Pitchford edged out by Karlsson

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Liam Pitchford saw a match point go begging as he was beaten 13-11 in a deciding set by Kristian Karlsson at the WTT Star Contender in Doha.

Pitchford was much improved on last week's showing at the Contender tournament, showing he is well on the way to recovery from the injury to his right thumb which has been hampering him.

Against his left-handed opponent, who is ranked No 29 in the world, Pitchford started tentatively and trailed 9-3 before a storming comeback saw his opponent take an early timeout at 9-8. Both men had chances to take the game, Pitchford's at 12-11, but it was Karlsson who claimed his third chance with the help of the net at 14-12.

But the momentum appeared to be with the Englishman and he ripped through the second game leading 5-0 and 10-1 on his way to taking it 11-3.

The Swede started the third a bit quicker – Pitchford rebuking himself loudly for his loose return of serve on the first point and seeing Karlsson hold the advantage all game to win it 11-7.

The fourth almost exactly followed the pattern of the second as Pitchford turned 4-0 and 8-1 leads into an even more emphatic 11-2 win.

The decider was close throughout, Karlsson earning a yellow card for smashing the ball away in frustration when he trailed 3-1. There were never more than two points in it from there on in and a run of three for Pitchford from 7-9 earned him the first match point. He was not able to convert it and, after saving Karlsson's first match point, went long to allow the Swede to convert his second and take the victory.

Pitchford will feel frustrated at not taking his chance in a match which he 'won' 52-43 on points, but at least he looks a lot more like his old self as he prepares – hopefully pain free – for the World Olympic Qualifying tournament next week.

Result

Men's Singles
Round of 32
Kristian Karlsson (SWE) bt Liam Pitchford 3-2 (14-12, 3-11, 11-7, 2-11, 13-11)

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