Pitchford seals maiden Nationals crown

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Liam Pitchford won his first-ever Senior English Men's Singles National Championship following a six-game win against four-times champion Paul Drinkhall.

The final was full of everything; high quality, powerful shots, endless tension and determined passion but it was the 19-year-old who came away from Ponds Forge with his first title under his belt.

Before the Championships there were a few question marks over the youngsters fitness after a hip injury sidelined him over the winter, but he proved his doubters wrong with a mature and professional performance.

Both players came out of the traps quickly, seemingly hitting top gear from the off as each knew the danger of their final opponent. The first game was a real power landmark that remained neck and neck until Drinkhall received a fortunate defensive edge to lead 8-6.

It was a piece of luck the defending champion would capitalise upon, sealing the game 11-8 with a blistering forehand down the line, such is his trademark shot.

The final continued at break-neck pace in the second game but this time it was Pitchford who led throughout. Eventually Drinkhall's tame forehand push clipped the net and went long to allow the 19-year-old to level at 1-1 with an 11-8 game of his own.

If Pitchford thought he could relax then he was sorely mistaken as a switched-on Drinkhall was in his face at the start of the third game and dominated his shell-shocked opponent to take a 7-0 lead. It was enough to see the 23-year-old into a 2-1 lead as Pitchford served off, gifting him a comfortable 11-2 game.

It was important that the youngster didn't start as slowly in the fourth game and he ensured himself of a more positive start by developing a 6-2 lead early on. Although Drinkhall fought back, he still did enough to cement an 11-7 game and level for a second time at 2-2.

The English no. 2s new-found confidence was apparent early in the fifth game with a pair of flamboyant backhand flicks to open up a 4-0 gap. Drinkhall looked genuinely troubled for the first time when the gap turned into a chasm at 8-1 and Pitchford duly sealed the end 11-4.

The four-times champion needed a way back in and a fortunate edge at 2-2 gave him a small boost early in the sixth game. It was enough to keep him fighting into a 7-6 lead but a very lucky net from Pitchford left Drinkhall stranded and changed the tide of the game.

It was just enough momentum for Pitchford to win his first ever Men's Singles title with Drinkhall's forehand

clipping the net and flying long to gift the 19-year-old an 11-9 game.

Liam Pitchford bt Paul Drinkhall 4-2 (8-11, 11-8, 2-11, 11-7, 11-4, 11-9)