



## Liam & Paul beaten by Chinese greats in final

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Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall were defeated 3-1 by the world's best pair Ma Long & Xu Xin in the Qatar Open doubles final today – but Pitchford will have a chance for revenge over Xu Xin in the singles semi-finals tomorrow.

It was the first time that an English pairing had reached the final of a men's doubles event on either the ITTF World Tour or at an ITTF Challenge Series tournament since the Tour started in 1996.

The early exchanges proved the English pair were worthy of that place against a Chinese pair who between them have won everything there is to win.

It was a fast Ma Long forehand which decided the first game 11-8, but Pitchford & Drinkhall hit back to take the second by the same margin.

The third was always likely to be pivotal but, given what had gone before, few expected the Chinese pair to build a 10-0 lead and win it 11-1.

Liam and Paul did not actually do a lot wrong in that game – it was more a case of what the Chinese did right – and they showed no hangover as they stood level at 6-6 in the fourth.

However, that was the last point they were to win as, either side of an English timeout at 6-8, the Chinese showed just why they are at the pinnacle of the world game as they completed their 3-1 win.

But a first World Tour podium appearance by an English pair still represents an important step forward for English table tennis.

[Click here to watch the match on itTV](#) (registration required).

[Click here to watch the medal ceremony.](#)

Afterwards, Drinkhall said: "Obviously a very tough match against two of the best players in the world – one of the best, if not the best, pairs. They make everything difficult for you.

"We held our own at times and played some really good stuff. We both felt we had more, but it's difficult to access everything you have against players like that.

"It is a step forward – we haven't played together for quite a long time and it's great to start again with some good results. Hopefully we can keep that up."

Earlier, Pitchford underscored that he is in great touch as he put in a performance of power and intelligence to move into the semi-finals of the singles.

Pitchford sunk Chuang Chih-Yuan of Chinese Taipei in four straight and next plays Xu Xin at 7.50am UK time on Sunday. In fact, the semi-finals are a case of Pitchford versus China, with the other last-four clash featuring Fan Zhendong and Wang Chuqin.

[Click here to watch Pitchford v Chuang](#) (registration required).

Fifteenth seed Pitchford started quickly against Chuang, opening a 5-1 lead, but his experienced opponent, now ranked 37 but a top-10 player for many years, fought back to lead 10-8. Pitchford saved those game points and had three of his own from successive deuce points before taking one to claim the game 14-12.

If it was crucial to get that first game on the board, the second set the tone for the rest of the match and Pitchford's bellow on winning it 11-8 – having led 10-5 – showed how important it was to open up clear daylight.





Liam Pitchford celebrates his singles win (ITTF picture)

The third was never in danger of heading anywhere but onto Pitchford's scorecard as this time he took his first game point to win it 11-5.

The Englishman barely missed anything all match and one forehand with ridiculous sidespin in the fourth, befuddling Chuang and hitting him in the midriff, prompted his opponent to take his timeout.

It only delayed the inevitable, and Chuang's serve straight into the net at 7-9 illustrated the stress he was under by then. The next point was all Pitchford needed to complete a 4-0 win.

So Pitchford equalled his best World Tour performance in reaching the semi-finals – can he go one better tomorrow?

# Results

## **Men's Doubles**

### **Final**

Ma Long & Xu Xin (CHN) bt Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall 3-1 (11-8, 8-11, 11-1, 11-6)

## **Men's Singles**

### **Quarter-finals**

Liam Pitchford bt Chuang Chih-Yuan (TPE) 4-0 (14-12, 11-8, 11-5, 11-7)

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