

World Juniors Final Report

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The Volkswagen World Junior Championships are all over in Manama, Bahrain, but not without some success for English star: Liam Pitchford.

Although the boys' singles competition was eventually won by the number one seed and world ranked 26, Koki Niwa from Japan, Pitchford managed to reach the quarter-finals by becoming the first player to knock-out a Chinese junior in both the boys' and girls' competitions.

Pitchford's 4-2 victory over Jiaji Wu put another feather in the youngster's illustrious cap as he reputation grows on the international circuit.

He finally fell to Frenchman Quentin Robinot 4-1 in the quarters but his tournament will still be remembered as a success after his round of 16 victory.

Pitchford began the match slowly with a lot of his first game shots finding the net as he narrowly lost the opening game 11-8. However, any thoughts that the level of opponent was too tough for Pitchford were quickly dispelled in the second game when he raced back to win 11-6.

All throughout the match the games were tight as there was very little between the two players. This pattern continued into the fifth game where the match was eventually decided.

Both players had taken another game to be level at 2-2 going into the fifth before Pitchford had the first chance to take the game when he forced Wu to fire wide for 10-9. Although he missed the chance to go 3-2 up he forced Wu wide again for a second game point, however, Pitchford netted to level again at 11-11.

Then came a big turning point, with Pitchford in control of the rally, Wu benefitted from a huge edge to lead 12-11 and have his first game point. On another day that kind of luck would have beaten anyone else but Pitchford rose to the challenge and in the next rally hit a superb forehand down the line from low down to level at 12-12.

The drama was not over – after Wu had forced another game point, he threw away the chance by serving straight into the net... before Pitchford followed suit and gifted Wu a third game point.

However, the next three points were all won by the Englishman – the last a great fading backhand that Wu could not return to win the game, and Pitchford led 3-2 after that epic 16-14 game.

Pitchford took the next game more comfortably 11-6 to win the match and seal another great upset in his short career to date.

While he would lose to Robinot in the next round his two quarter-final finishes (the other in the mixed doubles with German Petrissa Solja) his performances added to his experience and confidence ahead of future challenges.

Pitchford said of his victory: "I was nervous before the match and a little afraid at the start, it took time to get used to his services; he won the first game on serve and receive.

After the first game I got into the match. I started to win points by playing backhand to backhand and then switching the direction down the line." He added: "At 10-9 ahead in the fifth game I had a point to win the game; I think it was then I started to realize I could win. I eventually won that game, after at one point he served in the net and then I did the same!"

On being only the second player to beat a Chinese opponent all tournament (Yuto Muramatsu beat Peifeng Cheng in the team event) Pitchford said: "I tried really hard not to think about that, I really tried to put that out of

my mind.”

Pitchford’s team-mates Gavin Evans and Sean Cullen had a less successful campaign with Evans’ ending early after a shoulder injury flared up and prevented him from competing in the singles.

Cullen managed to win through his singles group before eventually falling to eventual quarter-finalist Simon Gauzy from France in the first round. Alongside Pitchford he also managed to reach the third round of the boys’ singles.

Results:

Second round:

L Pitchford bt CM Hyuck (KOR) 4-1 (9-11, 11-6, 11-3, 11-6, 13-11)

S Gauzy (FRA) bt S Cullen 4-0 (11-7, 11-5, 11-5, 11-7)

Round of 32:

L Pitchford bt S Saha (IND) 4-2 (11-6, 11-6, 11-5, 8-11, 9-11, 11-5)

Round of 16:

L Pitchford bt J Wu (CHN) 4-2 (8-11, 11-6, 11-9, 7-11, 16-14, 11-6)

Round of 8:

Q Robinot (FRA) bt L Pitchford 4-1 (11-3, 6-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7)

Boys’ doubles:

S Cullen/L Pitchford bt A Di Salvo/N Galvano (ARG) 3-0 (11-9, 12-10, 11-6)

H Desai/S Ghosh (IND) bt S Cullen/L Pitchford 3-1 (10-12, 11-8, 11-5, 11-8)

Mixed doubles:

L Pitchford/P Solja (GER) bt L Mutti/D Vivarelli (ITA) 3-2 (11-3, 9-11, 7-11, 11-5, 11-9)

Y Zhu/G Lin (CHN) bt L Pitchford/P Solja (GER) 4-1 (11-3, 9-11, 11-6, 11-8, 11-3)

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