

Pitchford Unbeaten As England Go Down

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Liam Pitchford in his 2nd match with Enio Mendes from last nights international match

England may have been forced to accept defeat in last nights Joola European Nations League match in Preston, but they went down in style.

Without Paul Drinkhall, Darius Knight and Andrew Baggeley, it was a below strength side that took on a talented Portugal team, but you wouldn't have thought it.

They put up a sensational show and despite finally going down 3-2, England's threesome of Liam Pitchford, Daniel Reed and Chris Doran brought the 350 crowd to their feet several times with some spectacular table tennis.

It was the sort of table tennis that the crowd loved and will have gone home in the knowledge that England have some special players in the making.

Pitchford especially was on top of his form, first crushing Diogo Carvalho in three and then tackling the Portuguese No 1 Enio Mendes beating him in five. This was scintillating stuff.

Perhaps the announcement before the match that the young Derbyshire player had won the BOA Athlete of the Year Award helped to lift his game. Whatever it was, it worked.

Chris Doran, brought in as a late replacement for national champion Andrew Baggeley didn't let the side down either. His match against Andre Silva was something special. Both players refusing to give up with Doran, well over 6ft tall and still growing, producing some exquisite touches.

Maybe Daniel Reed was disappointed losing to Mendes but Portugal's top player was just too good on a night and Reed will have learned a lot from his defeat.

It was a night when England came close but not close enough to picking up a surprise win. But coach Alan Cooke and his players did themselves proud in front of a packed St. Augustine's Centre who loved every minute of it.

Results: England 2, Portugal 3.

L Pitchford bt D Carvalho 6, 9, 5.

D Reed lost to E Mendes -8, -7, -8;

C Doran lost to A Silva -11, 5, -8, -13.

Pitchford bt E Mendes 7, -6, 11, -7, 3.

Reed/Doran lost to Carvalho/Silva -5, -5, 7, -10.

By Jim Beckley

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