



Drinkhall safely through to round 2

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Paul Drinkhall showed his class after a nervy opening two games to book his place in the second round of the Olympic Men's Singles in Rio.

The English No 2 defeated his Serbian opponent Aleksandar Karakasevic 4-1 but did not have things all his own way against an unpredictable left-hander.

Drinkhall surged into a 9-2 lead in the first, only for his opponent to take the next six points, prompting coach Alan Cooke to call an early timeout.

Drinkhall went 10-9 up but Karakasevic, ranked No 88 in the world, saved the game point with the help of a fine drop shot and then took the next two.

A repeat looked on the cards in the second as Drinkhall's 10-4 lead vanished in a blitz of returns from the Serb. But Drinkhall found his composure to take it 12-10 and level the match.

The pattern was reversed in the third as the Englishman trailed 1-6 and 3-7, before a run of seven points took him to the brink. This time, he only needed two game points as he took a 2-1 advantage.

From 7-7 in the fourth, Drinkhall won four of the next five points, sealing it with a flashing winner down the line.

And as Karakasevic appeared to become distracted by the noisy atmosphere in the arena, Drinkhall closed it out 11-5 in the fifth.

Paul said: "I think I handled [his play] pretty well at the start. I used my speed and I knew that if I could stay close to the table then I'd be too quick for him.

"I think that showed at the beginning of the first set. I think my concentration lapsed a little bit, he relaxed and played really well. It was a very tough game mentally, but I managed to get back on top.

"The crowd [with Brazilian Gustavo Tsuboi playing] didn't bother me at all. I think it affected [my opponent], but it's the Olympic Games and I stayed focused and tried to do the job at hand.

"I competed at London 2012, but I think I had a slightly easier match, whereas this was quite a tough match to go through. I've got a tough match now against Gao Ning.

"My old coach [Lu Jia-Yi] who coached me for 13 years is going to be in his corner, so it'll be another tough match. I've played him quite a few times but I've never beaten him before, so it'll be difficult."

It means both Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford will be in action on Sunday – Pitchford starting his campaign having been seeded directly to the second round.

He will play Zokhid Kenjaev of Uzbekistan at 2pm UK time after Kenjaev, ranked No 238 in the world, surprisingly beat world No 72 Lubomir Jancarik of the Czech Republic in six games.

Drinkhall will be back on court at 7.30pm UK time against Gao Ning of Singapore.

Result

Men's Singles

First round

Paul Drinkhall (GBR) bt Aleksandar Karakasevic (SRB) 4-1 (10-12, 12-10, 11-8, 11-8, 11-5)

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