

Drinkhall and Pitchford win on Baku debuts

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Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford both came from behind to win their opening matches at the European Games in Baku.

Drinkhall, the 16th seed was first up against Adam Pattantyus of Hungary. And if their respective world rankings of 55 and 63 suggested a close match, so it proved in the opening sets.

Pattantyus took the first 11-9, and then moved back in front by the same score after Paul had levelled to 5 in the second set.

The turning point arguably came in the fourth. With Paul 2-1 and 9-6 down, he went on a run of five points to level the match – and he continued his momentum into the fifth, taking it 11-6.

He always had his nose in front in the next and took it 11-8 on his second match point to complete a 4-2 scoreline (9-11, 11-5, 9-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-8).

Paul's opponent in the next round will be Slovenia's world No 69 Bojan Tokic, who beat seventh seed Robert Gardos of Austria 4-1.

[listen to 'Paul Drinkhall reacts to first-round victory in Baku' on audioBoom](#)

Paul said: "It was quite a tough match and he has a strange style and haven't played him before. It took a few games to get used to. It's a very strange style, normally you would call him a defender but he attacked from the forehand as well.

"That makes it a lot harder because I'm playing against two different techniques and in the beginning I made a few mistakes.



Paul Drinkhall in action in Baku. Photo: Paul Sanwell / OP Photographic

"He gets a lot of side spin on the ball and he lets the ball drop so you sometimes don't see him hit it and you just have to wait for the bounce.

"I've never beaten Tokic before so it's going to be a tough match, we have had quite a few close battles in the past and but I'm confident I can beat him tomorrow."

Pitchford was up against Admir Duranspahic of Bosnia Herzegovina. Although ranked No 212 in the world, he had beaten world No 70 Ruiwu Tan in the first round, and he continued his good form in the opening sets.

In a strange symmetry to Paul's match, it was the fourth set that saw the turning point thanks to a run of points by the Team GB player. In this case Liam had been 2-0 down before taking the third. He then trailed 10-7 in the fourth, but pulled out a brilliant run of five points to take it 12-10 and level the overall score.

The momentum had shifted, and the Chesterfield player was able to close out a 4-2 win (9-11, 5-11, 11-8, 12-10, 11-7, 11-8).

Liam's effort has been further boosted by the withdrawal of world No 7 and second seed Timo Boll of Germany through illness – the pair were due to meet in tomorrow's last 16. Instead, Liam will face world No 72 Yang Wang of Slovakia.

[listen to 'Liam Pitchford on his victory in Baku' on audioBoom](#)

Liam said: "I'm a bit relieved to get through it, I didn't really start very well and was a bit safe and not really into my game. But after that I just told myself to keep fighting and I knew that if I could play my game that I could win so I'm just happy to have done that.

"At 2-0 down I was a bit angry at myself and I didn't feel like I had started to play yet but I stuck in there and started to find it at the end.

"Hopefully tomorrow it will be better. I'm playing a defender and it will be a tough game. I lost to him once but I'll just go in there and see how it goes.

"Hopefully it will be better than out there today but it was nice to play in that atmosphere and to play in the European Games."

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