

Brilliant Samsonov seals third place

Author: Russell Moore

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Vladimir Samsonov beat Xu Xin in an excellent exhibition of table tennis at the Echo Arena, Liverpool to secure third place in the 2012 Liebherr Men's World Cup after a six game rollercoaster.

The match started with the kind of free-flowing entertainment that can come about from a pressure-free situation. Several of the early rallies were entertaining deep attacking affairs with both Samsonov and Xu Xin trading early blows.

As the game progressed it was the Belarussian who was on top with Xu Xin finding the net as he did in his semi-final with Ma Long on frequent occasions.

A 9-5 break in the first game was converted 11-8 by Samsonov with a powerful forehand drive down the middle of the table for an early 1-0 lead.

In game two Samsonov was given a 3-0 lead by the umpires but both the 36-year-old and his 22-year-old opponent agreed that it clipped an edge and Xu Xin was given the point, superb sportsmanship shown by the Belarussian once more.

He was rewarded by his own excellent play as another forehand drive down the line opened up an 8-3 lead. Once again he was able to convert as a disjointed Xu Xin fell 2-0 behind with an 11-5 game.

However, he pulled himself together in the third game, helped by the chants of his fans in the crowd, to create his own 6-3 opening with excellent agility and forehand speed to pass the Belarussian's defence on a couple of occasions.

With Samsonov unwilling to yield any ground to the world no. 3, Xu Xin had to work hard for every point but he came through the test with a backhand winner on game point to give himself some hope with an 11-7 third game.

However, Samsonov is not a three-time World Cup Champion for nothing as he absolutely blitzed the fourth game. At 10-0 the Belarussian pushed the ball into the net out of pure sportsmanship before drilling a perfectly executed backhand winner to secure an 11-1 game.

At 3-1 up he could sense the victory (and \$15,000 prize cheque) but not before Xu Xin worked himself into a 5-1 lead in the fourth game after a double net-cord helped the Chinese player ahead.

With Samsonov's backhands working overtime Xu Xin had his work cut out but he managed to hang onto the game and close the gap once more at 3-2 with an 11-6 game.



The 22-year-old once again found himself in trouble 3-0 down in the sixth game so he called timeout, without a coach he was left to raise himself to alter the momentum of the game.

Despite the crowd's vociferous support he was unable to stop the imperious Samsonov who moved 5-1 before excellent sportsmanship, this time from Xu Xin acknowledging an edge, gave the Belarussian a 6-3 lead.

It was one-way traffic from there as the gentle giant raced into a 10-4 lead and sealed a 4-2 win 11-6 when Xu Xin fired a forehand long.

Vladimir Samsonov (BLR) bt Xu Xin (CHN) 4-2 (11-8, 11-5, 7-11, 11-1, 6-11, 11-6)

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