



Sensational! Now Japan fall to England

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England took another huge step forward on the world stage tonight with a sensational victory over Japan at the World Team Championships.

And it was not just that they beat the world's No 3 team, it was the manner in which they did so that is sure to make every other team present in Halmstad sit up and take notice.

England's trio of Liam Pitchford, Paul Drinkhall and Sam Walker were facing players ranked 9 (Koki Niwa), 11 (Jun Mizutani) and 13 (Tomokazu Harimoto) in the world. If you add up those rankings, they would still be 19 places ahead of Drinkhall, England's top-ranked player at 52.

And yet this Leopards trio continues to build something very special and, though they went 1-0 behind, there was a growing sense through the match that they would avenge the defeats to Japan in the semi-finals of the last edition of this event and also at the ITTF Team World Cup in London in February.

Click below to watch the matches:

[Drinkhall v Mizutani](#)

[Pitchford v Harimoto](#)

[Walker v Niwa](#)

[Pitchford v Mizutani](#)

Mizutani was the man who put Japan ahead, though Drinkhall led 2-1 and kept a high level through the match, shrugging off a controversial moment in the second game when a point was not replayed despite the ball breaking and despite England protestations.

If Drinkhall's level was high, then Pitchford's was stratospheric against Harimoto. He had beaten the young star

in London, but not like this – the Chesterfield man simply on fire as he won 5, 5, 3 – taking that first game from 5-4 down.

Walker was England's success story against Japan two years ago, beating the world No 20 Yuya Oshima in that semi-final in Kuala Lumpur. But he topped that here as he sunk Niwa in three close games.

And so to Pitchford again. Having beaten world No 37, 30, 16 and 13 already at this tournament, could he add the No 11 to the list? To add spice, Pitchford held four match points against Mizutani two years ago but saw his opponent come back to win.

This time was different, though far from easy, and Pitchford, who is fast becoming England's talisman, held his game and his nerve to seal England's third group victory out of three.

Results

England 3 Japan 1

Jun Mizutani bt Paul Drinkhall 3-2 (11-7, 5-11, 3-11, 11-5, 11-4)

Liam Pitchford bt Tomokazu Harimoto 3-0 (11-5, 11-5, 11-3)

Sam Walker bt Koki Niwa 3-0 (11-9, 12-10, 11-8)

Pitchford beat Mizutani 3-2 (11-4, 9-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-8)

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