



England sink Irish to sweep into semi-finals

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England saw off Northern Ireland with relatively few alarms to move into the semi-finals of the men's team competition at the Commonwealth Games this morning.

Paul McCreery took one game off Liam Pitchford but otherwise it was plain sailing for the second seeds as they took the match 3-0.

England will now face Nigeria in the semi-finals, the African nation having beaten hosts Australia 3-1, with world No 26 Quadri Aruna not featuring.

The semi-finals and medal matches are on Monday, beginning with India versus Singapore at 12.30am UK time, followed by England's semi-final. The bronze medal match is at 7am, followed by the gold medal match at 9.30am.

McCreery opened in positive fashion against Pitchford, going for his shots and opening an 8-4 lead before Pitchford seemed to find his range and reeled off five in a row. However, more positive attacking from McCreery, ending with a fierce forehand into Pitchford's body, took him to an 11-9 win.

McCreery continued to give Pitchford questions to answer, but the Englishman got back on terms with an 11-9 score in the second, taking his third game point as McCreery, world ranked 552, netted a receive.

There were hints that Pitchford was about to up his game and so it proved in the second half of the third game, when a burst of points saw him claim it 11-5, the sheer variety of his play turning the heat back on the Irishman.

And ultimately Pitchford had too much guile in the fourth as he closed out against his doughty opponent.

With no disrespect to Owen Cathcart, his match against Paul Drinkhall was going to be a huge ask, with more than 1,000 places between them in the world rankings.

The 16-year-old is one for the future but this was a step too far in the present and Drinkhall was never seriously

threatened, his nous and power just too much for his young opponent, exemplified by a virtual slam-dunk smash to end it.

And so to the doubles, Sam Walker coming in to partner Drinkhall and Ashley Robinson joining McCreery for the Irish.

The English combination is a relatively new one, with the dynamics of the team competition in mind, but they have settled quite quickly and both were in good touch, never more so than in the second game, when both reeled off some impressive winners, one running backhand by Walker particularly sticking in the mind.

They took that game 11-7, building on an 11-6 score in the first. And the third continued in the same vein as England motored into that last-four clash with Nigeria.

Results

England 3 Northern Ireland 0

Liam Pitchford bt Paul McCreery 3-1 (9-11, 11-9, 11-5, 11-7)

Paul Drinkhall bt Owen Cathcart 3-0 (11-3, 11-5, 11-6)

Drinkhall & Sam Walker bt McCreery & Ashley Robinson 3-0 (11-6, 11-7, 11-8)

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