



Good start for GB at Worlds

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Paralympic champions Rob Davies and Will Bayley won their opening group matches at the World Para Table Tennis Championships in Slovenia.

On a good day for the British team, Commonwealth champion Ross Wilson and European silver medallist Dave Wetherill booked their places in the knockout stages that start on Friday by winning both their group matches and there were also wins for Kim Daybell, Ashley Facey Thompson, Jack Hunter-Spivey and Sue Gilroy.

Men's class 1

Rob Davies put his below-par performance in last month's Czech Open behind him with a convincing 3-0 win against world No 17 Alan Papirer from France and plays the PanAmerican champion Fernando Eberhardt in his second group match today.

"I'm really happy," said the Welshman. "It was good to win 3-0 but I'm happy with the way I played more than anything. I managed to keep my focus which was the main thing. I want to keep improving and if I can keep in the tournament I think I will get better and better."

On his World Championships debut Tom Matthews was bitterly disappointed to lose his first match 3-0 to 22-year-old Hyeon Uk Kim from Korea, the 2017 Asian Championships silver medallist.

"I never really settled into the match," said Matthews. "He is a really good player – I've never seen him before or played him before. He's quite new on the scene and I didn't really know what to expect. It's a new experience for me being on the big stage in front of all the lights and I'll learn from it and hopefully do a better job next time."

Matthews plays his second match against the world No 6 from Italy, Andrea Borgato while fellow Welshman Paul Davies begins his challenge with group matches against the in-form Endre Major from Hungary and the Argentinian Guillermo Bustamante Sierra.

Men's class 5

Jack Hunter-Spivey made an assured start to his World Championships with a 3-0 win against Iakoba Taubakoa, the wild card from Fiji, and plays his final group match tomorrow against world team champion Cheng Ming Chih from Chinese Taipei, who took silver in the Asian Para Games last week.

"I feel like I played really well," he said. "It was just getting used to the environment, the hall, the lights and everything. I feel that I did what I set out to do so for me it was a great first match and hopefully I can kick on now and perform at my best."

Men's class 6

David Wetherill was a 3-0 winner against the Oceania champion Trevor Hirth from Australia and then came back from losing the first set to beat the French world No 8 Bastien Grundeler 3-1 and book his place in the knockout stages.

"First of all it was good to get the win," said Wetherill. "I feel a bit rusty – I haven't played a lot this year compared to what I'm used to and I felt mentally a bit fragile so it was good to have a nice little battle and work my way into the tournament. I know I'm only going to get better."

Despite a late fightback in the third set Paul Karabardak lost his first match to the European bronze medallist Bobi Simion from Romania 3-0 but can still progress if he beats Kazuki Shichino from Japan.

Men's class 7

Defending champion Will Bayley was given a difficult match by Daniel Horut from Czech Republic and was relieved to come through in four sets after the former European bronze medallist took the first set 11-8. Bayley faces another tough match today against the French world No 7 Stephane Messi.

"I'm really happy to come through that," he said, "because there was one point in the match where I thought 'this is very difficult' and I was struggling a bit. I was playing really well but tactically not as well as I could have done and Daniel was playing probably the best he's ever played against me today so it took me a bit by surprise."

"The first match is always the toughest and I've got another tough one coming up. Every game is a final for me and I've got another final tomorrow so we'll see what happens."

Men's class 8

Ross Wilson got the British team off to a perfect start with a dominant 3-0 win against the 32-year-old former world No 1 from Belgium, Marc Ledoux and then came through against the former world No 1 and Rio bronze medallist Piotr Grudzien from Poland 3-1 to secure top place in his group.

"It was really good," said Wilson. "I knew I was going to have a fight on my hands in both matches so I came in very focused from the start. I went for it and took my chances and today was a good day. Grudzien is a really tricky player and he changed his tactics in the third set and that caught me out quite a lot. I needed to adapt to that and I did in the fourth set so I was pleased with that."

Aaron McKibbin lost his first match to defending champion and world No 1 Viktor Didukh from Ukraine and must win his second match today against a former world champion Richard Csejtey from Slovakia.

"I wouldn't say I played my best level and he didn't have to do too much to beat me," admitted McKibbin. "I was struggling a lot with his serves and when it was getting into open play and that was the difference between us – he was more solid in the first few balls really."

Men's class 9

Ashley Facey Thompson looked really sharp against the 18-year-old Brazilian Lucas Dos Santos Carvalho and was a comfortable 3-0 winner. He then demonstrated the improvement he has made this season with a 3-2 win against the world No 7 from China Zhao Yi Qing, taking the match 11-7 in the fifth after the Asian Para Games champion had fought back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2.

"I'm very happy," said Facey Thompson. "I had a lot of confidence going in and was focused on my movement because that has been going well and that came into the matches and made me play really well.

"This has probably been my best year in table tennis, beating top players and reaching a few finals so that has given me confidence and belief to know I can do well. I'm just going to keep focused and carry on fighting."

The 23-year-old Londoner plays his final group match today against Chao Ming Chee from Malaysia.

Men's class 10

Kim Daybell started his competition with a 3-0 win against the PanAmerican champion from Brazil, Claudio Massad but then lost out in a five set battle against the world No 8 Mateo Boheas, the Frenchman proving the stronger in the final set to take it 11-6. Daybell must now wait until the final group matches are played to know if he will progress.

"I thought he (Boheas) played quite well but I was too negative and just didn't go for the opportunities when they were there – my performance was just not good enough," said a clearly frustrated Daybell. "I will try to forget about that one and move on to the next game and do my best."

Women's class 4

Megan Shackleton started her first World Championships with a match against the Paralympic and European champion Borislava Peric-Rankovic and the 19-year-old from Todmorden put up a great fight, taking a tight first set 13-11 and pushing the world No 2 from Serbia all the way despite a 3-1 loss. She can still progress to the knockout stages if she can win her second match against the world No 10 Pi-chun Lu from Chinese Taipei.

"I think for my first Worlds to draw the current Paralympic champion was always going to be a challenge," admitted Shackleton, "but I think I managed to compose my nerves really well out there and to get 3-1 against someone so highly ranked in my class is promising for the future.

"I'm just showing now that I do have that ability under pressure to make the right decisions and hopefully in the future sets will start coming my way."

Sue Gilroy began with 3-1 win against the wildcard from Australia, Lisa Di Toro but then found world No 3 Sandra Mikolaschek just too strong and the 21-year-old German took their match 3-0. Gilroy plays her final group match today against the PanAmerican champion Martha Verdin from Mexico.

"Everything I did she (Mikolaschek) had an answer to," said Gilroy. "She's just playing really well. I did play a lot better than this morning but I just couldn't get near her today. I'm never as good at the beginning of a tournament – I always get better as the tournament goes on."

Women's class 6

In her first World Championships, Fliss Pickard could not have picked a tougher opponent than world No 1 Marina Lytovchenko, the Ukrainian who has won gold in Slovakia, Slovenia and China this year. However, the 26-year-old from Burnley kept battling and was far from disgraced in a 3-1 loss. She now has to wait until Friday to play her final group match against Gabriela Constantin from Romania.

"She's definitely got a lot more experience than me," said Pickard. "She's been to Paralympics and she's the top player in class 6 this season with a lot of good wins against classes above her as well so she's very good.

"I felt I played okay – my level wasn't great in technical terms but I'm happy with my attitude and the way I kept fighting for every single point."

The final group matches will be played tomorrow with the knockout stages played on Friday and Saturday.

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