



Sue and Ashley are silver stars

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World silver medallist Sue Gilroy (women's class 4-5) and the improving Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9) were the stars for the British Para Table Tennis Team at the PTT Slovenian Open today, taking silver in their respective singles events.

Paralympic champion Will Bayley (men's class 7) and Commonwealth champion Ross Wilson (men's class 8) had to be content with bronze and Jack Hunter-Spivey also took bronze in men's class 5.

Gilroy came through her quarter-final against Andreja Dolinar from Slovenia, the former European team champion, 3-1 and then produced a great performance against the Serbian world No 1 Borislava Peric-Rankovic, the Paralympic champion who has so often been her nemesis. From 2-0 down she fought her way back to level at 2-2 and then held her nerve in the tense final set to take it 13-11 and the match 3-2.

The Barnsley schoolteacher staged another comeback in the final against the 20-year-old world No 3 Sandra Mikolaschek, levelling at 2-2 after the young German had taken a 2-0 lead. At 4-1 down Mikolaschek called a time out and it proved to be the turning point in the match as she went on to win the deciding set 11-6 and take the gold.

"When she (Mikolaschek) called a time out she changed her game slightly," said Gilroy, "and then she was opening up a lot more, going very wide on my forehand and I just couldn't get to them. She is a very intelligent player and a very good player – probably the best in the world at the moment – and she won in Slovakia last week so she's in good form.

"To be honest, beating Peric was my final – it is a few years ago since I beat her so to come here when I've only been back in training a few weeks after surgery on my arm and beat her was a huge match for me especially from 2-0 down. So I'm really pleased with that.

"To be fair coming to Slovakia and Slovenia I knew I was going to struggle doing tournaments back-to-back because I've had to limit my training so I hadn't really put pressure on myself. I didn't think I would get out of the

groups, I just wanted to get back into match practice so it really is unbelievable to come back and beat the number one in the world.

"It gives me good form going into the World Championships in October and it is great that I have had that win now because it is embedded that I can do it and I just need to keep doing it now and have that confidence."

Londoner Facey Thompson was competing in his second final within a week having also taken silver in Slovakia last week. He beat the Slovakia gold medallist from Ukraine Lev Kats 3-2 in the last 16 and again showed all his fighting qualities in the quarter-final to beat the 19-year-old world team gold medallist Daniel Gustafsson 11-9 in the fifth after the Swedish player had come back from 2-0 down to level the match at 2-2.

A 3-1 semi-final win against Nobuyuki Suzuki from Japan took him through to the final against the world No 2 Iurii Nozdrunov and the Russian World and European medallist showed all his experience in a 3-0 win.

"To be fair, he played really well," said the 23-year-old, who has made huge progress since moving to Sheffield last year to train full time with the British squad. "I pushed him but he had the experience to take over and get the win.

"Two finals in two tournaments is great and I'm playing well. I'm learning a lot about how to play, how to win and how to keep composed so I'm doing well because I am playing at a consistent level. It was nice to get revenge over Kats for Slovakia – he played well but I had belief and carried on playing my strong game against him."

Josh Stacey struggled with cramp in his men's class 9 quarter-final against Suzuki and despite receiving treatment from British team physio Jason Beaumont during the match he was beaten 3-1.

"My calves were very tight so I struggled to play my normal game," admitted Stacey, "but he was better than me and played the way to beat me so credit to him. I fought well and played well in the earlier rounds so I'll focus on the team event with Ashley now."

Bayley reached the semi-finals with a 3-1 last 16 win against the 2015 European champion Jean-Paul Montanus from the Netherlands and a 3-1 win in the quarter-finals against Katsuyoshi Yagi from Japan. The 30-year-old from Tunbridge Wells has not produced his best form here and in his semi-final he was quickly 2-0, 6-0 down against the talented Ahmed Sayed Moahmed. Although he mounted a spirited comeback it was not enough and the Egyptian world No 6 took the third set 14-12 and the match 3-0.

Bayley said: "I've not been at my best here – I did well to win against J-P this morning so there are a few positives to take out of it but I've just got to go away and work hard.

"I'm trying my best and it is going to be a hard run now for the World Championships. I'm always really well prepared for the major championships so I'll be working extra hard now and use this as motivation for the Worlds."

Wilson won his last 16 match against the Russian Aleksei Saunin 3-0 and then played superbly to beat Emil Andersson, the former world No 1 from Sweden, 3-0 to set up a semi-final against the current world No 1 and world champion Viktor Didukh. The 22-year-old from Minster levelled at 1-1 but the Ukrainian was a very good able bodied player before losing a leg to cancer and he used his experience to take the next two sets 6 and 9 and the match 3-1.

