



Pitchford wonder win not enough to see England past Japan

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Liam Pitchford's silencing of 'wonder-kid' Tomokazu Harimoto (ranked 11) wasn't enough to see England cause a shock win over third seeds Japan on day one of the ITTF World Cup.

England, team bronze medallists from the World Championships in 2016 were hoping to avenge a close defeat to the Japanese in the semi-finals of that competition but fell narrowly short despite a spirited effort in Group B at the Copper Box in London.

First up, England's doubles pairing of Paul Drinkhall and Sam Walker started nervously losing the first game to Japan's Koki Niwa and Jin Ueda 5-11. However, two fearsome forehands from Drinkhall got English noses in front for the first time at 6-4 in the second and they went on to confidently take it 11-9.

[Click here to watch the doubles](#)

The nations traded blows in the third and fourth games to force a decider, the English duo fighting back to recover parity, but were ultimately undone by unforced errors early on in the 5th. Despite a stirring fightback from 2-8, they fell short at 11-7.

How costly that close defeat would eventually prove wasn't clear at that stage – especially with the presence of Japanese National Champion, and 14-year-old sensation Tomokazu Harimoto up next.

However, despite the daunting early signals from the starlet to lead 10-6 in the opening game, Liam Pitchford's brilliant backhands saw him improbably home 13-11 in arguably the game of the day.

[Click here to watch Pitchford v Harimoto](#)

From there on in Pitchford looked in supreme form. Racing to an incredible victory to record one of his biggest international results with a 3-0 whitewash over the world no.11. Most impressive of which was the manner in

which Pitchford completely dominated the match despite starting as the heavy underdog.

Next on the table was Drinkhall against Ueda – the two facing up again having met in the doubles earlier. Drinkhall spent a good deal of time back from the table, trying to match Ueda's early speed, but ultimately falling short – a 3-1 defeat, despite the valiant effort.

[Click here to watch Drinkhall v Ueda](#)

This brought Chesterfield-born Pitchford back to the table – this time to face top seed Koki Niwa (world rank 5) – a player he had previously beaten in domestic competition.

The opening game was the longest and tightest of the session. The Englishmen ruing missed opportunities from 7-2 up and at game point to drop it 16-14 to the Japanese.

That missed opportunity was repeated in the second game as Pitchford couldn't capitalise on a 6-3 lead, perhaps having an adrenaline-low after the dramatics of earlier. In the end Niwa played smartly and professionally finished the job in three games, giving Japan the win and securing their place at the top of the Group B table.

[Click here to watch Pitchford v Niwa](#)

Earlier they had defeated African Champions Egypt 3-0 – a feat the English team must now repeat in order to stay in medal contention.

The opening doubles between Japan and Egypt saw the Japanese right/left combo of Yuya Oshima & Koki Niwa win 3-1 before the most intriguing tie of the match, 14-year old Tomokazu Harimoto vs. the 6ft 5' Omar Assar.

Despite there only being six world ranking places between them there was a clear class difference in the first two games as Harimoto was in fine form winning 11-3, 11-6. However, Assar came back to take the next two 11-9 for the first 5 setter of the event. But it was the Japanese teenager who held his nerve to win the decider 11-4.

Victory was complete for Japan when Yuya Oshima came through 3-0 in the second singles match against Mohamed El-Beiali.

Attention now turns towards England's match with Egypt on Friday morning. The winner securing second spot in the group and a place in the last eight. A job which may be made potentially easier by seeds Hong Kong and Germany's defeats on Thursday.

Germany fall to shock defeat to scramble quarter-final draw

While China cruised to back-to-back 3-0 victories over France and Sweden and the Japanese eventually came through their tests against England and Egypt it was a different story for the other two group favourites Germany and Hong Kong.

Despite world no. 1 Dimitrij Ovtcharov's two victories over his South Korean opponents, the German team fell to a shock 3-2 defeat to the Koreans, almost certainly giving them second place in their group.

It was a similar result for Hong Kong who lost 3-2 to Brazil to lose their top rank in Group D. An earlier defeat for Wong Chun Ting (wr 8) against America's Kanak Jha (88) was the sign of things to come as he lost again to Brazil's Hugo Calderano (16) as the Asian side lost to their South American opponents.

