

Liam and Paul react to Suzhou performance

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Liam Pitchford in action in Suzhou

Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall have been reflecting on their World Championships performance in Suzhou.

Liam became the first Englishman since Matthew Syed and Carl Prean in 1999 to reach the last 32, while Paul matched Gareth Herbert's 2003 feat in reaching the last 64.

Liam certainly caught the eye with his 4-2 (11-8, 8-11, 10-12, 11-4, 11-6, 11-9) second-round win over world No 20 Tiago Apolonia before bowing out to 17th-ranked Saehyuk Joo of Korea, renowned as one of the best defensive players in the world.

The first two sets were closely contested and Liam had game points in the first, but Joo asserted himself in the second half of the match and pulled away to win 4-1 (12-10, 9-11, 11-5, 11-4, 11-8).

Despite his disappointment, Liam said: "Overall it's been quite a positive tournament for me.

"I started off quite nervous in my first match (when he beat Kalinikos Kreanga of Greece 4-2 (7-11, 11-5, 11-5, 10-12, 11-7, 11-7) but I think I handled it well and started to play some good stuff.

"Against Apolonia, we played together at the same club for two years, so I knew how I wanted to play against him and he knew how to play against me. It was a close game and I was very happy to beat a player with a high ranking.

"In the last match I felt like I started off really well in the first two sets. If I had taken the first it would have put him under pressure, but he got used to my style of play a little bit."

Had Liam won, his prize in the last 16 would have been a chance to take on world No 1 and top seed Ma Long of China. But while he admits he would have relished the challenge, he was also philosophical, saying: "I'm happy with the tournament and how it's gone and hopefully next time I'll get the chance again."

It also took a top-20 ranked player (No 18 Chun Ting Wong of Hong Kong) to end Paul's presence in the tournament in a match which was much closer than the 4-1 scoreline suggests (12-10, 9-11, 11-8, 11-9, 11-6).

He earlier sailed through his first-round match, dropping only seven points in beating world No 367 Elia Schmid of Switzerland 4-0 (11-1, 11-4, 11-1, 11-1).



Paul Drinkhall takes on Chun Ting Wong

Paul said: "I'm a bit disappointed, to be honest. I played well in my first match. It was against a weaker opponent but I did play well.

"In the second match, I think I played okay. I didn't do too much wrong but it wasn't good enough.

"The first set was important. I was leading and he came back and won it and that possibly dampened my confidence a little bit because I was on top throughout that game.

"I received quite badly, which also affected my confidence, but it was still a really close game – that's the annoying thing. If I'd received a bit better it would have made a difference."

The two English players teamed up in the doubles, where they were beaten 4-2 (7-11, 6-11, 11-4, 11-7, 8-11, 8-11) in the round of 64 by Youngsik Jung & Minseok Kim of Korea.

Paul said: "I think we played a good game really but the main problem was a bit of a slow start and going 2-0 down. After that it was a 50-50 game."

Performance Coach Alan Cooke said: "I think the boys have been very honest about their performance.

"I've no doubt Paul is disappointed because he took the guy very close (at the German Open in March) and so his expectations were quite high.

"But Wong has certainly improved and was a top 16 seed here.

"Liam came out here with some slight shoulder issues which affected his preparation, and he had a tough first match. But he came through that and stepped it up and showed what he can do when he beat Apolonia.

"Joo is the best defender in the world and for two-and-a-half games it was blow for blow.

"It's such a fine line and both of them have done very well. It was a very positive competition and hopefully it's all good experience for the future."

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