

Ding Ning and Liu Shiwen in womens' final

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Liu Shiwen one match away from the title

Ding Ning makes no mistake

World no. one – Ding Ning, the all-action 2011 World Singles Champion booked her final appearance in the Ladies Singles Final as she looks to become one of the few players to go on to win the treble of World Championships, World Cup and Pro Tour Finals. She beat Li Xiaoxia 4-1.

If she does go on to win the Final Ding Ning will be the favourite to capture the biggest title of all – in this venue in August 2012.

This semi-final was a repeat of the 2011 World Singles Final in Rotterdam but on this occasion it was the 21 year-old from Heilongjiang who was in charge for much of the game. Ding surged into a 3-0 lead and even when Li Xiaoxia pulled clear by gaining a 10-5 advantage in the fourth game Ding Ning pulled back to 10-9 before a very relieved Li Xiaoxia won the vital point. It was still a very long way back for Li Xiaoxia. It was important she made a good start in the fifth end. It wasn't to be. Ding Ning was on top throughout. Ding Ning won 11-7, 11-6, 11-7, 9-11, 11-3.

In the other semi-final Liu Shiwen beat Wang Yuegu's dazzling speed to reach the final. The world no.5 and the fourth seed ended the superb run of Yuegu (Singapore) in the semi-finals of the womens' singles at the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals, being held at the ExCel Arena, London.

Yuegu, herself world no. 9, had taken out the top seed Guo Yan (China) in the quarter-finals with her lightening fast, flat counter-hitting game in an epic encounter decided at 13-11 in the deciding game. After dropping the first game against Liu, with whom she trained in her native China, she looked like she might repeat the feat again, when, counter-hitting at dazzling pace she lifted the next two games and was 10-7 up in the fourth. The two wing top-spinner Liu kept her composure though, and raised her game to sneak it 13-11.

The fifth game reached even higher heights as both players got near their peaks, and there were many fast and furious topspin to flat counter-hitting rallies. Liu impressed by her ability to master the very difficult technique of early looping back very sharp flat hits from Wang played to difficult angles on the table, particularly extremely wide on her backhand. However, she continued to get stronger, to closely win that game and run away with the sixth to vanquish Wang 11-9, 5-11, 4-11, 13-11, 11-9, 11-5.

Liu now plays another Chinese compatriot, second seed Ding Ning (the world no.1) in the final at 7pm on this Saturday evening (26th November).

Ken Muhr and Steve Kerns

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