"I've had a good run in the last couple of competitions," said Wilson, "and it is a shame it had to come to an end here. I feel good on the table and feel like I'm playing from within myself still and I'm really enjoying it at the moment.

"I was disappointed to lose the semi-final. Sport is all about ups and downs and at 1-1 maybe he changed his tactics and maybe I changed mine – it was just a shame that I couldn't get back in the fourth set and take it to a fifth. Hopefully next time I can make some changes, come back stronger and get the win against him."

Liverpool's Hunter-Spivey won his quarter-final against Agus Sutanto from Indonesia, the Asian Para Games gold medallist, 3-1 and then came up against his regular team partner Tommy Urhaug from Norway in great form and the London 2012 Paralympic champion took the match 3-1.

"Tommy is one of my best friends and we train together all the time," said Hunter-Spivey, who celebrates his 23rd birthday tomorrow. "I thought I played a good match but he was just better than me on the day and that is the way it goes sometimes."

"I could have attacked more, played my game a bit more and imposed myself in the rallies but it is a learning process and all about building towards the World Championships."

In men's class 8 Billy Shilton produced one of the performances of the day to beat the Rio 2016 Paralympic silver medallist Andras Csonka in the last 16, recovering from losing a tight first set to beat the Hungarian world No 3 3-1. The 19-year-old from Stonehouse in Gloucester could not quite repeat that performance in his quarter-final and was beaten 3-1 by Linus Karlsson, the European bronze medallist from Sweden.

"My match against Csonka went perfectly," said Shilton. "Everything I spoke about with my coach Andrew beforehand I used perfectly in the match so I'm really happy to have won that match and it was a really good result for me. I only had 25 minutes before the next match so it was quite difficult to refocus. It was a completely different game and a different style of player and I've never really had to do that before so that was a new challenge for me but he played really well."

Aaron McKibbin also came through his last 16 match against Gyula Zborai, the Hungarian who had beaten him in Slovakia last week, in four sets but lost his quarter-final against the Ukrainian world No 4 Ivan Mai 3-1.

"I tried to do a lot of things that we have been working on in training," said the 26-year-old from Wandsworth. "Some things worked and some things didn't but there are things I can work on and I can definitely take some positives from the singles."

"As soon as I lost to Zborai in Slovakia I said that I wanted to play him in Slovenia to rectify it. He is an intelligent player and very smart so it still wasn't easy for me and I found a way to win so I'm happy with that. My group stage performance was something to build on for the team event and hopefully going into the Worlds later this year."

Tom Matthews has struggled to find his form in the very warm conditions here in Slovenia and although he fought hard in his men's class 1 quarter-final against Federico Falco the 24-year-old world team champion and European bronze medallist from Italy took the match 3-1.

Paul Karabardak showed great character to come through his last 16 match in men's class 6 against Matias Pino Lorca from Chile, the 21-year-old PanAmerican champion, 11-9 in the fifth but found the European bronze medallist Bobi Simion too strong in the quarter-final and the Romanian won 3-0.

Torpoint's David Wetherill also fought his way back into his men's class 6 quarter final against the former European silver medallist Thomas Rau from Germany, levelling at 2-2 after a slow start but the German just edged the fifth set 11-9.

"Rau has good serves but I couldn't even get them back on the table until the third set," said 28-year-old Wetherill, "and that is not because of any mental reason or because I don't know how to. My brain does but my body doesn't follow suit which is frustrating."

"To be honest, I almost felt that I had the match in the bag at 2-0 down, 5-5 as I was starting to feel looser. I didn't play well in the fifth – it is just annoying having that extra pressure of it being closer than it really ought to be."

Megan Shackleton lost her last 16 match in women's class 4-5 against the world team silver medallist Aleksandra Vasileva from Russia 3-0 but can take plenty of positives from her singles event and look forward to the team event with Gilroy.

"I'm pleased with my singles so far," said the 19-year-old from Todmorden, "although I'm obviously disappointed not to make it to the quarter-finals. But Aleksandra played really well and we do generally have tough matches that can go one way or the other and today she was just the better player."

Burnley's Fliss Pickard lost her women's class 6 quarter-final 3-1 against Maliak Alieva from Russia, the 23-year-old former class 7 who has been reclassified as a 6.

"I felt there were some good points and things to definitely work on," said the 23-year-old. "She has come down a classification so I've not had much experience of playing her but definitely with a few little tweaks I feel that there is not much in it."

The tournament continues with the team events, which conclude on Saturday.

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