



Pitchford safely through after scare

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Liam Pitchford survived a mid-match fightback by opponent Kou Lei to reach the last 16 of the Bulgaria Open.

Seeded sixth, Pitchford looked assured in taking the first two games, but his Ukrainian opponent hit back to edge the third.

World No 60 Kou Lei – who beat Pitchford in their only previous meeting at the 2015 European Games – then levelled the match by taking the fourth, and things looked destined to get worse for the Englishman as he trailed 7-1 in the fifth.

But Pitchford reasserted himself with a blistering run, levelling at 7-7 and taking 10 points out of 11 in total to win the game 11-8. He continued his form into the next, which he took 11-6 to move into the last 16.

[Click here to watch Liam Pitchford v Kou Lei](#) (registration required)

He will face world No 36 Chuang Chih-Yuan of Chinese Taipei at 2.20pm UK time tomorrow for a place in the quarter-finals. Chuang beat Paul Drinkhall's conqueror, Zheng Peifeng of China, also in six games.

Pitchford has beaten Chuang in their only previous meeting, at the World Team Championships in Sweden last year.

Pitchford admitted he was not quite sure how he had lost his 2-0 lead, telling the ITTF website: "I think I dominated the first two games, in the third I had a lead. I'm a bit low on confidence at the moment, I haven't been playing as well as I wanted to in the last few months and I think it's kind of in my head a little bit. I'm not moving as well as I was before. My game is still there, it's just I'm a little low on confidence and I'm happy to win no matter what. It always gives confidence when you win no matter how you played.

"The best win of my life I had it here (beating Ma Long in last year's event), it's always nice to come back and get my first win here. Hopefully I can play a little bit better tomorrow, carry on and go a little further in the tournament."

Result

Men's Singles

Round of 32

Liam Pitchford bt Kou Lei (UKR) 4-2 (11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 4-11, 11-8, 11-6)

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