

Wang Hao and Ma Long singles success

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Ma Long is in imperious form at the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals

SCINTILLATING MENS' QUARTER-FINAL WIN BY WANG HAO OVER MA LIN

Wang Hao, 28, the 2010 world mens' singles and three times World Cup champion beat his 21 year old Chinese compatriot and fellow penholder, Xu Xin, world ranked no.8, in a scintillating display of athletic attacking table tennis in their quarter-final encounter at the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals being played at the ExCel Arena, London. Wang and Xu share another similarity: Wang has the best penhold backhand loop in the world (played from the reverse side of the bat), but Xu is the new pretender of this technique.

It was good quality stuff throughout but at one game each, the match really came alight in the third, when Wang Hao won a huge forehand loop to loop rally to take a 9-6 lead, going on to win that game. However, that seemed to serve to fire up Xu, who was absolutely devastating, firing early whipped forehand loops to run away with it.

The fifth game was the best from an audience point of view, full of spectacular rallies and amazing shots from both players, Xu just edging it 12-10 with apparent slightly greater weight of forehand shot. The sixth game was much bittier, with Wang Hao playing tighter to keep Xu out, but when Xu started recovering from a 4-7 deficit and getting to 6-7 with a huge re-loop of Wang Hao's backhand, Wang called time out. It was well timed, because he won the next 8 points, and it was the turning point for completely taking over the match with classy very early struck topspin on both wings which gave Xu little time to counter-attack, Wang triumphing 5-11, 11-9, 11-8, 3-11, 11-6, 11-5.

In another quarter-final the world no.1, Ma Long (China) was overall too fast, had too much ammunition and was too consistent for the Chuang Chih-Yuan (Chinese Taipei), to gain a straight games, 11-2, 12-10, 11-2, 11-5 success. The second game was the only one to be really exciting, and the speedy Chuang had a chance to take it, winning a power loop to loop rally to go 10-9 up. Unfortunately for him Ma immediately won an even bigger power hitting rally to save the game point, and went on to win the game. Ma will now meet Wang Hao in the semi-finals on Sunday (27th November) afternoon.

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