



Sensational Pitchford defeats Ma Long!

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Liam Pitchford notched surely one of the greatest wins in the history of English table tennis, defeating China's world and Olympic champion Ma Long 4-3 at the Bulgaria Open today.

[Click here to watch the match in full](#)

The England No 1 was the epitome of a never-say-die attitude, saving eight game points across the third and fourth games to fight back from 2-0 down to level their last-32 clash.

He found even deeper reserves of courage and composure to recover from losing the fifth to once again level and then make a supercharged start to the decider, opening a 7-1 lead.

His illustrious opponent whittled it back to 7-5 but Pitchford was not about to pass up this chance and re-asserted himself to notch yet another big win in what is turning into a huge year in his career.

None, though, have been bigger than this – any cave-dwelling table tennis followers who might have missed the series of wins over top-20 opponents would have been awakened by the seismic nature of this performance.

Unreal.....!!! Liam Pitchford has just beat Ma Long 4-3 (11-7, 11-9, 12-14, 11-13, 11-7, 11-13, 6-11) in the R32 of the 2018 [#ITTFWorldTour](#) Asarel Bulgaria Open! [#Whutt?](#) pic.twitter.com/kwfAVxoiFY

— ITTF World (@ittfworld) [August 16, 2018](#)

Even at 2-0 down, Pitchford had shown enough to suggest the match was far from over. And so it proved as he saved three game points to win the third 14-12.

The fourth was the defining game as Ma Long recovered from having a fault called on his serve at 5-3 up to open a 10-6 lead. Pitchford, though, clawed them all back and saved another game point at 10-11. A second fault

was called at 11-11, and Pitchford took his own first chance with the aid of a net-cord.

Ma Long appeared listless at times, partly to do with the two faults but plenty to do with the man across the net not allowing him to play his game.

Nevertheless, when he took the fifth it seemed that China was once again finding the way to navigate a difficult path.

Pitchford got a little taste of his own medicine when Ma saved game points at 10-9 and 11-10 in the sixth, but faith in his own game saw the Englishman through at 13-11.

And so to the decider. It's probably fair to say few would have expected Pitchford to open up such a big lead, but then again it was only a reflection of the way he was playing. Ma fought – of course he would – but Pitchford was not for flinching.

Another Chinese awaits in the last 16 tomorrow in the shape of Ma Te, at 3.30pm UK time.



Liam reacts to his brilliant victory (ITTF photo)

Afterwards, Pitchford said: "I'm over the moon, just feeling very happy! I knew that this was his first match of the tournament, so I knew that he might have some difficulties to get his game on.

"He has also just recovered from some injuries, so I went in thinking that I could win – there is no point going in against the Chinese players thinking that you are going to lose, so I tried to be active and attack him straight from the beginning.

"I missed a couple of good chances in the opening sets, but even though I was trailing 0-2 and 4-8 in the third game I just stayed in there and did my best. I tried to as much as possible to play backhand-backhand and switch to forehand when I could. I'm just really, really happy!

"He might have not been in his best shape this being his first tournament of the season, but it was nonetheless a great win. If I want to win the tournament I have to beat the best players. I'm looking forward to tomorrow's

match.”

Earlier in the day, in his last 32 clash, Paul Drinkhall went out to top seed Dimitrij Ovtcharov, but pushed his opponent, never more so than in opening up 6-1 and 10-4 leads on his way to taking the second game.

But the great German held Drinkhall at arm’s length for the rest of the match to take his place in the last 16.

[Click here to watch Drinkhall v Ovtcharov](#)

Meanwhile, Pitchford & Drinkhall are into the doubles quarter-finals. The English pair brushed aside Swedish duo Par Gerell & Mattias Falck in three straight in the last 16 and next face Japan’s Koki Niwa & Jin Ueda, the third seeds, for a place in the semis. The match is at 9.40UK time and will be live-streamed on the ITTF website (Table 1).

[Click here to watch the last-16 match](#)

Results

Men’s Singles

Round of 32

Liam Pitchford bt Ma Long (CHN) 4-3 (7-11, 9-11, 14-12, 13-11, 7-11, 13-11, 11-6)

Dimitrij Ovtcharov (GER) bt Paul Drinkhall 4-1 (11-9, 8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-8)

Men’s Doubles

Round of 16

Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall bt Par Gerell & Mattias Falck (SWE) 3-0 (11-7, 11-7, 11-3)

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