



Trio of golds for GB para stars

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Commonwealth silver medallist Kim Daybell (men's class 10) and two of the British Para Table Tennis Team's teenage stars Megan Shackleton (women's class 4) and Josh Stacey (men's class 9) all took gold in their respective singles events at the PTT Czech Open in Ostrava.

Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9) and Jack Hunter-Spivey (men's class 5) took silver and Aaron McKibbin (men's class 8) and Fliss Pickard (women's class 6) bronze.

Daybell was a comfortable 3-0 winner against 17-year-old Mateo Scuto from Luxembourg and after a walkover in his second match against Quy Thu Bui from Vietnam he beat Gevorg Beglaryan from Armenia to take top place in his group.

He beat the Russian Ivan Davydov 3-0 in the quarter-finals and the Frenchman Benoit Grasset 3-0 in the semi-finals but then had to produce his best to beat the Czech former world, Paralympic and European champion Ivan Karabec 3-1 in the final.

"It was a tough match today," said 26-year-old Daybell, from Sheffield, "as we have played each other so many times through the years. He is always a difficult opponent and I was pleased to come through.

"It bodes well for me coming into the World Championships next month and I feel that I am in good form. The early rounds were comfortable so to suddenly have to play at the top level was a challenge. Overall there is still plenty to work on but I was pleased with my performance."

Shackleton, from Todmorden, topped her group after 3-0 wins against Ekaterina Popova from Russia and Jelena Sisic from Croatia, and a hard-fought 3-2 win against the 17-year-old Italian Carlotta Ragazzini from Italy, the European Para Youth Games silver medallist. A 3-0 win against Helke Koller from Austria in the semi-final took her into the final against world number 12 Aleksandra Vasileva and she fought back from 2-1 down to beat the Russian 11-7 in the fifth.

"I'm so proud of myself for fighting back from being 2-1 down to win 3-2 after a tough battle to clinch the fourth

15-13," said 19-year-old Shackleton. "It's always a challenge against Vasileva as we both have such similar styles, but I'm really glad I pulled through in the end as I wanted to win the gold in memory of my friend who recently passed away."

Stacey, bronze medallist in the Commonwealth Games, came through his group unbeaten after 3-1 wins against Takumi Tsujimura from Japan and Daniel-Alexandru Dinca from Romania and a 3-0 win against Robert Cwenar from Poland. After beating Pawel Konstantyn from Poland 3-0 in the quarter-finals he set up an all-British final against Facey Thompson with a 3-1 win against another Polish player Pawel Jablonski and played a superb match in the final to win his first singles title 3-0.

"I think I played well," said the 18-year-old Welshman from St Mellons, "especially in the final and I handled my nerves well. Playing Ash was a strange feeling because we've been warming up together at the tournament. It's a good feeling to win my first singles gold and now I'm looking forward to the team event."

Londoner Facey Thompson came through his group with 3-0 wins against Denis Chirkov from Russia, Barnabas Retter from Hungary, silver medallist in 2017, and Stefan Hatala from Slovakia. He had to fight hard to beat Daniel-Alexandru Dinca from Romania in the quarter-final, coming back from 2-1 down to win 3-2, and reached the final with a 3-0 win against David Pulpan from Czech Republic.

"It was weird playing my team mate in the final," said the 23-year-old from Stratford, "I've never had to do that before in class 9. It was an okay performance from me but Josh played well and was solid the whole way through the match."

Hunter-Spivey, 23, from Liverpool, topped his group with three wins from three against David Olsson, the 18-year-old European Para Youth Games bronze medallist from Sweden, Mauro Depergola, the PanAmerican bronze medallist from Argentina, and the unranked Milos Tesar from Czech Republic.

He received a bye into the semi-finals and recovered from dropping the first set to beat Milan Zelen from Serbia 3-1 and set up a final against his regular team partner and close friend Tommy Urhaug. The former World and Paralympic champion from Norway was on his best form and took the gold with a 3-0 win.

McKibbin topped his group and came through his last 16 match against Steven Roman Chinchilla from Costa Rica 3-1 and a quarter-final against the Frenchman Elias Debeyssac 3-1 but lost his semi-final to old adversary Richard Csejtey, the former world champion from Slovakia, 3-1.

"I felt I played okay although not my best," said the 27-year-old Londoner. "I struggled in most of my matches, maybe due to tiredness after a hard training camp in Slovenia, but there have been some things I'm looking to improve recently including being more positive on my receive when it is coming long. I made a few mistakes on it but when it was going on it was good so I have a few more weeks to try and improve it before the Worlds."

Pickard began with a 3-2 win against top seed Katarzyna Marszal from Poland, the former world champion and Paralympic team champion in Rio, and progressed from her group as runner-up despite a 3-2 loss to Emelie Endre from Sweden, the world No 12. The 24-year-old from Burnley had to settle for bronze after losing her semi-final to the experienced world No 9 Gabriela Constantin from Romania 3-0.

The tournament continues with the team events.

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