

Chinese domination in mens' doubles

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Ma Lin and Zhang Jike make it an all-China line-up

BOTH CHINESE PAIRINGS THROUGH TO MEN'S DOUBLES FINAL

The formidable Chinese pairings of Ma Lin and Zhang Jike, and Ma Long and Wang Hao have duly reached the final of the mens' doubles at the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals being held at the ExCel Arena, London, but the latter pair were in some trouble in their semi-final with Yang Zi and Zhan Jian of Singapore.

Ma Long is the current world no.1 and Wang Hao is the world no.2 and 2010 world singles champion, while Yang Zi and Zhan Jian are respectively world ranked 45 and 63, so on paper the Chinese were much stronger, but doubles is a different game and Singapore had a left-hander/right-hander combination which can be an advantage.

Ma and Wang quickly won the first game, and although the Singaporean pair, always appearing in contention, took the second game, the Chinese were to go into a 3 games to 1 lead. However, Yang and Zhan then started a tremendous fightback, Yang's sharp and very early left-handed forehand and backhand attacks and tight play proving particularly dangerous. They won a big counter-attacking rally at 7-7 in the fifth game, and went on to take a 10-7 lead. When Yang served into the net and then Ma launched a big forehand loop for the Chinese to pull back two game points they looked like they may have blown their chances, but Ma flicked off a return of serve and the Singaporeans were back in the match!

The sixth game was dynamic and very strongly fought, with the Singaporean pair seeming to gain a slight ascendancy, and when Ma served into the net they had two game points at 10-8. But, the Chinese showed their toughness and class to fight their way out of a corner with big forehand loops, first from Wang and then from Ma, to take the match 11-4, 7-11, 11-6, 11-8, 9-11, 13-11.

Yang commented, "I was pleased with our performance. We got much closer than we have done before. Our tactic was to touch the ball short to keep the Chinese out."

The other semi-final was won in straight games, 11-9, 11-9, 11-8, 11-4 by 2008 Olympic singles champion Ma Lin with current World singles and World Cup champion Zhang Jike, over Austrians Robert Gardos and Daniel Habesohn. However, it was not totally one sided, the Austrians blending well together to force mistakes by their illustrious opponents, and Gardos in particular coming out with some flashing winners.

The men's doubles final will be held at 6pm this Saturday (26th November).

Ken Muhr

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