3
2026

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The CK Sport Center caught fire on Saturday morning, with the home ladies edging Croatia after a thriller and getting promoted to Division 2 for the first time.

THE LUXEMBOURG LADIES MAKE HISTORY

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[4] LUXEMBOURG 2-1 [3] CROATIA

ROLLERCOASTER. The tone was set early on, and Enas Mohamed put the home team ahead after a fierce 5-game battle against Paulina Radoš, in which both ladies had the upper hand in turn. We knew Franka Vidovic was by far the best female player of the event, and after playing two five-setters the day before Elisenda Ruiz-Kaiser didn't have the energy to trouble the Croatian #1. One match-all, therefore promotion to Division 2 came down to the third rubber



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between Sandra Denis and Dora Rezic (pic). It was point for point for most of the match, but the 53-year old was not only able to level at 2-all after a nailbiting tiebreak but also to pull away at 6-6 in the fifth, leading to incredible scenes of celebration for the home country.

“ REACTIONS

ELISENDA RUIZ-KAISER: *“It went up, it went down, and Sandra pulled through in the end. I knew my match would be very tough but I trusted my team completely. We wanted to get promoted, we did, now we all need to train and improve because staying up will be hard.”*

ENAS MOHAMED: *“I was aware of the importance of my match and therefore my responsibilities. Getting promoted is an incredible achievement, and it’ll be amazing to be at the ETC 1-2 alongside elite players. I’ve been getting fitter lately,*



I have no choice if I want to compete with the younger girls. I was a good junior in Egypt, but I stopped playing for 13 years. When I started playing again I thought I needed to achieve things as quickly as possible, but Sandra has really inspired me. When I see what she’s doing I realize I still have time!”

MEN'S 3th/4th: [2] ROMANIA 3-1 [4] LUXEMBOURG

While the ladies were making history on court 6, the men were hoping to follow their path with a first ever bronze medal. Amir Samimi put the home team ahead after four hard-fought games v Vasile Hapun, but Dan Hutchines' and Kyllian Hebbelinck's losses (in 3 and 4) meant Mark Radley had to win in straight games. Lux #2 had been outstanding all week but the mountain was too hard to climb, and Dumitru Goian sealed the deal after winning game 1.

ANALYSIS**2026 ETC3 takeaways from national coach Tomi Niinimäki.**

"The women's match against Croatia was incredible, both camps were very noisy and it came down to Sandra pulling through for us... Getting promoted is massive, but on the other hand it'll be tricky because our teams will be different playing in different events which leads to a broader reflection: travelling to the ETC every year is difficult for small nations, it could be every two years like the World Teams. As for the women, the level in Division 2 will be much higher but I believe not only that Eli will continue to improve but also that Bianca Bidoli can have

an impact. If we want long-term growth, junior programs are key. We also need more spectators, more interest at national level, in other words a cultural change. To get back to the men, the Romania's fixture summed up the week. I believe we matched them in skillsets but it came down to endurance. Our players showed they can compete with ETC3 top teams but lack some match fitness. Amir is getting there, and the others need to play more tournaments which I am aware is not easy. We'd have loved both teams to get promoted, but besides the competition, the team spirit was fantastic across the board – players, volunteers etc. – and the organizers did a great job."



[3] UKRAINE 3-1 [1] ITALY

The #2 and #3 strings were very close and the young Italian squad fought bravely, but Ukraine were the better team and are ETC3 champions for the second time.

Like Denys Podvornyi, Valeriy Fedoruk was part of the team who won in 2012. We caught up with the 43-year old after the prize ceremony. *"It was our goal to get promoted and win the event. We were so focused, I actually got a headache after my match from the pressure coming down! We've been going up and down for a few years but hopefully with youngsters coming through we can stay in Division 2. I've coached*

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Dmytro Shcherbakov when he was little, it's great to see his progress and he was impressive in the final. Dima and I don't live in Ukraine, but it's a bit like a squash coach who gets more stressed watching from the outside. Sadly talking about

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the war has become a habit, but when I go on court I try to focus on squash. I wish I'd started playing earlier than 24 years old. But I have only one life on this earth and I have goals: I want to become World Masters champion this summer in Australia, I am not hiding it."

After getting promoted the day before, the Maltese clinched gold on Saturday beating Austria. They'd already been ETC3 champions in 2014 and 2017, but they'll play in Division 2 for the first time.

