



Pitchford ready for his Ultimate test

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It will be an Indian summer for Liam Pitchford as he competes in the inaugural Ultimate Table Tennis league.

Pitchford flies out on Friday to take his place in the new-style competition, representing the Bayside Spinners franchise.

He will spend the rest of the month in India, playing a series of matches first in Chennai, then Delhi and finally in Mumbai against the five other franchises in the series.

Each team has eight players, comprising four men and four women. Of those, two of each are Indian players and two are from overseas.

Pitchford's team-mates are Par Gerell of Sweden, Wu Yang of China, Lee Ho Ching of Hong Kong and home-grown quartet Sanil Shetty, Arjun Ghosh, Sutirtha Mukherjee and Priyadarchini Das.

Each fixture has nine matches, with eight singles and one mixed doubles. Matches are of three games, with each game counting towards the final score. At the end of the league, the top four teams will advance to the semi-finals.

Among the other top male players Pitchford will face are Portuguese duo Marcos Freitas and Tiago Apolonia, Panagiotis Gionis of Greece, Stefan Fegerl of Austria, Andrej Gacina of Croatia, Ukraine's Kou Lei and Nigeria's Quadri Aruna.

Pitchford said:

It should be interesting and a fun league. It's hard to say how it will go because it's such a mix of players.

We've got Wu Yang, who is probably the best female player in the league, but I don't really know many of the Indian players.

Everybody can beat everybody and the mixed doubles could prove crucial in a lot of matches. I fancy my chances because I've beaten most of the guys I will be playing.

It's good preparation for the new season and hopefully I will put on a good show.

Pitchford has good memories of India, where he helped England to win men's team silver at the 2010 Commonwealth Games as a teenager.

He added:

I've not been back to India since but I remember it quite well because it was my first big multi-sport games.

You are a bit in a bubble at the Commonwealths, heading from the village to the venue, and you don't really see much. But the crowd were hot and made a lot of noise and they took to us really well – apart from when we beat India!

They love their sport out there and this is good for the future and can only help table tennis. I'm sure it will be a good show.

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