



Para trio ready to share spotlight

Author: Paul Stimpson

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Kim Daybell, Felicity Pickard and Ross Wilson are cast in the role of trailblazers as para and able-bodied athletes stand together in Australia.

The trio compete in the first Commonwealth Games standing para events and are looking forward to sharing the spotlight at a prestigious event – something they seldom get to do.

“It’s a great chance to be part of a whole team. It shows we are now getting the recognition the same as the able-bodied athletes and I think that’s good,” said Pickard, 23.

“It’s an exciting prospect, I’ve never really been to something big like this before, especially a multi-sport event. The experience will be great to take into the future.

“We’re not used to being with other sports and it’s about being one big team. We’ve all got individual goals but we’ll all come together as a team.

“It feels a bit different being England rather than GB, but we have the same pride.”

That last point is something that may feel stranger for the para players than their able-bodied counterparts – through the BPTT, the para squad generally travel to events wearing British rather than English livery, so it raises the prospect of a match against a regular team-mate from Scotland or Wales.

Wilson said: “We are quite a close team and we’ve got good family values. To play one of them would be a bit strange but I’ll have to take it as any other match and focus on the task in hand.”

Wilson may have a minor advantage, having previously visited the area.

He said: “I went travelling in Australia and went all the way up the east coast, including Gold Coast, and I loved it. It’s my favourite country so far – after England!

"I think going out there and getting a feel for it was quite nice. It's a relaxed and laid-back country and the people are really nice. The weather was a different level – really hot. It's a great place for the games and it will be amazing.

"I'm really excited, it will be our first time as a team playing at a Commonwealth Games and I'm really looking forward to getting out there and doing our best."

It is a sentiment that medical student Daybell shares. He said: "It's the first time para has had a real contingent going, they had some test events before with the women's wheelchair but this is the first time they've had a standing event.

"To be part of the first one is going to be very exciting and to go to Australia will be a good trip. I think we need the Paralympics to remain a standalone thing, but it will be nice to stand side by side with the able-bodied players and get the same coverage and the same recognition. I'm really looking forward to it."

In terms of the competition, Pickard is playing up a classification and will not have faced many of her opponents before.

She said: "I'll just try to play my best and if I play the table tennis I can play, then anything is possible. To get a medal would be fantastic, but I'll just take it one match at a time.

"I just want to test myself and challenge myself and enjoy it."

Whoever they face, Daybell and Wilson's experience on the international stage is sure to stand them in good stead, and neither will take anything for granted.

Daybell said: "Obviously, anyone who plays for their country is a good player, but the big threats will probably be similar to the able-bodied, with India, Singapore and Nigeria, though we'll have to see when we arrive how strong the tournament is.

"You're never sure which countries will invest in it, but I'm approaching it the same way as the Paralympics, I think that's served me well in the past."

Meanwhile, Wilson added: "Take each game as it comes is the way I'm going to look at it, the same as any other competition I've played. The pressure is amazing but it's something I live for.

"We've got a lot of goals throughout the year and a lot of big competitions coming up, including the Worlds at the end of the year.

"There's something inside us that wants to prepare and improve for that – we're preparing for the best in the world already so I think whoever is at the Commonwealths, we'll be well prepared."

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