



Pitchford left to fly singles flag in Ekaterinburg

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Liam Pitchford will be England's sole representative in the last 32 of the Men's Singles at the European Championships.

The 22-year-old overcame Russia's Mikhail Paikov in six sets, while Paul Drinkhall was beaten, also in six, by Lubomir Jancarik of the Czech Republic and Sam Walker lost 4-0 to Kirill Skachkov of Russia.

Although he was never behind, apart from in the opening few points, Pitchford did not have it all his own way against left-handed Paikov.

That was most evident in the fifth when, from 3-3, he found himself 10-3 down as the Russian got on a run of points. He saved four game points but could not bridge the gap to save the game.

That enabled the Russian, ranked No 111 in the world, to make it 2-3 and he held game points in the sixth as well. Pitchford staved those off, only to dump his serve in the net on his first match point at 12-11. But he won the next two to advance to the last 32.

There he will face world No 380 Tomas Polansky of the Czech Republic, who shocked Stefan Fegerl, a member of the Austrian team which took the gold medal, 4-2 (5-11, 8-11, 12-10, 11-7, 11-7, 12-10). The match is at 8am UK time on Friday.

Drinkhall will have expected to have joined Pitchford, particularly when he led world No 136 Jancarik 2-1. But his opponent wrested control of the match away and went on to win 11-9, 7-11, 8-11, 11-7, 11-3, 11-6.

Walker was eliminated 4-0 by Russia's No 31 seed and world No 78 Skachkov, though he fought hard, including saving two match points before succumbing 11-4, 10-12, 13-15, 9-11.

Walker had reached the main draw with a stirring 3-1 win over world No 104 Ovidiu Ionescu of Romania in the groups. Having lost 3-2 to Shimon Rabinovich, who then in turn lost 3-2 to Ionescu, Walker knew victory would put him in the shake-up on countback.

And he duly obliged with a 3-1 win – 11-7, 5-11, 11-8, 11-6 – to top the group.

"My confidence has been low this year, I've not had the best of results," Walker told the ITTF website. "In the Men's Team event here in Ekaterinburg I lost to Lauric Jean, 3-0 in the match against Belgium and 3-0 to Marco Rech-Daldosso when we played Italy.

"I lost the first two games against Shimon but then came back, so I felt that was a positive. I was well aware of the fact that I needed to win 3-1 against Ovidiu but I tried not to think of that and focus on my game and be positive."

Andrew Baggaley was eliminated in the group stages. Playing in a group of five and having won his opening three matches, he faced a winner-take-all clash with Yaroslav Zhmudenko of Ukraine, the world No 150.

And despite twice coming from a set behind to level, he was beaten 3-2 (9-11, 11-7, 3-11, 11-8, 9-11).

Pitchford & Drinkhall are in doubles action on Friday, facing French duo Stephane Ouaiiche and Tristan Flore at 11.30am UK time.

Results

Qualifying group 12

Shimon Rabinovich (ISR) bt Sam Walker 3-2 (11-5, 12-10, 8-11, 12-14, 11-9)

Walker bt Khayal Hashimli (AZE) 3-0 (11-1, 11-6, 11-5)

Walker bt Ovidiu Ionescu (ROM) 3-1 (11-7, 5-11, 11-8, 11-5)

Group 27

Andrew Baggaley bt Denis Terna (MDA) 3-2 (7-11, 9-11, 11-3, 11-8, 11-7)

Baggaley bt Nicolas Champod (SUI) 3-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-4)

Baggaley bt Kestutis Zeimys (LTU) 3-0 (11-5, 11-8, 11-6)

Yaroslav Zhmudenko (UKR) bt Baggaley 3-2 (11-9, 7-11, 11-3, 8-11, 11-9)

Round of 64

Liam Pitchford bt Mikhail Paikov (RUS) 4-2 (11-9, 9-11, 11-5, 11-5, 7-11, 14-12)

Kirill Skachkov (RUS) bt Walker 4-0 (11-4, 12-10, 15-13, 11-9)

Lubomir Jancarik (CZE) bt Paul Drinkhall 4-2 (11-9, 7-11, 8-11, 11-7, 11-3, 11-6)

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