

Walker ends World Juniors on a high

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Posted On: [December 09, 2013](#)



England's Sam Walker completed a successful junior campaign with his head held high after reaching the last 16 of the World Junior Championships in Rabat, Morocco.

The 18-year-old was confident on the back of a breakthrough year where he impressed both domestically, with the National Men's Under-21 title, and internationally, where he picked up a maiden ITTF Junior Tour title in Malta.

Hoping to continue his form into the prestigious event in North Africa, the Worksop-born star cruised through his qualifying group with ease, beating both Aly Ghallab and Juan Lamadrid without dropping an end.

Walker, supported by National Coach Alan Cooke, then picked up two big wins in the knockout stages to set up a last 16 meeting with top seed Yuto Muramatsu.

His first victory, over Patryk Zatowka, was a comprehensive 4-0 win, before he followed that up with an excellent victory over higher ranked Alexandre Robinot – one of France's prestigious young prospects.

Walker said: "I lost against him last time so I was even more determined to beat him this time around. The first set was a bit scrappy but I thought for the majority I was in control and went 10-8 up but then I let my game get too loose and served two half long and allowed him back in and I lost it 10-12. After that set, in the corner Alan and I spoke about how I was a little bit slow on moving wide to forehand which was where he was catching me out and that I also needed to put more pressure on him with my returns.

"It was really important that I got a good start in my second set which managed to do and also made some more aggressive returns so it was more difficult for him to get in and he started to make some easy mistakes.

"For the next two sets I just kept my focus and the same tactics as I didn't feel like I needed to change anything. In the end I managed to pull through and take the match 4-2. He's a good player and it was great to win against him especially with how dominant the French are in the European Junior game."

Unfortunately for Walker his draw saw him come up against the top seed, Muramatsu, in the next round, who played exceptionally well to give the Englishman no room for movement.

Although disappointed with the defeat, the English no. 7 reflected positively on his overall efforts.

He said: "He's a defender with short pimples on his backhand, I played him recently in Berlin at the German Open and it was a close match I lost 3-4. Therefore I went into the match with some tactics of playing him wide into forehand and playing a powerful forehand into his middle.

"Unfortunately it didn't really come off in the match, he was really strong today so I have to give him credit. He attacked a lot more against me this time and he attacked well and strong into my forehand. He also made it really difficult for me to play my strong balls because he kept his chops really low to the net. Obviously I'm disappointed to have lost but he's a good player and I've had a good tournament so I've got a lot to be positive about.

"After speaking with Alan, we feel there have been big improvements in my game recently which is a great feeling. There's still a lot to work on though so it's back to England tomorrow and straight back into the training hall on Tuesday. Overall I'm satisfied with my performance and the way I played, I did better than my ranking so that's a bonus."

World Junior Championships (December 1-8, 2013) Rabat, MAR Selected Results

Boy's Singles:

Group 3:

Sam Walker bt Aly Ghallab (EGY, 949) 4-0 (11-5, 11-5, 11-8, 11-7)

Sam Walker bt Juan Lamdril (CHI, 861) 4-0 (11-4, 15-13, 12-10, 11-8)

Last 64:

Sam Walker bt Patryk Zatozka (POL, 462) 4-0 (11-9, 11-6, 11-6, 11-7)

Last 32:

Sam Walker bt Alexandre Robinot (FRA, 237) 4-2 (10-12, 11-6, 11-6, 11-9, 6-11, 11-6)

Last 16:

Yuto Muramatsu (JPN, 70) bt Sam Walker 4-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-4, 11-6)

Written by Russell Moore (December 9, 2013)

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