



Brits in medal shake-up

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The British Para Table Tennis Team is assured of at least two medals in the team events at the PTT Slovenian Open in Lasko after Commonwealth champion Ross Wilson and Aaron McKibbin (men's class 8), Paul Karabardak, Martin Perry and David Wetherill (men's class 6) reached the semi-finals of their respective events, while Tom Matthews is still in with a chance of a medal in the round robin men's class 1 event.

There was disappointment for Paralympic champion Will Bayley and Billy Shilton (men's class 8), Ashley Facey Thompson and Josh Stacey (men's class 9), Jack Hunter-Spivey (men's class 5), Sue Gilroy and Megan Shackleton (women's class 4-5), who were all knocked out in the quarter-finals.

Wilson and McKibbin combined well to beat former world champion Richard Csejtey from Slovakia and 19-year-old Roman Vakarash from Ukraine in the doubles. Wilson secured the tie with a comfortable 3-0 win against Vakarash which, following their win yesterday against the Italian Samuel de Chiara and Devin Wassink from the Netherlands, ensured that the British pair went through to the quarter-finals as group winners.

They were drawn against the experienced Hungarian team of Andras Csonka and Gyula Zborai and played superbly to win the doubles 3-0. Wilson then recovered from losing the third set against Csonka to beat the Paralympic silver medallist 3-1 and take his team through to the semi-finals tomorrow where they will play world champions Ukraine.

After their defeat yesterday to the Romanian/Greek partnership of Bobi Simion and Georgios Mouchthis, Karabardak, Perry and Wetherill needed to beat Danny Bobrov from Israel and Valentin Kneuss from Switzerland to progress to the semi-finals. After dropping the first set Karabardak and Perry started to find their form and won the doubles 3-1 before Karabardak secured a 2-0 win in the tie with a 3-0 win against Kneuss.

Matthews and the PanAmerican bronze medallist Bustamante Sierra lost their doubles to the world team champions Federico Falco and Andrea Borgato from Italy but Matthews then produced his best form to beat Falco 3-0, having lost to the Italian in the quarter-finals of the singles. Borgato then beat Bustamante Sierra to win the tie for Italy.

In their second match the Welsh/Argentinian pair came back from losing the first set to win the doubles against Endre Major from Hungary and Dmitri Lavrov from Russia 3-1 and Matthews then drew on all his fighting qualities to overcome the disappointment of losing a titanic fourth set 19-17 to beat Lavrov 11-6 in the fifth.

Matthews and Bustamante Sierra play their final round-robin match tomorrow against Sung Joo Park from Korea and Alan Papirer from France.

Gilroy and Shackleton won their second group match against the class 4 world No 10 from Thailand Wijittra Jaion and 16-year-old Irem Oluk from Turkey 2-0, winning the doubles 15-13 in the fourth and Gilroy beating Oluk 3-0 in the singles. They secured top place in their group with a 2-0 win in their final match against Helke Koller from Austria and Jelena Sisic from Croatia, Gilroy beating Koller 3-1 after combining with Shackleton to win the doubles 3-0.

Their quarter final against Mexico looked to be going according to plan at 2-0, 9-5 up in the doubles but gradually Edith Sigala Lopez and Martha Verdin began to work their way back into the match and after taking the third set 12-10 they took the next two for a 3-2 win. Gilroy again led 2-1 against Sigala Lopez but the Mexican PanAmerican champion proved the stronger over the last two sets and took the match 3-2 and the tie for Mexico 2-0.

"I think we just switched off a little bit," said a very disappointed Gilroy. "We have been playing really well in doubles but I knew I was struggling today. We played great in the group stages and we just needed a bit more in the quarter finals and unfortunately we just couldn't bring it today.

"I've had a great tournament – I'm really pleased with my singles but physically exhausted now and maybe it was just one match too far."

"I think maybe we lost a bit of confidence when we lost the third set," said Shackleton, "but we can take a lot of positives from that match. We have improved a lot as a doubles team and in the team event generally. We were a bit unlucky today but hopefully in the next tournament it will be a different story."

