



Zhendong is a Fan of Pitchford after thriller

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World No 2 Fan Zhendong praised Liam Pitchford after the Englishman gave him an almighty battle at the ITTF World Team Cup at the Copper Box Arena.

Pitchford was beaten 3-1 (8-11, 11-3, 11-9, 11-9) in a wonderful match of extraordinary pace, skill and power from both men.

[Click here to watch the match](#)

Fan Zhendong's reaction at the end, at the handshake and in interview, spoke of an appreciation for his opponent.

He said: "This is the first time I have played him. He played very well and I'm very happy to beat him when he played so well. I was down on several occasions, I kept my focus; I must stress Liam played so well."



Fan Zhendong was impressed by Liam Pitchford (picture by Alan Man)

Social media posters were also quick to praise Pitchford, including many from the Far East, such as the one below.

Liam Pitchford moves us fantastic.

— 䄁 (@vww47512) [February 24, 2018](#)

Pitchford said of his performance: "It's practice and preparation. I have been putting a lot of work in over the last few months and years and it has paid off in this tournament.

"It was a little bit surprised with how I've been playing, but I'm over the moon and it's another stepping stone to get me where I want to be.

"I'm disappointed because I lost but I felt I had my chances. I had him under pressure especially in the third and fourth games. I played well, but in the end a loss is a loss. I've probably had finer matches but it was nice to play in front of a home crowd.

"There are a lot of positives to take from here. I have a long way to go, I know that, but this is a step on the road to getting there."

[Missed the action? You can also catch up on the morning session on the BBC iPlayer by clicking here](#)

Sam Walker was philosophical about his heavy defeat at the hands of the great Ma Long, saying after his 11-5, 11-1, 11-2 mauling: "I'm probably going to hospital, that's how badly he's beaten me!

"It's hard, he just doesn't make any mistakes. I was trying to risk it more than usual and when he got on top, he was so safe and powerful.

“That’s the first time I’ve played a Chinese player in singles and it’s always a learning experience.”



Sam Walker found it tough against Ma Long (picture by Alan Man)

[Click here to watch Sam Walker v Ma Long](#)

Paul Drinkhall believes the match shows that the gap is narrowing between England and the best players in the world.

He said: “It’s been great for the team again. Liam has had some really good performances, Sam getting the win against Egypt and me and Sam doing well in the doubles. We’ve not played our best but we’ve managed to get through matches.

“We’ve shown up as a team, with our team spirit and showed what we can do.

“Liam really pushed Fan Zhendong and it’s great to be pushing them. Someone’s going to beat them one day and there’s no reason it can’t be us.

“We’re working towards that and being consistently up at the top of the world.”

[Click here to watch the doubles match](#)

So concludes another great tournament for England and the last word has to go to Pitchford:

“We never expected to win another world medal. We’ve not been bad as a team – World Championships bronze, Team World Cup bronze, quarter-final Olympics is not bad for three guys from England.

“We stick together as a team, we are great friends off the court, we have a laugh, and then when we get onto the court preparation, we are really serious. I guess we just like the big matches.”

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