



Hosts Sweden end England medal hopes

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There is to be no repeat of England's bronze medal heroics from two years ago after they were beaten 3-0 by hosts Sweden in the World Team Championships quarter-finals.

With the Swedes all ranked higher than the English players they faced and with a noisy home crowd behind them in Halmstad, it was always going to be a difficult match for the Leopards.

But they approached it with confidence, as well they might having won all five group matches including the fantastic, famous victory over Japan.

And although two of the matches were decided in three straight, it was by no means as one-sided as the scores suggest as Sweden booked a semi-final against China tomorrow.

With the arena buzzing from the start, Kristian Karlsson gave the home fans more to cheer about when he took the first match against Paul Drinkhall.



Paul Drinkhall takes on Kristian Karlsson (ITTF picture)

It was always a close battle, dominated by serve and receive, and Drinkhall will rue not converting a 7-2 and 8-4 lead in the second. He took his timeout at 8-7 up, but his left-handed opponent, who is ranked No 19 in the world, did not let him back in either in that game or in the third.

Liam Pitchford, up against Mattias Karlsson, ranked at No 20, was defending a perfect record of 10 victories in the group stage.

First order of business was to try to make sure Sweden's momentum was halted, and Pitchford did that by taking a tight first game, saving one game point at 10-11 and then taking his own third chance.

The response was good from Karlsson, opening up 5-1 and 7-2 leads on the way to taking the second, but Pitchford matched that and more as he led the third 5-1 and 10-2 as he restored his lead 11-5.

The switchback continued as Karlsson again levelled – would it continue into the fifth and reward Pitchford with the win? It was a tense and tight match, Pitchford coming from 4-0 down to 7-7 and from 7-9 to 9-9. But a thumping forehand set up match point for the Swede and he and the crowd roared with delight when he took it.

Could Sam Walker stem the tide? He match world No 63 Jon Persson blow for blow to 9-9 in the first – or so it seemed as the score was suddenly changed to 10-8 in Persson's favour as Walker acknowledged something as the players towelled down.

And while Walker did not appear affected by that, it gave Persson the chance to take the game and seize the initiative – and with momentum behind him, he raced through the second.

Walker fought hard, first from 4-0 down in the third and then to save three match points, starting from 10-9 down. He also missed one game point chance, before the roof came off as Persson clinched the game 14-12 and ended England's chances.



Sweden celebrate victory (ITTF picture)

The other quarter-finals saw South Korea inflict a shock 3-1 defeat on Japan, with two victories for Jeoung Youngsik. They will play Germany, who beat Brazil 3-1 tonight, in the other semi-final.

Highlights of the quarter-finals can be seen at 11pm on Eurosport tonight.

Results

Sweden 3 England 0

Kristian Karlsson bt Paul Drinkhall 3-0 (11-9, 11-8, 11-8)

Mattias Karlsson bt Liam Pitchford 3-2 (12-14, 11-6, 5-11, 11-7, 11-9)

Jon Persson bt Sam Walker 3-0 (11-8, 11-3, 14-12)

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