



Pitchford and Drinkhall magic puts England in dreamland!

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England's World Team Championships adventure gets better and better – and the Leopards are now into the semi-finals!

Paul Drinkhall won a spellbinding final match, finally taking a fifth match point in the deciding game as England beat France 3-2 to set up a last-four clash with Japan after Liam Pitchford had earlier won both his matches.

And – what odds on this at the start of the tournament? – England are the last surviving European side in the event as China face Korea in the other semi-final.

That final match was a nerve-shredder but Drinkhall somehow kept his intact to defeat Emmanuel Lebesson. Both players missed game points in the first before Drinkhall took it 15-13, but the French left-hander is fiercely competitive and took the next two games to leave Drinkhall with it all to do.

It was 11-9 to the Englishman in the fourth, during which Lebesson was yellow-carded for stalling, and so it came down to one game for a place in the semi-finals.

Six points in a row from 1-3 down put Drinkhall in charge and an exchange of points led him to 10-6 up. All four match points came and went as Lebesson refused to go quietly, and a fifth successive point for the Frenchman gave them a match point. Surely the sporting gods couldn't be so cruel?

Thankfully, they weren't as Drinkhall saved that one and took the next two points to put England into a semi-final, an unprecedented achievement in the modern era.

What seems like an eternity earlier, world No 27 Simon Gauzy started quickly against Drinkhall (WR 72) in the first match, racing into a 6-0 lead before Paul began to chip away. The English player was very much in every point from then on, but his opponent just had a tiny bit extra when it mattered in a 3-0 victory.

The same but in reverse could almost be said of the second match as Liam Pitchford (WR 64) beat Emmanuel Lebesson (WR 73) 3-0, always having something in hand after he opened up with a 7-0 lead in game one.

Sam Walker battled hard against world No 106 Tristan Flore, winning game three to close the gap, but found the 53-place gap in the rankings just too much to bridge.

Pitchford then showed his A game to take down Gauzy, his Ochsenhausen team-mate in the Bundesliga. He took the first 12-10 and then saved no fewer than eight game points in the second. He also missed two of his own before Gauzy eventually took his ninth chance and the game 21-19.

If that had the feel of a match-changing moment, Pitchford was having none of it and slammed the door on his opponent with two 11-9 games to set up that nail-biting finale between Drinkhall and Lebesson.

And so England inflicted a revenge defeat on France after suffering a 3-0 reverse in the group stage. Can they go all the way now? The latest date with destiny is at 11.30am UK time tomorrow – [watch it live here](#)

Afterwards, Drinkhall said: "Yes I was 10-6 in the fifth but I won 13-11 and that is what counts! It has just been fantastic, Liam played great today and won both his matches and Sam has been great at number three.

"We came here as a promoted team; our aim was to stay in the division, now we are in the semi-finals; it is just beyond belief."

Pitchford added: "Yesterday Paul won two and we won against Poland; today I won two and we won against France. We have all played to a good level; we have beaten a good team; everyone has pulled together."

Don't forget, all of the England Leopards squad will be live in action at the PG Mutual National Championships. [Click here to buy your tickets.](#)

Results

Men's Championship Division

Quarter-final

England 3 France 2

Simon Gauzy bt Paul Drinkhall 3-0 (11-9, 11-8, 11-8)

Liam Pitchford bt Emmanuel Lebesson 3-0 (11-8, 11-6, 11-9)

Tristan Flore bt Sam Walker 3-1 (11-8, 11-5, 7-11, 11-7)

Pitchford bt Gauzy 3-1 (12-10, 19-21, 11-9, 11-9)

Drinkhall bt Lebesson 3-2 (15-13, 8-11, 9-11, 11-9, 13-11)

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