

Win of the Season

Author: Russell Moore

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16 Year-old Liam Pitchford brought the 65th English Open to life and it is doubtful if any player will surpass his victory in this year's event. In a fluctuating game of high-drama, considerable tension and some unbelievably evenly contested Table Tennis England no. seven Liam (ranked no. 579 globally) edged out World no. 89 Liu Song (Argentina) 11-9, 8-11, 11-7, 8-11, 15-13, 6-11, 12-10. Liam trailed 5-3 in the decider and you couldn't help thinking that the greater experience of the American World Cup representative might be the decisive factor. However, no one had told Liam and with two of the sweetest of whipped backhands (taken seemingly before the ball had even touched the table) Liam transformed the game. Liam's English rivals may be interested to note that this victory at a rating of 2.5 is worth 125 English Ranking points. Liam may not qualify for the Competition Proper as the very composed Liu Song may well beat Daniel Kriston (Hungary), who beat Liam this morning, but, didn't the Chesterfield lad play well. It is doubtful if you will see a better English performance all Season.

Gavin Evans faced the toughest of tests. He will be disappointed to have succumbed 11-9, 7-11, 7-11, 9-11, 4-11 against Mateusz Galebowski (Poland) but he received no favours when the draw paired him against World no. 68 Par Gerell (Sweden) in his second game, one of the highest ranked players in the Qualifying Competition. Gerrell beat Evans 11-8, 11-5, 11-5, 11-9.

Hannah Hicks also met top 100 World ranked opposition. She battled hard but world no. 97 Park Young Sook (Korea) was always going to be a very tricky opponent. Hannah succumbed 4-11, 4-11, 8-11, 5-11.

England no. three Karina LeFevre also came up against a top-class opponent, in her case late-entrant and World no. 105 Tanja Hain-Hoffman (Germany). Karina held her opponent for all of the first game and it was only in the fourth end when the German girl pulled clear to win 15-13, 11-7, 11-7, 11-5.

England no. 10 Matt Ware (ranked a lowly no. 934 globally) had little to lose against Daniel Kosiba (Hungary) ranked no. 307, and he was determined to make a good impression. He battled as if his life depended on it in games two and three before eventually losing 4-11, 13-11, 11-9, 8-11, 8-11, 4-11.

Perhaps the best known player taking part in the Qualifying Competition was 1995 English Open Champion, the hardhitting "kamikaze" like Damien Eloi (France) (still ranked no. 62 globally) who overwhelmed Indian no. 2 Junior Boy Soumajit Ghosh 11-1, 11-4, 11-7, 11-7.

Some players look completely out of place in a Pre-Qualifying Competition. Unranked globally, Chang Chenchen (China) was one of them. She looked head and shoulders above her rivals and she beat World no. 147 Li Bin (Hungary) 11-4, 11-6, 11-4, 11-7 and she also disposed of World no. 163 Iulia Necula (Romania) 11-7, 11-4, 12-10, 5-11, 11-9. She will certainly be one to watch out for.

Image: Liam Pitchford, Courtesy tabletennisphotos.com

By Steve Kerns

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