



## Pitchford beaten in Olympic qualifiers final

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Liam Pitchford's Olympic dreams are on hold for now after he lost in the final of the second stage of the world qualifying tournament in Doha.

There will be other chances to book a place in Tokyo at the European qualifying event next month, and by virtue of world ranking after that, but Pitchford would have been keen to get the job done at the earliest opportunity today.

In the event, Russia's Kirill Skachkov was the better player on the day and won it in five. After the first two games were shared, Skachkov was yellow-carded at 4-6 down in the third. It seemed to put him on the front foot, winning seven of the next nine points to take the game.

And when he edged a key fourth game 14-12 on his fourth game point, it was a long way back for the English No 1.

Earlier, Pitchford somehow chiselled out a victory over Greek great Panagiotis Gionis in the semi-final.

It was 14-12 in a deciding seventh game as Pitchford finally got over the line with his fourth match point at the end of a real arm-wrestle against a defensive titan of the game.

The drama was heightened as the livestream on Facebook abruptly stopped at 7-9 in the final game – watching the rest of the match unfold on the live-scoring page was rather like watching a penalty shootout on Ceefax back in the day!

The scoring showed Pitchford force three match points, only to see them saved, before taking his fourth chance to finally break through the amazing defence of world No 49 Gionis.

So, the four players to book their places at the Olympics at this tournament were Skachkov, Lubomir Jancarik of the Czech Republic, Bence Majoros of Hungary and Wang Yang of Slovakia.

In the women's singles, five places were available and went to: Britt Eerland (NED), Linda Bergstrom (SWE), Polina Mikhailova (RUS), Yang Xiaoxin (MON) and Suthasini Sawettabut (THA).

## Results

### Phase 2 semi-final

Liam Pitchford bt Panagiotis Gionis (GRE) 4-3 (12-10, 8-11, 11-9, 5-11, 7-11, 11-9, 14-12)

### Final

Kirill Skachkov (RUS) bt Pitchford 4-1 (11-7, 7-11, 11-8, 14-12, 11-7)

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