Pitchford leads way into Champions League quarters

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Liam Pitchford spearheaded his Russian club UMMC's passage into the quarter-finals of the Champions League with four wins from five matches in the second group stage.

He started with a 3-2 (11-9, 11-5, 11-13, 10-12, 6-3) victory over Frane Kojic of Croatia as UMMC won 3-0 against Solex-Consult Wiener Neustadt.

Pitchford then won both his matches against his former club Hennebont – 3-0 (14-12, 12-10, 11-7) against Omar Assar and 3-1 (8-11, 11-4, 11-6, 11-9) against Anders Lind, but could not prevent his team slipping to a 3-2 defeat.

It meant they needed to win their last match against Top Spin Messina Fontalba. Tomislav Pucar put them ahead, but Pitchford was edged out 3-2 (5-11, 6-11, 11-2, 12-10, 3-6) by Joao Monteiro despite a fine fightback from 2-0 down. After Jonathan Groth had put UMMC back in front, Pitchford sealed it by easing past Marco Rech Daldosso 3-0 (11-7, 11-4, 11-3).

It meant UMMC topped the group on a three-way countback, ahead of Hennebont who lost 3-2 to Messina Fontalba.

The draw for the knockout stage will take place next Saturday, during the European Under-21 Championships in Belgium.

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