



'A great team performance' – Leopards react to victory

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Last night's dramatic comeback victory over Greece saw England add to their reputation for fighting to the last point.

The Leopards [came from 2-0 down to beat the visitors 3-2](#) in Stoke, with Sam Walker saving two match points for the visitors in the third match, before victories by Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall completed the turnaround

It follows the famous [last-gasp quarter-final victory](#) by Walker, Pitchford and Drinkhall over France in the World Team Championships, not to mention the [record-breaking victory over the same opponents](#) in GB colours at the Rio Olympics.

It's something the players take strength from, and Pitchford admitted:

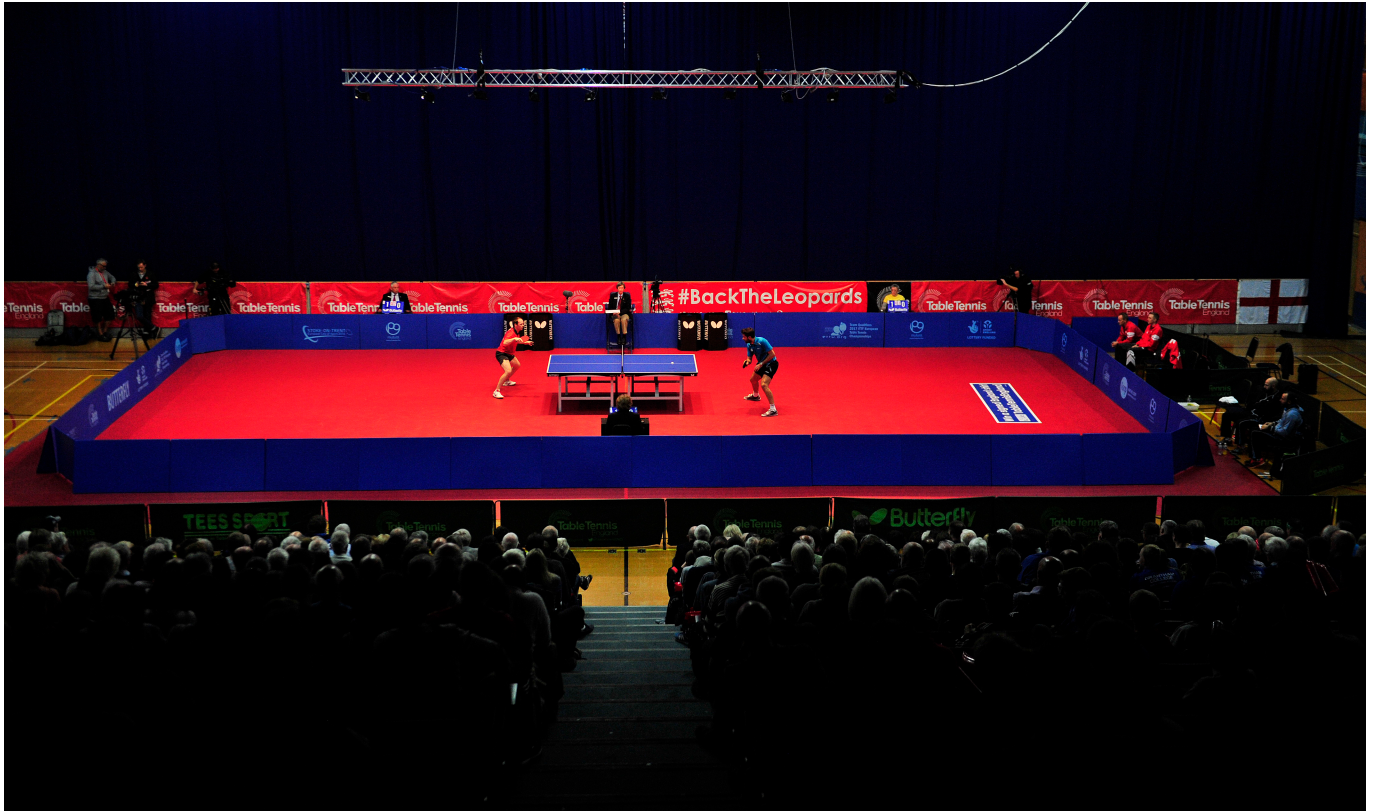
"We don't do it easy, do we? We should know that by now.

"It wasn't looking so good at one point and I don't think any of us started well. I didn't feel I was playing like I could in the first match, but I was disappointed to lose.

"We knew when Sam turned it around and won we were still in the game. Against Gionis, I tried too much to kill him in the first set, then I changed it and played more patiently and waited for my opportunities. When I felt it was there to attack, I attacked.

"It was important to win that match obviously, and then Paul came through at the end. That's what we're all about – fighting, supporting and never giving in. We've had a few close games now and won them all.

"It was a team performance, we played for each other and fought for each other. It's not the best we've played, but we won and that's the main thing."



Hundreds of spectators watch over the field of play in Stoke (picture by Steve Parkin)

Drinkhall added:

"We were 2-0 down, probably unexpectedly, but when Sam won, I think we got confidence as a team.

"We dug deep and it was a good team performance in the end.

"Gionis is tough – even when you are playing him tactically the right way he's tough – and Liam played some great table tennis to win, and then I managed to come through."

Walker is developing a habit of saving match points on his way to victory, but he said there is no magic formula.

He said:

"There's no secret. I don't really think about the result or the score and just play point by point. Today it worked.

"He played really well but under pressure, you could see he was inexperienced. I was surprised by how strong his balls were, especially his counter-attacks. Credit to him – at 16, it's not an easy thing to do. I'm just happy we won in the end."

For their part, Greece deserve plaudits for coming so close to victory – and they are vowing to turn the tables in the return fixture next year.

Team No 1 Panagiotis Gionis said:

"It was a great game for both teams and the spectators.

"It was good for us that Papageorgiou won the first game, after that England started to be afraid a little bit.

"It was a close game against Drinkhall but I was a little better at the end of the sets and then I think we were a bit unlucky in the third game with the young boy.

"All the games were very close. It was in small details and England were happy in the end. It will be very exciting when we play in Greece and we will see."

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