

Superb Drinkhall storms into Baku semi-finals

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Paul Drinkhall has stormed into the semi-finals of the European Games and is one win away from the gold medal match.

The 25-year-old took out world No 10 and fourth seed Marcos Freitas of Portugal in five sets (11-6, 11-6, 3-11, 11-6, 11-9) – just as he had on his way to the Russian Open final last year.

Paul's opponent in the last four is the top seed, Dimitrij Ovtcharov of Germany. For those looking for an omen, Paul beat him at the Russian Open too.

Paul said: "It's an amazing win really, I did beat him last time but that was the tournament of my life and I managed to bring my form into this match.

"I think my style really suits it against him and it's an amazing win and I'm very happy with myself. It's up there [with the best wins] and hopefully I can pull out another good performance in the next round."

Paul was earlier made to fight in the last 16 by Slovenia's Bojan Tokic – who upset No 7 seed Robert Gardos in the previous round – before securing a 4-2 victory.

After losing the first, Paul led 7-3 in the second, only for Tokic to take six points in a row. Paul made it 9-9 but then faced a game point at 10-9 down. He saved that and took the next two points to level the match.

Tokic, world ranked 69, won the third to move back in front, but Paul took charge from then, reeling off the next three sets to seal it 4-2 (6011, 12-10, 8-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-3).

Meanwhile, Liam Pitchford was eliminated in the quarter-finals by Lei Kou, going down 4-1 (8-11, 6-11, 6-11, 11-9, 8-11) to his Ukrainian opponent.



Liam Pitchford in action in Baku (picture by Paul Sanwell)

Kou has been something of a giant-killer, having beaten fifth seed Panagiotis Gionis of Greece in the second round and 12th seed Stefan Fegerl of Austria in the last 16.

Having added Liam to his list of scalps, the world No 61 will face third seed Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus for a place in the final.

"I didn't feel like I played my game out there," said Liam. "I think the main difference was my receive. I didn't receive as I have been doing and he served quite well and after that I couldn't get into the rallies.

"He was just on his game and I wasn't. I have learned a lot and I know I can get far in these tournaments, I am just disappointed to lose in the quarter-finals but I will take a lot from it and I will learn from it and it will spur me on and hopefully I can qualify for Rio."

Earlier, Liam looked impressive in taking a 3-0 lead against world No 72 Yang Wang of Slovakia, only for his opponent to find some form and pull back two sets.

The sixth set could have gone either way as Liam saw one match point saved and then prevented Wang from levelling by saving a game point.

But the Chesterfield ace grabbed his second match point to set up a quarter-final against world No 61 Lei Kou.

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