



GB Para squads ready for big fortnight

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The next two weeks are an important period for the British Para Table Tennis Team and its preparation for the World Championships later this year, with the PTT Slovakia Open in Bratislava (May 3-6) followed by the 15th Slovenian Open in Lasko (May 9-12).

A squad of 10 athletes including Paralympic team bronze medallist Aaron McKibbin, European silver medallist David Wetherill and Commonwealth bronze medallist Josh Stacey will compete in Slovakia and they will be joined in Slovenia by Paralympic and World champion Will Bayley, Commonwealth champion Ross Wilson, European silver medallist Tom Matthews and European team gold medallist Paul Karabardak.

Also among the athletes competing in Slovakia are Liverpool's Jack Hunter-Spivey in his first international tournament since winning the US Open title in December last year, and European bronze medallist Sue Gilroy, who recently won her 23rd title at the BPTT National Championships.

"The National Championships were really good preparation for Slovakia and Slovenia," said Hunter-Spivey, who successfully defended his three National titles last month and has been training in Sheffield with Norwegian former Paralympic champion Tommy Urhaug. "Training is going really well so I'm feeling good."

Gilroy only returned to training six weeks ago after major surgery and missed the Italian Open in March but is looking forward to continuing her team partnership with 18-year-old Megan Shackleton which resulted in a bronze medal at last year's World Team Championships.

"Megan has really come on and she is a really talented player," said Gilroy. "Even though we haven't practised much together lately we did really well in the doubles at the Nationals so hopefully we can do well in Slovakia and Slovenia."

Burnley's Floss Pickard just missed out on a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games but was impressive in successfully defending her National title one week later.

"I feel I have improved quite a lot in the last year with all the support I'm having from the GB team in Sheffield and I feel more confident going in to a match," said Pickard. "The Commonwealth Games has definitely given me the boost I need to go forward to Slovakia and Slovenia."

British team Performance Director Gorazd Vecko is hoping that his team can build on the success of the Commonwealth Games in which British athletes took gold, silver and bronze.

"The tournaments in Slovakia and Slovenia always provide very tough competition," said Vecko, "and with the exception of China all the strongest nations will be represented. Back-to-back tournaments are tough on the players but they will be good experience. The athletes have been working hard in training and are ready for the challenge."

The full squad for the Slovakia Open is:

Ashley Facey Thompson – class 9 (Sheffield/London)
Jack Hunter-Spivey – class 5 (Sheffield/Liverpool)
Sue Gilroy MBE – class 4 (Barnsley)
Aaron McKibbin – class 8 (Sheffield/London)
Martin Perry – class 6 (Sheffield/Paisley)
Fliss Pickard – class 6 (Burnley)
Megan Shackleton – class 4 (Todmorden)
Billy Shilton – class 8 (Sheffield/Stonehouse – Gloucester)
Josh Stacey – class 9 (St Mellons)
David Wetherill – class 6 (Torpoint)

The full squad for the Slovenian Open is:

Will Bayley – class 7 (Sheffield/Tunbridge Wells)
Ashley Facey Thompson – class 9 (Sheffield/London)
Jack Hunter-Spivey – class 5 (Sheffield/Liverpool)
Sue Gilroy MBE – class 4 (Barnsley)
Paul Karabardak – class 6 (Swansea)
Tom Matthews – class 1 (Aberdare)
Aaron McKibbin – class 8 (Sheffield/London)
Martin Perry – class 6 (Sheffield/Paisley)
Fliss Pickard – class 6 (Burnley)
Megan Shackleton – class 4 (Todmorden)
Billy Shilton – class 8 (Sheffield/Stonehouse – Gloucester)
Josh Stacey – class 9 (St Mellons)
David Wetherill – class 6 (Torpoint)
Ross Wilson – class 8 (Sheffield/Minster)

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