

Xu Xin ends English hope in Hungary

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Hungary hero Andrew Baggaley will be joined by Liam Pitchford in Slovenia

Andrew Baggaley lost out to World number 5 Xu Xin in the last 16 of the Hungarian Open but he departed with his head held high.

A fantastic few days from the man from Milton Keynes was capped off last night with his double victories over Frenchman Emmanuel Lebesson (4-1) and then Hungarian Adam Lindner (4-3).

Today nothing was expected from the English player. His ranking of 144 some 139 places below the exceptional Chinese star but Baggaley didn't let this faze him.

He took the first point in the match to lead, a pleasant bonus, but Xu quickly stamped his mark on the match with a number of punishing blows that only the players from Asia seem to possess.

If the first game 11-6 loss was tough then the start of the second game was worse. Xu compiled a number of thunderous forehand smashes that slammed into Baggaley's half of the table to no response as he flew 6-0 ahead.

When Baggaley pulled one back, Xu looked distraught and his rhythm was broken as he stumbled through the rest of the game, eventually taking it 11-5.

After that the English star stiffened his resolve and with true English spirit fought back to take Xu toe-to-toe in the last two games. In the third he led 7-6 – the first time he held a lead since the first point, and leveled again at 8-8 when he won the rally of the match.

At 10-10 anything seemed possible but eventually Xu closed out the game 12-10 to lead 3-0. In the fourth (and final) game, Baggaley fought again and led by two points twice; 4-2 and 6-4 before he was pegged back to 7-7.

When Xu kicked ahead and closed out the match 11-8 there was disappointment but only that the match reached expectation levels.

We now look forward to the Slovenian Open that begins next week. Baggaley will clearly arrive in high spirits while Paul Drinkhall's performances equally deserved merit, if not at least, a little more luck.

Then Liam Pitchford also arrives after playing Timo Boll and Werner Schlager in the Energis Masters. Who is to say another last 16 place is not out of the question?

Ahead of the Olympics, English table tennis suddenly looks in a really good place with Kelly Sibley and Joanna Parker also making strides in the women's game. Let's not forget either that each nation only has two Olympic singles selections to pick so, given that five of the men's quarter-finalists are Chinese, we can expect a few more opportunities come Olympic Games time.

Either way, the Slovenian Open next week looks very exciting and promises a great deal of potential for our

English players.

Men's Singles Last 16 Result

X Xin bt A Baggaley 4-0 (11-6, 11-5, 12-10, 11-8)

By Russell Moore

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