



Liam back into world's top 15

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Liam Pitchford's brilliant run to the final of the Qatar Open has launched him back into the top 15 in the world.

England's No 1 had dropped down to 22 but his string of victories in Doha, where he became the first English player to reach a Platinum World Tour event final, took him back up to No 15.

His semi-final victim, China's Xu Xin, was world No 1 at the time but drops to No 2, swapping places with compatriot Fan Zhendong, who beat Pitchford in the final.

Pitchford would be only one place off his career high of No 12 if the two players above him did not have points from the T2 series of events – the world rankings are made up of each player's best eight events, but players who appear in the T2 series, which Pitchford has not, are allowed to count those as extra events.

The rankings have now been frozen indefinitely, with the international calendar on hold during the coronavirus pandemic, and Pitchford admits it is a little frustrating that he did not have the opportunity to continue his rich vein of form.

He added: "It (lockdown) came at a bad time for me, but it's also given me time to reflect on what I've been doing right and how to do that better for the next tournaments.

"If the Olympics were still going ahead, you could say maybe I was playing too well, too early, so that's something to think about – how to prepare and when I want to be playing really well.

"Obviously, I want to play well in every tournament, but I want to be in my best shape when the Olympics come around."

Meanwhile, Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall, who became the first English pair to reach a World Tour doubles final in Qatar, where they lost to Ma Long & Xu Xin, have climbed a huge 115 places in the doubles rankings to No 31. Their lowly ranking before that was a product of not having played much as a pair in recent times.

Drinkhall has also climbed in the singles rankings, from 63 to 55, while Sam Walker remains in the top 100 at No 96, down 12 places on the March list. Tin-Tin Ho is the top-ranked English female player, climbing five places to No 93.

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