



## GB trio secure podium finishes

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Commonwealth champion Ross Wilson (men's class 8), European silver medallist Tom Matthews (men's class 1) and World Championship debutant Fliss Pickard (women's class 6) were the stars for the British team on day three of the World Para Table Tennis Championships in Slovenia and are assured of a medal having made it into the semi-finals of their respective events.

But it was a case of so near yet so far for defending champion Will Bayley (men's class 7), Jack Hunter-Spivey (men's class 5), Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9), Sue Gilroy (women's class 4), Megan Shackleton (women's class 4) and David Wetherill (men's class 6) who were all knocked out in the quarter-finals, while Paralympic champion Rob Davies (men's class 1) and Commonwealth silver medallist Kim Daybell (men's class 10) went out in the last 16.

Wilson has grown in belief since winning the Commonwealth title in April and he was impressive in beating Thomas Bouvais, the world team bronze medallist from France, 3-0.

"I'm really pleased with that," said the 23-year-old from Minster. "He beat one of the Chinese players in the previous round and was playing well in that match so I knew it was going to be difficult. I knew I was going to have to come in strong from the start and I did.

"It all starts now really. I'm seeded to finish third so this was my first goal but I'm looking to do better than that and hopefully I can do that tomorrow."

Matthews looked to be going out of the tournament at 2-0 down in his quarter-final to the 24-year-old Italian Federico Falco. But the Welshman is a fighter and he battled his way back into the match, taking the next two sets to take it to a decider. After saving two match points he clinched the match 12-10 in the fifth.

"I can't believe I have just done that," said the 26-year-old from Aberdare. "That was a fight and a half – Falco is an amazing player and I'm so happy right now. To come back and win that is just an incredible feeling.

"I had a bit of a cry at the end – it was an emotional match and the emotion came out. I wear my heart on my

sleeve and I put everything into that last set and hoped that I came out on top and I'm so glad I did. I started out a bit passive and was a bit nervous and once my coach calmed me down I started to play my game. That is how I won the match and credit to my coach Neil Robinson for that."

Pickard showed all her fight and determination to beat the world No 9 Gabriela Constantin in her final group match, holding her nerve in the deciding set after the Romanian came back from 0-5 to level at 5-5 and taking the match 11-7 in the fifth. The win took her into the quarter-finals and she produced an even better performance to defeat the world No 4 and former world champion from Poland, Katarzyna Marszal, 3-0.

"I'm in shock at the moment," said the 24-year-old from Burnley. "I can't quite believe it. I just had to believe in all the training that I've done and I just went for it. I was really nervous but I'm just trying to stick to a game plan and keep positive.

"I just decided to take it one match at a time and I believed that anything was possible but now I'm in the semi-finals I can't quite believe it. I've not finished yet so I've got to keep going and keep fighting."



Will Bayley in action in Slovenia. Photo by Vid Ponikvar / Sportida

Bayley has had some great battles in the past against Jordi Morales and this time it was the Spaniard who proved just the stronger. After Bayley had fought his way back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2 the momentum seemed to be with him but the former world silver medallist was not to be denied and he took the deciding fifth set 11-6.

"I'm really disappointed to lose a tough match because I've trained so hard for this," said Bayley, "but this is the way sport is sometimes and he played really well. Today he held on when I fought back and I thought for a moment that it was going to be enough to overcome him but he came out with some really good shots in the fifth set to win it. He played well today – I've got to give him credit."

Facey Thompson has confirmed his undoubted talent at these Championships but he was unable to produce his best form in his quarter-final against Koyo Iwabuchi and the world No 10 from Japan was a 3-0 winner.

"To be fair he played really well and all credit to him," said the 23-year-old Londoner. "He was just on top of me

and I couldn't really get into the match. I tried my hardest but I think the pressure got to me and I didn't really perform at my best. I've had a good competition – beaten the number seven in the world and won my group so I'm very happy with the way I've played. I've just got to keep on going and keep on working hard and this is going to motivate me – I want to get better every day."

Hunter-Spivey put up a superb performance to put out the defending champion and Paralympic silver medallist Valentin Baus in the last 16, taking a 2-0 lead and keeping his focus to take the match in the fourth set after the 22-year-old German had fought back to take the third.

