



Pitchford's confidence boost ahead of Euros

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Liam Pitchford says he has been working hard to continue his recent run of superb form when the European Championships get under way on Tuesday.

The England No 1 defeated world and Olympic champion Ma Long at the Bulgaria Open and followed up by beating men's World Cup winner Dimitrij Ovtcharov in the Czech Republic, on his way to a first World Tour semi-final appearance.

Those victories over players who have both recently topped the world rankings helped Pitchford to rise to a career high of No 31 in the world and No 11 in Europe.

They gave him a lot of confidence going in to the Europeans – but he also knows he needs to produce that form on a more consistent basis.

The Chesterfield athlete said: "Beating Ma Long – he's one of the best players ever and not many Europeans have beaten him – gave me a lot of confidence. Then to get to my first World Tour semi-final at the next event gave me even more confidence.

"I've always believed I can beat anyone on my day but it's about trying to do it consistently. At those two tournaments, that worked out well, so you have to say it was a step forward.

"Going into the Europeans, I know if I play well like I did in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, I could be challenging, but I also know that if I don't play well there's a lot of players who are good enough to beat me.

"It's wide open this year – everyone can play and there are a lot of players who can win it.

"I've been working hard again. We've had a good training camp in Copenhagen with all the squad. I'm enjoying it and I'm still playing well, and that's the main thing.

"If I keep doing that then the results will come."

The European Championships begin in Alicante on Tuesday. Also representing England are Paul Drinkhall, Sam Walker, Tin-Tin Ho and Maria Tsaptsinos.

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