



Pitchford bows out, but Drinkhall still going

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Liam Pitchford found No 9 seed Youngsik Jeoung of Korea too hot to handle as his Men's Singles bid came to an end in Rio.

Pitchford lost in five to an opponent who turned in a high-paced and virtually error-free display in the last-32 clash – the victor now faces world No 1 Ma Long of China.

However, Paul Drinkhall remains in the competition thanks to a brilliant 4-3 victory over Gao Ning of Singapore – his third-round match takes place at 5pm UK time on Monday.

Pitchford was always facing a tough task against Jeoung, who beat him 4-1 in the Korea Open earlier this year.

But the Chesterfield man got a great start, a run of six points from 0-1 in the first game setting him up to take it 11-6. But Jeoung levelled with an 11-8 game won on his fifth game point.

The third proved to be the pivotal game as Pitchford put together a brilliant run of six points from 10-5 down to chalk up a game point. However, Jeoung won three on the spin to move ahead in the match.

Pitchford fought hard all the way, defending doggedly and producing some blistering winners. But Jeoung missed almost nothing, never giving Pitchford the chance to string a collection of points together as he won the next two to complete the 4-1 scoreline.

"I started off well and I think I surprised him a little bit in that first game and it was his first match of the tournament," Pitchford said.

"After that he settled down a bit and got back into it. I thought I was still playing well and in the second set I had a chance and in the third I had a set point.

"If I had got that set point maybe it would have been different but I tried everything and he just had the answers really. It was a chance but it happens – hopefully next time it will go my way.

"I am disappointed because I felt I could beat him and then I would have had a shot against the world number one.

"But he played well and hopefully next time I can improve on that performance. I am playing well but on the day he was just better."

Drinkhall's match was the archetypal rollercoaster. The Teesider led 3-1 but saw his opponent, twice Commonwealth Games champion, come back to level and take it to a decider in Rio.

But Drinkhall held firm to seal that seventh game 11-8 and clinch a thriller which saw both men produce sustained brilliance.



Paul Drinkhall celebrates his victory (ITTF picture)

The match was characterised by runs of points from both men. Drinkhall's five-point burst from 3-4 was pivotal in the first and he won four on the bounce to seal the second 11-6.

Gao went better still in the third with a run of seven from 2-2, but Drinkhall restored his two-game lead thanks to five points in a row from 6-3.

The fifth saw Paul always with his nose in front until the score reached 9-5, when Gao reeled off six on the spin. While the sixth saw Paul battle back from 2-6 down to level at 7-7 with the point of the match, superb defence from the back of the court ultimately forcing Gao to go long.

At 9-8, Drinkhall was again two points from the next round. Again, the Singaporean turned it around by winning the next three points.

The decider was cagey, Drinkhall leading 5-3, Gao then up 7-5 before parity was restored at 8-8. Drinkhall won the next to once again stand two points from the last 32. And this time there was no turnaround as he won those next two points to complete a scintillating victory.

Drinkhall now faces Croatia's Andrej Gacina, the 15th seed, at 5pm UK time on Monday.

Drinkhall said: "I'd never beaten him in four or five matches and I was pleased to see him in my half of the draw because I've always felt I could beat him in the past.

"That was all about character. He played some great shots and got himself back into the game and it was more

him doing the right thing, than me playing badly.

"I just told myself to keep my head in the game. We know each other so well, so there were no surprises. I'm not sure the coaches make much of a difference when you get in situations like this.

"I've played Gacina a few times and won some and lost some. He's improved a lot in the rankings since I last played him but I feel in a really good place and I'm very confident.

"I've played some really good matches and how I'm feeling out there is so positive. I'll have a game plan and it will be important to be patient. It's all good."

Earlier, Pitchford advanced with a confident 4-1 victory over Zokhid Kenjaev. The Chesterfield ace controlled the majority of the match and the only blip was losing the third game to his left-handed opponent from Uzbekistan.

It sets up a third-round match against No 9 seed Youngsik Jeoung of Korea at midnight UK time tonight, the same opponent who beat him in the Korea Open earlier this year.

Pitchford faced something of an unknown quantity in Kenjaev, ranked No 238 in the world but who had disposed of world No 72 Lubomir Jancarik in the first round.

Kenjaev took the first two points of the match, but a run of nine in a row effectively won Pitchford the first game as a mixture of attack and impeccable defence saw Kenjaev struggle to make any impression.

The second saw Pitchford go on another run of points at exactly the right time, taking four in a row from 8-10 down, but his opponent narrowed the gap by taking the third.

The fourth game might have seen Pitchford further inconvenienced when Kenjaev led 6-4, but Liam took seven of the next eight points to close in on victory. And when he led 7-0 in the fifth, there was no way back for Kenjaev.

Pitchford said: "It has been a long wait to play that first match here so I'm happy to get out there and get the win. I didn't really know much about him before we played so I watched videos of him last night to gauge his style of play.

"He surprised me a bit and played really well so I had to step it up after the third game to secure the win. I was a bit nervous in that first game but after the first few points, I settled down and was really focused on my game.

"At London 2012, I was there for the experience and not really ready to compete with the big guys but it has been a long four years and I have improved a hell of a lot so I've come into this Olympics with a lot of confidence.

"I have a tough game next round against the number nine. I played him a few months ago and lost 4-1 but it was quite a close game. He's the favourite so I can go in there with no pressure and give it my all."

Result

Men's Singles

Second round

Liam Pitchford (GBR) bt Zokhid Kenjaev (UZB) 4-1 (11-3, 12-10, 8-11, 11-7, 11-4)

Paul Drinkhall (GBR) bt Gao Ning (SIN) 4-3 (11-7, 11-6, 3-11, 11-3, 9-11, 9-11, 11-8)

Third round

Youngsik Jeoung (KOR) bt Pitchford 4-1 (6-11, 11-8, 13-11, 11-5, 11-5)

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