



## 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 27<sup>th</sup> 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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