

# Drinkhall to face Pitchford in final

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Paul Drinkhall won an epic encounter with Darius Knight 4-2 as he reached the 2012 men's singles final against Liam Pitchford who defeated Daniel Reed.

The match was always likely to be close between two players who have frequently played both with and against each other for years and their strong forehand to forehand rallies were a constant delight during the semi-final.

In the first game it was neck and neck until Drinkhall broke ahead at 10-8. But, with two game points, he let Knight back in to level at 10-10. Crucially the player from Cleveland held his nerve to take the first 13-11.

When Drinkhall raced ahead again in the second 5-1 it seemed as though he had Knight's number and duly went on to take a 2-0 lead with an 11-7 game following the final point which saw a powerful forehand from Drinkhall hit Knight's top edge.

Game three would need to be important for Knight and he made sure he took it. At 5-4 everything was to play for but Knight received a slice of luck with a heavy net cord and never looked back from there – pulling himself back into the match 11-7.

The tide seemed to have turned with Knight blowing Drinkhall away in game four. His awesome forehand winning seven points in a row as Drinkhall looked shocked. When the English number two netted it confirmed Knight had levelled 2-2 with the 11-3 game.

Game five was always likely to prove pivotal and although Knight came out firing to win an outstanding first point, Drinkhall's grit showed and he clawed his way back ahead before taking the lead again 11-7.

Drinkhall appeared to have re-composed himself and sealed the match 4-2 with an 11-7 final game against a frustrated Knight who knew at one stage he had Drinkhall where he wanted him.

He will now face Pitchford in the final after the 18-year-old from Derbyshire won through confidently and comfortably 4-0 against Daniel Reed.



Reed had been playing superb table tennis all weekend to reach this stage and he himself brushed Matt Ware aside in the previous round. However, Pitchford proved too much a step up in class.

The English number one had found his form against Andrew Baggaley in the quarter-final to win 4-1 and with his outstanding backhand fully functioning it was always going to be hard for Reed to find a riposte.

Pitchford raced ahead 1-0 with a destructive 11-3 first game before Reed came back to make the second game a tight affair. Although Reed was playing at the top of his powers matching Pitchford for his forehand rallies, he had no match for his backhands which cost him the game.

The number one seed eventually took the game with an outstanding point where he attacked three times with forehand draws to a deep-lying Reed before firing the point-winner across the table giving the English number four no chance.

In the third game Reed again began well, trailing just 4-3, but five consecutive points all but gave Pitchford the game – ending 11-6.

Although Reed fought on he was battling against a strong tide and the nail was put in the coffin with a final 11-6 game to confirm Pitchford's place in the final.

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