

# Liam's confident ahead of Baku Games test

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Liam Pitchford says he fears no one as he aims to end the season on a high at the European Games.


Having won three medals – including singles bronze – at last year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and in April become the first English player this century to reach the last 32 of the World Championships, world No 49 Pitchford arrived in Baku with confidence of going deep into the tournament.

If he manages to win the singles title in Azerbaijan, a guaranteed place at Rio 2016 will be his.

"I'm going in positive, really. It's the last tournament of the season and I'd like to go out playing well," said the 21-year-old.

"There's a ticket on offer for Rio in the back of everyone's mind but I'm not thinking too much about that. I'm going out in the best shape possible and aim to progress through the rounds. If I get to the quarter-finals I'll be really happy. Anything more will be a bonus."

Players from Germany and Portugal will be among the biggest threats, with Germany having two players in the world's top 10. But Pitchford's victory over Portugal's world No 20 Tiago Apolonia at the Worlds gives him added belief that he can compete with the best in Europe.

 "I've pretty much beaten all the top guys or at least performed well against them, so there's no one I'm scared of," he said.

"I'm in pretty good shape. I feel my game is there but I probably haven't quite found the one or two clicks I need to step up. Hopefully in Baku that will happen and I'll be able to be at the top of my game for four, five, six games, or however many it takes."

Pitchford was speaking at the kitting out day, when Team GB athletes picked up their kit for Baku.

He said: "It's always exciting to get new kit, and with it being the first European Games adds a bit of extra excitement to it."

Pitchford travelled to Baku earlier this year for the Top 16 event, although as first reserve he did not get to compete. He added: "It was good to see what everything was like. The venues are up to a good standard.

"I think the Games is a good idea and hopefully it can be as big as the other continents' games. I think it's a great idea to have another extra tournament in the schedule, and it's always nice to go to multi-sport games and interact with other countries and other sports, and to support other GB athletes."

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