

Jike makes it an all-China final

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ZHANG JIKE HAS JUST A BIT TOO MUCH CONTROLLED AGRESSION FOR GAO

21 year old Zhang Jike (China), current world champion and World Cup winner, the world no.3 beat Gao Ning (Singapore), 28 and the world no. 18, 11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 11-8, 11-9, to reach the men's singles final of the ITTF Pro Tour Grand Finals, being held at the ExCel, London.

For quite a big man, Gao plays with nimble speed, agility and deceptive power, covering the table well and being able to soak up a lot of attacking punishment, as he demonstrated in putting out 2008 Olympic gold medallist Ma Lin (China) in the last 16, and 2004 Olympic gold medallist Ryu Seung Min (Korea) in the quarter-finals. However, both these opponents are penholders with relatively weak backhands, whereas Zhang Jike has excellent top-spinning ball control on both wings.

Although there were a lot of good counter-hitting and top-spinning rallies, and Gao was able to get very close to Zhang, it was Zhang's ability to exchange backhands with Gao and to control the whole table which gave him the edge. Although Zhang sometimes seemed to ease off and lose his concentration, he also had the ability to raise his game and turn on the power when it really mattered, which was decisive.

It will be intriguing to see if he can raise his game to an even higher level, when he faces world no.1 Ma Long in the final at 7pm tonight (Sunday, 27th November).

Ken Muhr

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