With both Germany and Hong Kong potentially both finishing as runner-up in their groups, the quarter-final draw on Friday could spring some mouth-watering match-ups and could provide sides like England with a path through to the semi-finals.

England Results

Group B

Japan 3-1 England

Koki Niwa/Jin Ueda bt Paul Drinkhall/Sam Walker 3-2 (11-5, 9-11, 11-6, 9-11, 11-7)

Liam Pitchford bt Tomokazu Harimoto 3-0 (13-11, 11-8, 11-5)

Jin Ueda bt Paul Drinkhall 3-1 (11-8, 9-11, 12-10, 11-6)

Koki Niwa bt Liam Pitchford 3-0 (16-14, 11-8, 11-7)

Other Results

Group A

China 3-0 France

Xu Xin/Ma Long bt Alexandre Cassin/Emmanuel Lebesson 3-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-5)

Fan Zhendong bt Quentin Robinot 3-0 (11-9, 14-12, 11-3)

Ma Long bt Emmanuel Lebesson 3-0 (11-5, 11-6, 11-8)

China 3-0 Sweden

Ma Long/Xu Xin bt Par Gerell/Anton Kallberg 3-0 (11-1, 11-6, 11-4)

Fan Zhendong bt Kristian Karlsson 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-7)

Xu Xin bt Anton Kallberg 3-1 (12-10, 9-11, 11-4, 12-10)

Group B

Japan 3-0 Egypt

Koki Niwa/Yuya Oshima bt Ahmed Saleh/Mohamed El-Beiali 3-0 (11-6, 6-11, 11-2, 11-8)

Tomokazu Harimoto bt Omar Assar 3-2 (11-3, 11-6, 9-11, 9-11, 11-4)

Yuya Oshima bt Mohamed El-Beiali 3-0 (11-8, 11-6, 11-8)

Group C

Germany 3-0 Australia

Ruwen Filus/Patrick Franziska bt David Powell/Kane Townsend 3-0 (12-10, 11-5, 11-1)

Dimitrij Ovtcharov bt Heming Hu 3-1 (11-7, 11-6, 8-11, 11-4)

Patrick Franziska bt Kane Townsend 3-0 (11-6, 11-6, 11-6)

South Korea 3-2 Germany

Jeoung Youngsik/Jeong Sangeun bt Patrick Franziska/Benedikt Duda 3-1 (4-11, 11-7, 11-9, 11-6)

Dimitrij Ovtcharov bt Lee Sangsu 3-0 (11-8, 14-12, 11-8)

Jeong Sangeun bt Patrick Franziska 3-1 (5-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7)

Dimitrij Ovtcharov bt Jeoung Youngsik 3-1 (11-9, 13-11, 9-11, 11-9)

Lee Sangsu bt Benedikt Duda 3-1 (11-5, 9-11, 11-9, 11-4)

Group D

Hong Kong 3-1 USA

Ng Pak Nam/Ho Kwan Kit bt Adar Alguetti/Yijun Feng 3-0 (11-7, 11-3, 11-3)

Kanak Jha bt Wong Chun Ting 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 11-8)

Ho Kwan Kit bt Yijun Feng 3-0 (11-9, 12-10, 11-8)

Ng Pak Nam bt Kanak Jha 3-0 (11-2, 13-11, 11-5)

Brazil 3-2 Hong Kong

Lam Siu Hang/Ho Kwan Kit bt Eric Jouti/Gustavo Tsuboi 3-0 (12-10, 11-5, 11-9)

Hugo Calderano bt Wong Chun Ting 3-1 (12-10, 12-10, 9-11, 11-4)

Gustavo Tsuboi bt Ho Kwan Kit 3-2 (13-11, 11-6, 9-11, 8-11, 11-7)

Wong Chun Ting bt Eric Jouti 3-1 (11-3, 2-11, 11-6, 11-5)

Hugo Calderano bt Lam Siu Hang 3-0 (11-7, 11-7, 11-5)

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