

Samsonov beats Chuang in 7-game epic

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Vladimir Samsonov beat Chuang Chih-Yuan in a brilliant and absorbing quarter-final where the Chinese Taipei star saved five match points before the experience Belarussian could finally seal his passage to the semi-finals in a dramatic seventh game.

Chuang started positively in the first game by opening up an early lead from 5-5 to 10-5 to effectively seal the opener. However, the experienced Samsonov had other ideas as he fought back to close at just 10-9 down – including an excellent rally at 10-7.

Unfortunately for the world number 14, Chuang managed to win the next point as Samsonov went long for a tight hold of 11-9.

Not to be denied, Samsonov then continued his form from the end of the first game into the second as he turned those four successive points in the first game into an 11-6 second game to quietly level matters at 1-1.

Chuang decided enough was enough and re-established his lead in the third. Deciding vocals were the way forward he began to meet his points with a fist pump and vociferous call as an 8-4 lead was converted into an 11-6 game and 2-1 lead.

Not fazed by Chuang's increased vocals, Samsonov silently went about his business in game four and created a lead from 2-4 behind to 5-4 ahead. From there the three-time World Cup Champion remained in control until he sealed the game 11-7.

The see-saw nature to the match continued in the fifth game as the players were neck-and-neck until the score reached 8-8. From there Chuang made a mini-break on two Samsonov serves to create two game points – the first of which was saved, forcing Chuang to call a timeout.

When the Belarussian saved a second he let off a big roar and fist pump – his first of the match. Two more to follow as the Taipei player netted twice and Samsonov led for the first time with a crucial 12-10 game.

When Samsonov overturned a 5-2 deficit in the sixth game to lead 6-5, Chuang let out a small cry of frustration as he could feel the match slipping away. Samsonov then opened up three match points at 10-7 – two of which Chuang saved to force another timeout.

Incredibly he then won a third, fourth and fifth consecutive point to save his skin and force a deciding game.

Now both players were vocal with every point crucial. A big fifth point rally was met with a cry and a fist pump from Samsonov who led 4-1 and then 5-3 at the change of ends.

At 9-8 up, Samsonov and Chuang produced a wonder-rally which the Belarussian eventually won to set up two more match points with a variety of shots and skills involved in an amazing spectacle of table tennis.

However, Chuang wasn't finished. Once again he saved two more match points to take the game to deuce in the seventh. This time there was no mistake for the 36-year-old as he drove a forehand smash into Chuang's body to convert his sixth match point.

Vladimir Samsonov (BLR) bt Chuang Chih-Yuan 4-3 (9-11, 11-6, 6-11, 11-7, 12-10, 10-12, 12-10)

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