



Pitchford and Drinkhall miss out on Rio – for now

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Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall both missed out on a place in the Rio Olympics tonight – but more chances await the English duo at the qualifying event in Sweden.

Pitchford took world No 20 Tiago Apolonia of Portugal to a decider and saved two match points before bowing out 4-3, while Drinkhall was beaten 4-1 by home favourite Par Gerell, ranked No 33.

But both men go into another stage of the competition tomorrow and Saturday, when four victories will get them a Team GB place. If they miss out, there will still be the chance to qualify by virtue of their world rankings.

Earlier, both won their first two matches of the day to set up those shootouts for a Team GB berth.

English No 1 Pitchford beat world No 228 Elia Schmid of Switzerland 4-1 and then matched that score against world No 146 Zsolt Peto of Serbia.

Drinkhall had a brilliant 4-0 win over world No 23 Simon Gauzy of France and backed it up by coming from 2-0 down to defeat Alexey Liventsov of Russia 4-2.

Against Schmid, Pitchford saved a game point to take the first game 12-10 and both players missed a chance each before Schmid levelled 13-11 in the second. But the Chesterfield man showed his class and pulled away in the next three games.

Peto made him work hard in the second match but Pitchford always had the edge after taking the first two games.

Drinkhall blitzed past Gauzy, who had beaten him twice at the World Team Championships last month, opening up leads in every game and with only the third set – when he saw a 10-3 lead become 10-8 – being unduly nervy for England Leopards supporters.

He then played Russia's world No 93 Liventsov and it took him a little while to get into his stride, losing the first two, including the second 13-11 having been 10-7 up. But he reeled off the next four to move to within that one win of Rio.

Results

Liam Pitchford bt Elia Schmid (SUI) 4-1 (12-10, 11-13, 11-7, 11-4, 11-5)

Paul Drinkhall bt Simon Gauzy (FRA) 4-0 (11-6, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7)

Pitchford bt Zsolt Peto (SRB) 4-1 (11-7, 16-14, 12-14, 11-4, 12-10)

Drinkhall bt Alexey Liventsov (RUS) 4-2 (8-11, 11-13, 11-4, 11-9, 11-8, 11-5)

Tiago Apolonia (POR) bt Pitchford 4-3 (2-11, 12-10, 11-8, 8-11, 11-9, 9-11, 11-8)

Par Gerell (SWE) bt Drinkhall 4-1 (11-7, 11-7, 8-11, 14-12, 11-5)

The other six players to finish in qualifying places today were: Panagiotis Gionis (GRE), Timo Boll (GER), Marcos Freitas (POR), Bastian Steger (GER), Alexander Shibaev (RUS) and Bojan Tokic (SLO) – though Steger is set to miss out as Germany's Dimitrij Ovtcharov had already qualified by winning gold at the European Games.

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