

Chinese end English pair's hopes

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England's Liebherr Men's World Cup duo of Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall were beaten in their final group matches at the Echo Arena on Saturday afternoon after falling to straight games defeats to their Chinese opponents.

Starting the day with a mountain to climb, both Drinkhall (87) and Pitchford (145) had the almost impossible tasks to beat Ma Long (2) and Xu Xin (3) respectively.

First up was Drinkhall against Ma Long, who was still seething after yesterday's 4-0 defeat to Chinese Taipei player Chuang Chih-Yuan.

Ma Long was at his devastating best against the English no. 1 as he raced to a comprehensive 4-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-3, 11-1) victory. Although Drinkhall frequently competed in long topspin to topspin rallies from deep, the former world no. 1 had too much power and precision in his armory.

Pitchford, on the other hand, gave Xu Xin a run for his money with three of the four games going to deuce, with the Englishman just unable to convert the game points that came his way.

Quick off the table, Pitchford surprised Xu Xin with his speed on both the forehand and backhand sides as he took a 9-8 lead in the first game. Xu Xin fought back to force a game point (which Pitchford saved) before the Chinese star closed the first game 12-10.

The second game went to Xu Xin 11-5 but the young Englishman retaliated once more to force two game points in the third. For a second time though he was left to rue a missed chance as two nets from the English no. 2 resulted in another 12-10 game for Xu Xin.

The fourth (and final) game was the most entertaining of them all as Pitchford fought back from 7-9 down to lead 10-9. While he couldn't win that point, he was well in control of the next before Xu Xin received an incredibly lucky net from a deep defensive position to force a first match point.

The next point that followed was even more incredible. After a lengthy rally, Xu Xin dropped the ball short and wide to which Pitchford dived at and hooked back on the table – the follow up from Xu Xin was netted and Pitchford saved the match point.

He went on to save two more match points before Xu Xin eventually sealed a tight game 15-13.

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