

Pitchford seals dramatic victory

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Liam Pitchford got England off to a winning start

England are one match away from winning gold after defeating India 3-1 in a spellbinding semi-final in Glasgow tonight.

Liam Pitchford was the hero, holding his nerve in an incredible match against Harmeet Desai to take the fifth set 17-15 and put England into tomorrow's final against top seeds Singapore.

In a last-four clash lasting almost three hours, Pitchford got England off to a winning start, coming from 2-1 down to defeat World No 44 Sharath Achanta 3-2.

Paul Drinkhall then stamped his class on his singles match against Amalraj Anthony, dominating throughout to win in three straight.

But if England thought their path to the final would be straightforward from that point, India had other ideas.

Anthony and Desai teamed up to win a thrilling doubles clash in five, saving two England match points on their way to taking the decider 13-11.

Pitchford looked in the mood to finish the fourth match quickly as he opened up a 2-0 lead. And when he led 10-4 in the third, it appeared done and dusted.

But Desai refused to be beaten, incredibly winning the next eight points to take the game with a flurry of brilliant shots.

It was 12-10 to the Indian in the fourth as well, setting up a tension-packed decider which had a vociferous crowd at the Scotstoun Sports Complex on the edge of their seats, and those in the England camp probably on the limit of their nerves.

Neither man gave an inch, match points were gained and saved on both sides and, eventually, Pitchford came through 17-15, sinking to his knees in delight and relief as his jubilant team-mates invaded the court.

So it's Singapore in Monday's final for England, while India must rouse themselves to play Nigeria for bronze.

Match-winner Pitchford said: "I don't know what happened, I had six match points but then it started slipping away and in the end I had to dig deep.

"The lads helped me a lot from the bench and I am just really happy we are through. To get into final it is always big for our table tennis in England.

"We saw Singapore struggle against Nigeria (in the other semi-final) and I think if we can get at them and put them under pressure we have a good shot."

Team-mate Drinkhall added: "At one point when Liam was 2-0 up and 10-5 up, I thought it was going to be a relaxed win but it turned into an epic match.

"He got a little nervous and made a few errors. Then after that the other guy started playing the best table tennis of his life, but it was great for Liam to come through it.

"We could have won the doubles and we had a few balls where in hindsight we could have done something different, but we played well."

And Daniel Reed, who offered great support from the sidelines, alongside Sam Walker and coach Alan Cooke, said: "I'm really happy for the guys, it was a great performance and we have all played very well throughout the tournament.

"To come through a nervy end and make the final is great and I played a few matches in the group so for us to come out with a medal we are all happy with.

"We got the silver last time and we are all hoping to get the gold. Singapore are the favorites but they looked nervous and we can beat them."

Men's semi-final

England 3-1 India

Liam Pitchford beat Sharath Achanta 3-2 (11-4, 8-11, 9-11, 11-5, 11-6)

Paul Drinkhall beat Amalraj Anthony 3-0 (11-5, 11-8, 11-9)

Paul Drinkhall/Andrew Baggaley lost to Harmeet Desai/Amalraj Anthony 2-3 (11-7, 14-16, 8-11, 11-7, 11-13)

Liam Pitchford beat Harmeet Desai 3-2 (11-5, 11-6, 10-12, 10-12, 17-15)

By Paul Stimpson (July 27th, 2014)

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