



Samsonov carries Europe's medal hopes into semis

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The Olympics table tennis singles competitions are down to the last four – with Paul Drinkhall's conqueror Vladimir Samsonov the only non-Asian still in the competition.

In the men's singles, the semi-finals and medal matches take place tomorrow and feature three of the top four seeds – China's Ma Long and defending champion Zhang Jike and Jun Mizutani of Japan.

The exception is seventh seed Samsonov, who beat third seed and London bronze medallist Dimitrij Ovtcharov in yesterday's quarter-finals.

The Belarus athlete, in his sixth Games, defeated Germany's Ovtcharov 4-2 (8-11, 11-7, 19-17, 4-11, 11-2, 14-12) in a prolonged match which included an injury timeout for Samsonov in the second game – he later said he had a rib injury.

Samsonov will play Zhang Jike in the semi-finals – the defending champion defeated Japan's Koki Niwa 4-1 (5-11, 11-4, 11-7, 11-7, 11-4).

That will be the second semi-final tomorrow, following Ma Long versus Mizutani. Yesterday the Chinese world No 1 beat Quadri Aruna of Nigeria in short order, winning 4-0 (11-4, 11-2, 11-6, 11-7), while Mizutani beat Portugal's Marcos Freitas 4-2 (11-4, 9-11, 11-3, 11-8, 10-12, 11-2).

Today's women's semi-finals and medal matches feature four Asian players, including the two Chinese players who contested the final four years ago.

They were both impressive yesterday's quarter-finals, defending champion Li Xiaoxia beating Cheng I-Ching of Taipei in four straight (11-5, 11-5, 11-6, 11-6) and London 2012 silver medallist Ding Ning conceding only one more point in seeing off the one remaining European, Han Ying of Germany, in four straight (11-8, 11-5, 11-3, 11-7).

Li will play Japan's Ai Fukuhara, who defeated the second seed and London bronze medallist Feng Tianwei 4-0 (14-12, 11-8, 11-7, 11-5), in the first semi-final at 2pm today UK time.

Ding's opponent at 3pm is the North Korean Kim Song I. Kim is ranked 27th in the tournament but defeated the ninth seed, Singapore's Yu Mengyu, 4-2 (11-8, 6-11, 11-5, 11-6, 9-11 11-6).

The bronze medal match is at half past midnight tonight, with the gold medal match following at 1.30am.

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