Bayley and Shilton had a tough opening match against the world team champions and Paralympic silver medallists from Sweden but pushed Emil Andersson and Linus Karlsson all the way in the doubles despite a 3-0 defeat. Shilton lost 3-1 to former world No 1 and European champion Andersson which left the British pair needing to beat Arufuahirokazu Tateishi and Takumi Shukunobe from Japan in their final group match. They took the doubles 3-0 and Shilton made sure of their quarter-final place with a 3-0 win against Tateishi.

A 3-0 win in the doubles gave the world champions Ukraine the lead in their quarter-final and although Shilton kept fighting against Ivan Mai the world No 4 took their singles 3-1 and the tie for Ukraine 2-0.

"I've been struggling a bit with my shoulder," said Bayley, "and that put us under a lot of pressure. In the doubles both of us could have played a lot better but I was proud of Billy's performance in the singles because I think he gave it a really good shot and it could have gone either way."

"It was a good match against Mai," said Shilton. "The last three times we have played each other it has been really close so I am happy with my performance. Everything is going the right way and the work I'm putting in in training is starting to pay off now so I'm quite pleased overall."

Facey Thompson and Stacey began with a 2-0 win against world team champions Sweden, looking very sharp in the doubles to win 3-0 before Facey Thompson recovered from 2-1 down against Daniel Gustafsson to beat the 19 year old World number seven 3-2, 11-6 in the fifth. They beat Takuya Nakajima from Japan and Vit Spalek from the Czech Republic 3-1 in the doubles and Stacey won the tie with a 3-0 win against 14-year-old Spalek.

They made a good start to their quarter-final against Lev Kats from Ukraine and Pawel Jablonski from Poland taking a 2-0 lead in the doubles but Kats and Jablonski fought back to win the match 3-2 and Kats, singles gold medallist in Slovakia last week, took his team through to the semi-finals with a 3-0 win against Stacey.

"We played well at the start," said Facey Thompson, "and were combining well together. Then they just pulled it back and started to play better and we made a few mistakes but they got the momentum and belief and that is

sport. I was really happy with the way we played against Sweden – Josh played really well in the doubles and I was very impressed with the way he was playing.”

Hunter-Spivey and the class 4 world No 7 Mohamed Eid Saleh from Egypt lost a marathon five-set battle in the doubles to Mitar Palikuca and Darko Babic from Serbia. Hunter-Spivey, who celebrated his 23rd birthday today, started well in his singles against Palikuca but the class 5 world No 3 and European bronze medallist is in good form having won the singles event here and he came back to win the match 3-1 and the tie for Serbia 2-0.

Their win yesterday against the class 2 European champion Colin Judge and the American Ahad Bakhshaei Sarand was enough to take Hunter-Spivey and Eid Saleh through to the quarter-finals where they played the French team of Nicolas Savant-Aira and Alexandre Delarque. They were edged out in the doubles in five close sets and Delarque then beat Eid Saleh 3-0 to win the tie for France.

“We played very well in the doubles,” said Hunter-Spivey. “We lost 13-11 in the fifth so we played some really good rallies. Unfortunately my team-mate couldn’t get the win today in the singles but you win some, you lose some and today it wasn’t our day. Overall it’s been a good tournament for me, a positive singles event and I’m really looking forward to the Worlds now.”

In women’s class 6-7 Fliss Pickard and the Oceania champion Rebecca Julian from Australia lost their doubles to Smilla Sand and Emelie Endre from Sweden and Julian, a former class 6 world No 2, found class 7 player Sand too strong in the first singles, the 16-year-old winning the match 3-0 and the tie for Sweden 2-0.

A 2-0 defeat to the class 7 world No 3 Ulija Shishkina and Maliak Alieva from Russia in their final match put the British/Australian team out of the tournament but Pickard is gaining experience all the time and improving with every competition.

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