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2026 ETC3

LOOK IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

1

RECORD

In the women's, the top 3 teams equalled or bettered their highest finish, Luxembourg and Croatia clinching their first medal. Malta's #1 Colette Sultana was part of the team who'd won in 2014 and 2017 and therefore joins Portugal's Rui Soares, who was previously the only player with three ETC3 titles.

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COACHING CORNER**2**

Nicolas Serna multitasked during the week, advising his teammates alongside Marcus Berrett. The Italian #1, who played a big part in his country getting promoted, will start as a high school assistant coach in the US in a few months.

**3****CLASH OF GENERATIONS**

57-year old Damjan Adlešič was the oldest player in the event, but the Slovenian wasn't there to make numbers and he pushed two juniors to 5 games (he won one and lost one).

4

OFFICIALS

One thing we noticed in Luxembourg was the presence of three female referees among the group led by Tomáš Fořter. There were some tense matches, as expected when promotion is at stake, but they were up to the task.

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UNsung HERO

5

Shootout to Greece's Theodora Papadopoulou, whose results may have got unnoticed: she won 4 of her 5 matches and pushed Malta's Lijana Sultana to 5 games.



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MVPs

If these awards existed at the ETC3, we'd have given them with no hesitation to Dmytro Scherbakov and Franka Vidovic. Although her team didn't get promoted, the Croatian #1 did not drop a single game in 6 matches.

BEHIND THE SCENES

There is no great event without great volunteers and the 2026 ETC3, whose organization was praised by all the participants, was a success thanks to all the tireless work done behind the scenes.

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“WHEN I SAW EVERYONE CRYING, I REALIZED WHAT IT MEANT...”

We couldn't have written a better scenario, with 53-year old Sandra Denis sealing promotion for Luxembourg in the fifth game of the deciding rubber. The home hero opened up a few minutes after the match.



Sandra, what did you feel just after it was over?

When I saw everyone crying, my teammates and the people in the crowd, I realized what it meant for us and for them. If I'd known that before, it would have been really hard to play like I did and win the match. I know Dora Rezic because although she's young she's played in the ETC3 for a few years, she started squash quite late and she's improved a lot.

The pressure was on me today and I am glad I was able to manage it.

You're a seasoned campaigner, would you say it's the biggest match you've played?

What do you mean, I am only 26 years old! Joke aside, yes in terms of occasion it's probably the biggest match I've been involved in. Getting promoted is what all teams are aiming at.

Achieving it for the first time at home, in an incredible atmosphere, it doesn't get any better than this. Could you quit on such a high?

I did think about it before the event but haven't made my decision yet, both would have upsides and downsides. Of course Division 2 will be tough but the team has become much

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stronger with the additions of Eli, who'll continue to improve, and Enas. Besides, I am convinced that our 16-year old Bianca Bidoli has great potential, she just needs to get tougher mentally. As for me, if I continue I'll be available for the team.

At 53 years old, how on earth can you play two big matches on Friday and back up with a 5-game win on Saturday?

I am not really an example because in terms of recovery I am not doing all the right things (she laughs)... I had a major knee injury in 2017, which was actually a blessing because I met a great physio, who helped me not only for

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my rehabilitation but also my fitness. I don't play squash five times a week like I used to, but I do a lot more off the court. This season has been frustrating because I've played mostly against men and it's hard to beat them. Therefore I was looking forward to the ETC3, and I am proud of the efforts I've produced regardless of the results.

Can you tell us a bit more about your story with squash?

I was one of the best tennis players in Luxembourg, in junior as well as senior, but at some point I no longer had the time to train. I started squash because I was looking for another sport where I could keep winning (she laughs). I've been playing for the national team for almost three decades, with a few different generations: European Team Championships, Games of Small States, Nations Challenge Cup in the 2000s etc.

When I see you perform, I can't help to think you'd do well in Masters events, but you play very few of those...

I already dedicate a lot of time to squash and even if I don't have kids my husband, as well as my cats, want to see me from time to time! He'd like us to go to Australia this summer for the World Champs, but it's about performing and it would require going two weeks before to get used to the jetlag and



prepare, and I don't think he realizes it wouldn't be a holiday!

To conclude, what's your view on squash in Luxembourg at the moment?

There are crazy things happening in the world right now, and investing money in sports like squash is not the main priority. But to be honest I think our situation is good compared to other countries and given the size of Luxembourg. The government have supported a lot, and our results this week show that they were right. We are lucky enough to have Tomi as a national coach, and training with him has had a very positive impact on my game. As for our technical director Christopher Votion, he's done a fantastic job. I do hope he's going to stay for as long as possible and continue help us grow.

MERCI LËTZEBUERG

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