

Paul: This puts me in good heart for Rio quest

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Paul Drinkhall rued missed opportunities but is still taking great heart from his performance at the European Games.

The 25-year-old from Loftus was beaten 4-2 in the bronze medal play-off by Lei Kou of Ukraine, having earlier led No 1 seed and eventual gold medallist Dimitrij Ovtcharov 2-1 in the semi-finals.

Against Kou, Paul was 1-0 up and had eight game points to come back from 3-2 down to force a decider, only for his opponent to win the decisive sixth set 22-20 on his fifth match point.

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"I think in the first set and the last two sets I played really well and he was great. I just handed him two sets too easily to let him get 3-1 up from 1-1 and that cost me," said Paul.

"If I could have kept the intensity up from the first set and the last two it could have been a lot closer and hopefully in my favour. But he's a clever player and did everything right with sticking in there during that long last game and he did well to win.

"The last game was great but I wish there were no rallies and I'd have won. But hopefully it's good for British table tennis."



Paul Drinkhall takes on Lei Kou in the medal play-off. Picture by Paul Sanwell/OP Photographic

Paul felt the margins between defeat and possible victory were small, but was pleased to have picked up useful ranking points in his quest to qualify for the Rio Olympics by virtue of his world ranking.

"The disappointment is on small things," he said. "Earlier today I was 2-1 up and could have been in the final but I'll work on those and hopefully in Rio I'll push on.

"My game is definitely there when I play my best. Dimitrij struggled with me earlier today and I've felt my game has got a lot better over the last couple of years. I've won a lot of games that a year ago I would have lost. It's got a lot better and I've got a few more months before Rio and hopefully I can get there and do some damage."

Paul also revealed that recently becoming a father has helped his game, and he said he was looking forward to getting home to wife Jo and baby Dougie.

"Having a child has had a real positive effect on my game," he said. "I keep looking at pictures of him before I play and it puts a smile on my face – I'm going home tomorrow night and getting back to some more sleepless nights."

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