That took the 23-year-old from Liverpool into a quarter-final against the world No 4 Ali Ozturk, who had ended the British player's challenge at last year's European Championships at the same stage before going on to take the gold. Although Hunter-Spivey started well and took the first set it was not enough and the Rio bronze medallist took the match 3-1.

"I think when we were 1-1 taking that third set was crucial," said Hunter-Spivey. "I feel that I played quite well and I left everything on the table but it wasn't my day. It's very disappointing but I'll fight another day.

"I feel that I have proved to myself now that I can beat big players on the big stage and although I've missed out on a medal I've beaten the current World champion at a World Championships and I've got to take something from that."

Gilroy came through her last 16 match against the 20-year-old Russian Aleksandra Vasileva 3-1 to earn a quarter-final against the player who has so often been her nemesis, Borislava Peric-Rankovic. Gilroy won their last encounter at the Slovenia Open in May but this time it was the Paralympic and European champion from Serbia who came out on top with a 3-0 win.

"I'm bitterly disappointed," said Gilroy. "I had a great warm-up and I just don't know what went wrong. I just couldn't bring it to the table. She was so mentally tough on the day and I know I can play so much better than that – we are so evenly matched but unfortunately that wasn't shown today."



Megan Shackleton reached the quarter-finals. Photo by Vid Ponikvar / Sportida

Shackleton demonstrated her huge potential with a 3-0 win in her last 16 match against the world No 8 from Thailand, Wijittra Jaion. Her reward was a quarter-final against the 29-year-old world No 1 from China, Zhou Ying, and the 19-year-old from Todmorden put up another good performance despite a 3-0 loss to the two time Paralympic and world champion.

"I think I've had a really good performance out here," said Shackleton. "To finish 2018 off on a high with getting to the quarter-finals at my first World Championships I think proves that hard work pays off and being part of the programme full time is going to be really beneficial for the future."

Wetherill came through his last 16 match against the Spanish world team champion Alberto Seoane Alcazar 3-1 to play the Korean Hong Kyu Park in the quarter-finals. The pair had not met since the Korea Open in 2013 and although Wetherill played well it was the Korean world No 4 who took his chances a bit better today and he was a 3-1 winner.

"I was trying to fight my hardest and I can be pleased that I fought for every ball but I wasn't quite clicking," said a disappointed Wetherill. "I was a bit too inconsistent. It has been a long three days and I felt quite fatigued in the third set and I wasn't quite timing the ball properly."

"He is an awkward player and I don't really know him that well and that unknown factor made me feel a bit more uncomfortable. He's one of the best players in the world so no excuses, but still disappointing."

Davies has struggled to find his form at these Championships and although he started well against Guillermo Bustamante Sierra, taking the first set 11-6, the Argentinian PanAmerican bronze medallist has been playing well this week and he came back to take the next three sets for a 3-1 win and a place in the quarter-finals.

"It's very disappointing," said the 32-year-old from Brecon, who was as gracious in defeat as in victory. "Obviously going out at this stage is not what I wanted to be doing but I can only use it to fire me up ready for next year and that is what I intend doing."

"These guys are training hard all the time and I couldn't go out to a nicer guy than Guillermo. He is an ex-rugby player like myself and he has really improved and that is what I need to do for next year."

Daybell is another player who has not found his best form here and the 26-year-old, who now works as a junior doctor having qualified from medical school, lost his last 16 match to the Paralympic team silver medallist from Spain Jorge Cardona.

"It has been difficult," admitted Daybell. "Sometimes you come into a tournament feeling in the right place and I didn't feel too bad coming in but I've not really been able to find my game. But when you come to a World Championships you've got to expect to play the best players in the world playing at the highest level and he played very well today. I've just got to pick myself up and move on."

"Starting work as a doctor has not been easy – it's a very high pressure environment on top of trying to compete which is an equally high pressure environment and I think sometimes it can get on top of you a bit when you are constantly under that pressure. But in the same way that I adjusted when I started medical school I'll adjust to starting work – it may just take a bit of time."

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