



## Walsh books Pitchford clash after family battle

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Ethan Walsh will have a crack at England No 1 Liam Pitchford in the last 16 – after getting past his brother-in-law in the group stage at the Mark Bates Ltd National Championships.

Meanwhile, two group runners-up earned a lucky loser spot in the Women's Singles knockout rounds as the group stages came to a close at the David Ross Sports Village in Nottingham.

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### Men's Singles

The family battle between Ethan Walsh and brother-in-law Adam Nutland would have been interesting enough in itself even without the potential of playing Pitchford to add to family bragging rights.

And the plot thickened still further given that a victory for Walsh would ensure the group went to countback, with Nutland earlier having beaten Umair Mauthoor 3-2 (3-11, 11-6, 7-11, 11-7, 11-9) before Mauthoor overcame Walsh 3-2 (11-9, 9-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-9).

In the event, youth won the day as national Junior champion Walsh took it 3-1 (11-9, 11-7, 8-11, 11-7) to book that clash with Pitchford.

Walsh said: "It'll be good to play Liam. I'll just go out there and go for it and see what happens. To get a set off him would be a goal, but that's going to be very hard.

"When I played Adam, I tried to take it out of my mind who I was playing and just take it as any other match. I

didn't feel too much pressure, I just wanted to make sure of the win."



Gabriel Achampong

Elsewhere, James Hobson and Jack Bennett were the big winners, both getting through to the knockout stage from second seeding in the group.

Bennett had a tussle with Israel Awolaja to decide the winner of Group 8. He led 2-0, saw his opponent come back to make it 2-2 but then took the decider to complete a 3-2 (11-7, 11-6, 8-11, 7-11, 11-6) victory which means he has a crack at No 3 seed Sam Walker in the last 16 tomorrow.

Both players had trouble with Ben Piggott earlier in the group, the Cleveland youngster leading Bennett 2-0 in the first match, before Bennett came back to win 3-2 (7-11, 4-11, 12-10, 11-8, 11-8). Piggott then overcame Awolaja in three straight (4, 7, 12).

Hobson got above James Smith in Group 6 by virtue of a 3-2 victory, despite losing the first set 11-1. He won the next two, Smith levelled, but Hobson took the decider 11-5 to back up his earlier win over George Hazell – who also beat Smith. It earned Hobson a tie against Helshan Weerasinghe in the last 16.

The other groups went with seeding, at least in terms of the top player going through, though several No 3 ranked players beat the No 2.

Sam Mabey had to shake off Josh Weatherby to top Group 1, winning 3-2 after seeing his opponent whittle away a 2-0 deficit. The final scoreline was 11-6, 11-8, 9-11, 7-11, 11-4 in Mabey's favour. Both players defeated the No 2 player, Lorestas Trumpauskas.



Josh Weatherby gets some advice from Denis Neale

Luke Savill won Group 2 with two 3-0 wins, but Zak Cantor continued his good day with a 3-2 (11-6, 7-11, 11-8, 9-11, 11-6) win over Shaquille Webb-Dixon.

Sam Wilson had to pull out a 3-2 (5-11, 11-7, 11-5, 1-11, 11-6) win over Graeme Barella in Group 3. Both players beat Louis Price, meaning again the No 3 finished second in the group.

That pattern was also repeated in Group 4, where No 3 Liam McTiernan beat No 2 Alim Hirji, shading a key third game and going on to win 3-1 (7-11, 11-7, 17-15, 11-9). Both players lost to top seed in the group, Josh Bennett.

And it was the same in Group 7. Top ranked Shayan Siraj won his two matches 3-0 against Gabriel Achampong and Naphong Boonyaprapa, while Boonyaprapa overcame the higher ranked Achampong 3-2 (11-8, 8-11, 2-11, 11-9, 11-6).

## Women's Singles



Sara Williams

There were a few surprises in the women's singles group stage with some interesting match-ups set for the last 16. Two lucky losers – Lisa Rinnhofer and Amy Marriott – were randomly picked from second-place finishers to qualify for the knockouts.

Group 5 saw Sara Williams finish top after she dispatched Tiana Denssion 3-0 (13-11, 11-9, 11-8). Williams had a much tougher job against Anna Green, the youngest player in the field and 31 years Williams' junior. She came through 3-2 (12-10, 7-11, 10-12, 11-8, 11-6). Williams goes on to face top seed and three-time former champion Tin-Tin Ho in the next round.

Xiaoman Ji, the oldest competitor in the field, came top of group 7 with two impressive wins. She beat Alice Hazell and Rachel Baker, dropping only one set. Ji faces second seed and women's under-21 champion Denise Payet in the next round.

In group 2, Samadhi Udamulla saved three match points to beat Gracie Edwards 3-2 (7-11, 11-7, 7-1, 11-6, 14-12). Mari Baldwin topped the group, but had to work hard for her wins. She beat Edwards 3-2 (11-13, 11-5, 8-11, 11-5, 11-2) and Udamulla 3-1 (8-11, 11-7, 11-5, 13-11).

In group 4, Gemma Kerr squeezed through as she beat Erin Green 3-2 (6-11, 11-5, 11-9, 2-11, 11-9) in the deciding match. It was a very close match with an excellent rally with Green attacking ball after ball and Kerr looping them back. Eventually, Kerr missed one, much to her frustration. Both Kerr and Green beat Rebecca Savage.



Lisa Rinnhofer

Group 3 went to seed, with Letitia McMullan only dropping one set to win it. She beat Emily Haskell and Lisa Rinnhofer to qualify for the round of 16. However, Rinnhofer also qualified as a lucky loser.

Jasmin Wong topped group one with two clinical displays. Her only hiccup came when she dropped a game to Megan Jones. Wong dispatched Kirsty Maull 3-0.

Millie Rogove didn't drop a set on her way to winning group 8. She comfortably beat Amy Marriott and Medha Verma. However, thanks to the draw of lucky losers, Marriott also qualified.

Anaya Patel was clinical in her group 6 win. She beat Mya Sultan and Stefania Popa in straight sets.



Stefania Popa

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