

Stokes doubles up with repeat WCPP victory

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Posted On: August 25, 2015

Ashley Stokes put himself in pole position in the UK qualifying tournament for the World Championship of Ping Pong.

The Middlesex player won the second tournament of the series at Batts in Harlow, repeating his victory in the opening event last month.

But he was pushed all the way by Matt Ware (DO) in the final, being taken to five sets by an opponent ranked No 10 in the Table Tennis England senior rankings.

Stokes took the first set 15-8 but saw his opponent hit back to lead 2-1. The fourth was shaded by a point as Stokes levelled, and he kept the momentum to take the decider and complete a 3-2 (15-8, 9-15, 8-15, 15-14, 15-11).

In contrast, both finalists blazed a trail through the knockout stages without dropping a set. Stokes defeated Wayne Shaw (SK), Robin Ashleigh (E) and Serbia's Zoltan Koszo on his way to the last four, where his victim was Martin Gunn (AV) by a 15-13, 15-7 margin.

Ware saw off Andrew Warner (SK), Scotland's Ian Johnston and Graham Sandley of Middlesex before defeating Lithuania's Egle Adomelyte – runner-up to Stokes in the previous qualifying event – 15-11, 15-14 in the semi-finals.

The group stage had also been trouble-free for Ware as he beat all six opponents 2-0, conceding only 89 points across the 12 sets while achieving the maximum 180 himself – though his final set, against Koszo saw him pushed to 15-14.

Stokes was not far behind, winning all his 12 sets for the loss of a combined 96 points. Richard Farthing (K) pushed him closest before losing 15-13, 15-11.

Not surprisingly, Stokes leads the UK qualification standings after two of the four events.

The next tournament in the series is on Saturday September 5, again at Batts.

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