

Pitchford's Euro run ended despite Gardos victory

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Posted On: [October 19, 2012](#)



Liam Pitchford was unable to build on his incredible win against world number 32 Robert Gardos (AUT) as England's campaign at the European Championships in Denmark came to a close.

Pitchford, who must now be unsettling some of the seeds at these Championships, was denied another meeting with Vladimir Samsonov by German defender Ruwen Filus who beat the young Englishman 4-2.

Earlier in the day Pitchford had upset the seedings with a tremendous victory against the Austrian Gardos in a six-game triumph.

The 19-year-old began well against the European number 12, despite conceding five consecutive points in the opening game to drop 9-6 down, he fought back brilliantly to level at 9-9.

The youngster then saved two game points, one at 10-9 and one at 12-11 before embarking on his own three-point run to snatch the opening game from Gardos' grasp.

When Pitchford repeated the dose in the second game – moving from 8-8 to 11-9 to open up a 2-0 lead, the shock was well and truly on with the Englishman showcasing the kind of backhands that made him hit the headlines 12 months ago.

However, Gardos is not the 11th seed for nothing and he fought his way back into contention over the course of the next two games. Firstly, he broke away from 5-5 in the third to lead 9-5 only to see the courageous Pitchford reply in kind to level again at 9-9.

This time there was no success for the Chesterfield lad as the Austrian won the next two points to claim a game back. Soon after he was level at 2-2 when he led from start to finish in the fourth game to win it 11-8 and begin questioning the youngsters temperament.

This time Pitchford held out. He increased the spin on his forehands while continuing to battle well in backhand rallies as he won his most comfortable game of the match 11-6.

More drama was to unfold in the sixth (and final) game where the players locked horns in pursuit of a last 32 place. At 9-8 down, the English number 2 benefitted from a thick net to level 9-9.

He couldn't capitalize immediately, however, as he went long to concede a game point at 10-9 – although it was one that he saved to take the game into deuce at 10-10.

This is where Pitchford's strengths came through as a multiple of powerful backhands secured another amazing victory. Firstly, his cross-court backhand gave him game point 1, then a backhand down Gardo's backhand line set up a second at 12-11.

Timeout was taken by Pitchford on serve but the Austrian's brilliant serve return saved a second match point for 12-12. When the third stunning backhand from Pitchford in quick succession opened up a third match point, there was no failing this time as Gardos found the net and Pitchford stood back and roared with delight.

However, the youngster was unable to build on that victory as he fell in the last 32 stage to Germany's Ruwen Filus.

The expert defender lost the first game 11-8 to the Englishman but recovered to take the second game 11-6 before a six-point run in the third sealed an 11-7 game and 2-1 lead.

After another 11-7 game the German appeared in full control and, at 8-5 up in the fifth, well on his way to victory. However, five successive points from the 19-year-old helped salvage the game and prolong his stay in the European Championships.

However, it only extended his campaign by one game as Filus led throughout the sixth game to reach the last 16 against Vladimir Samsonov with an 11-7 end.

Unfortunately, Pitchford's teammates were unable to follow his exploits in the singles as both Paul Drinkhall and Joanna Parker were eliminated in their respective round of 64 matches.

Drinkhall, who suffered a 4-3 defeat to Yaroslav Zhmudenko at the Final World Qualification Tournament in Qatar, suffered a repeat dose of that sickly medicine when he once again lost in the seventh game to the Ukrainian.

In Doha, the Englishman lost 12-10 in the decider while this time in Denmark he was an 11-9 victim in the last game once more. After trailing 2-1, then leading 3-2, the match was forced into the final game.

There, Drinkhall fell both 8-3 and 9-5 behind, only to recover matters at 9-9. But, just like in Qatar, he was left heart-broken as the Ukrainian sealed the next two points for another success.

Parker, meanwhile, was beaten by fellow defender Tetyana Bilenko (also from Ukraine) 4-1. After winning the opening game 11-9, she surrendered a 9-6 lead in the second game to eventually lose it 13-11.

From that point on, the higher ranked Ukrainian won the next three games to seal her place in the women's last 32.

Later in the evening Drinkhall and Pitchford combined to take on the mighty force of Vladimir Samsonov and Dimitrij Ovtcharov in the doubles. However, they were not overawed in the first couple of games as they pushed their illustrious opponents.

With quick footwork and positive, aggressive strokeplay the English pair worked their way into a deep deuce in the opening game before their opponents sealed it 15-13. Drinkhall and Pitchford then stepped it up again in the second game to lead 10-7 before they saw all three game points slip away. This time though they fought back and met their 12-10 game win with a pump of the fist.

Unfortunately, that was as close as they got to the Samsonov and Ovtcharov as the Central Europeans took control in the next two games, showing all their class, to book their place in the quarter-finals.

2012 Joola European Championships Results

Men's Singles:

Yaroslav Zhmudenko (UKR, 103) bt Paul Drinkhall 4-3 (8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 8-11, 9-11, 11-7, 11-9)

Liam Pitchford bt Robert Gardos (AUT, 32) 4-2 (14-12, 11-9, 9-11, 8-11, 11-6, 14-12)

Ruwen Filus (GER, 77) bt Liam Pitchford 4-2 (8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-7, 9-11, 11-7)

Women's Singles:

Tetyana Bilenko (UKR, 103) bt Joanna Parker 4-1 (9-11, 13-11, 11-4, 11-7, 11-8)

Men's Doubles:

Vladimir Samsonov (BLR)/Dimitrij Ovtcharov (GER) bt Paul Drinkhall/Liam Pitchford 3-1 (15-13, 10-12, 11-6, 11-7)

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