



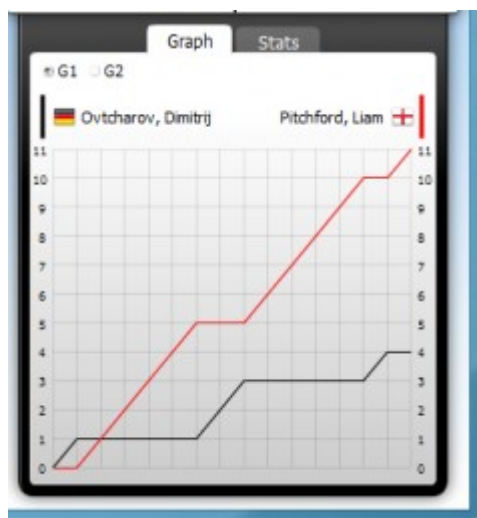
Battling Pitchford forces Ovtcharov to dig deep

Author: Paul Stimpson

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Liam Pitchford went toe-to-toe with European No 1 Dimitrij Ovtcharov before bowing out of the European Championships 4-2 to the great German.

The Chesterfield player made a brilliant start, some crunching forehand winners helping him open a 5-1 lead which he converted into an 11-4 final scoreline. But Ovtcharov won six of the last seven points in game two to draw level.



The score graph from the first set of Pitchford v Ovtcharov

The third saw the top seed make his decisive move from 7-6 up to 10-6. Pitchford held his two serves but Ovtcharov then clinched the set.

But Pitchford deservedly levelled by taking a fourth which featured a brilliant 30-shot rally, with both players finding great length as they seemingly defended and attacked in turn. It was the Englishman who won it, leaping in the air in delight after his and the match's showreel moment. It came at a crucial time too – 7-5 – and gave Pitchford the momentum to level.

If he thought that momentum could continue, Ovtcharov was having none of it. Visibly upping his game and seeming to go to another physical level, he sprinted through the fifth 11-3.

Pitchford was in the sixth at 3-3 but lost the next three points, prompting a time-out. Although he took the next point, that was as good as it got, Ovtcharov taking the next five to seal a place in the last eight.

But Pitchford, playing Ovtcharov for the first time, can take heart from exceeding his 19th seeding and giving a more than good account of himself against the best player in the tournament.

Pitchford set up his clash against Ovtcharov with a 4-1 victory over surprise package Tomas Polansky. The 17-year-old Czech player, ranked 380 in the world, had upset world No 43 Stefan Fegerl – a member of the gold-winning Austrian team – in the previous round in Ekaterinburg.

You can watch live coverage of the latter stages of the European Championships on Eurosport 2 and Eurosport International over the weekend

But although Polansky had his moments, Pitchford was never seriously threatened. The Chesterfield man took the first 11-5 and repeated the scoreline in the second, making a decisive move from 5-5.

The Czech youngster revived his chances in the third, opening up 4-0 and 7-1 leads before Pitchford began to whittle away. Polansky got to 10-7 ahead and took the set on his third game point, 11-9.

But that proved to be no more than an inconvenience and Pitchford's best run of the match saw him take the fourth 11-3, this time taking eight points in a row from 3-3.

Pitchford was always in charge of the fifth, taking it 11-6 to book that mouth-watering match with Ovtcharov.

Pitchford also teamed up with Paul Drinkhall to win their first doubles match, at the last-32 stage, 3-1 against French duo Stephane Ouaiche & Tristan Flore.

Seeded 12th, the English pair then took on fourth seeds Par Gerell & Jon Persson of Sweden in a match which turned out to be an eipc. Twice Drinkhall & Pitchford took the lead and twice the Swedes levelled.

To describe the deciding set as close is probably an understatement. Points were traded all the way to 8-8, when Paul & Liam won two in a row. But their opponents saved those two match points, and another at 11-10. The English duo in turn saved three match points as the two sides again traded blows, before the fourth seeds took their fourth chance and went through to the quarter-finals.

Check out his graph of the last set between Paul & Liam and their Swedish opponents!

pic.twitter.com/WAvYj9aC9q

– Table Tennis England (@TableTennisENG) [October 2, 2015](#)

Results

Men's Singles

Round of 32

Liam Pitchford bt Tomas Polansky (CZE) 4-1 (11-5, 11-5, 9-11, 11-3, 11-6).

Round of 16

Dimitrij Ovtcharov (GER) bt Pitchford 4-2 (4-11, 11-7, 11-8, 6-11, 11-3, 11-4)

Men's Doubles

Round of 32

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford bt Stephane Ouaiche & Tristan Flore (FRA) 3-1 (11-8, 11-7, 6-11, 11-8)

Round of 16

Par Gerell & Jon Persson (SWE) bt Drinkhall & Pitchford 3-2 (8-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-6, 16-14)

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