



Hat-trick for Stacey at British Para Nationals

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Welsh champion Josh Stacey dominated the British Para Table Tennis Michael Hawksworth National Championships in Grantham this weekend, taking the Open Standing Singles title, the Open Standing Doubles title with Billy Shilton and the men's class 9 title.

Liverpool's Jack Hunter-Spivey won his sixth Open Wheelchair singles title and Fliss Pickard successfully defended her Open Ladies Standing singles title.

Stacey came through a great battle against men's class 10 champion Kim Daybell in the semi-final, edging the match 11-9 in the fifth after Daybell had fought back from 2-0 down. He started well in the final but Aaron McKibbin levelled the match at 1-1 before Stacey completed a 3-1 win.

"It's been a really good tournament," said the 19-year-old from Cardiff. "I played really well from start to finish so I'm obviously very pleased. It was a really good match in the final for everyone to watch as well as to play.

"Kim is in the class above me so to even compete with him is obviously a great achievement. I was 2-0 up and in control of the match and he changed a few things. In the fifth I just decided to be as positive as I could on the receive and thankfully it worked out but it was very close.

"It is massive to be recognised as one of the best players in Britain so to be regarded as one of the best in the Open category as well as in my class is great."

Stacey was winning the Open standing doubles title for the second consecutive year but was partnered this time by Billy Shilton. The pair beat McKibbin and Ross Wilson 3-0 in the final.

"It was really good playing doubles with Billy," said Stacey. "He is really easy to play with and quite consistent so I was relaxed and felt that I could play my game and Billy was always going to be safe and reliable."

McKibbin also lost out in the final of men's class 8 but was able to take plenty of positives from the weekend.

"I've taken three silvers here so it's not nice to lose all three finals but it has been a good weekend," said the 27-year-old Londoner. "Josh and I also played each other in the group stages and he had the hardest draw having to play Kim in the semi-finals so fair play to him he is a deserving winner and it was a good final.

"The level is going up every year which is a good sign for Para table tennis. I had to play a few matches in the knockout rounds against players in the Development squad and I was quite surprised by their level which is definitely improving."

Hunter-Spivey was pushed hard in the Open Wheelchair final by 19-year-old Megan Shackleton who had survived a strong challenge in the semi-final from Dan Bullen, eventually taking the match 11-9 in the fifth after Bullen had levelled at 2-2.

She took that momentum into the final to take a 1-0 lead and then fought back again to level at 2-2 but class 5 champion Hunter-Spivey proved just too strong in the final set to secure his sixth Open title.

"Megan played very well," he said, "the best level I've ever seen her play and I was lucky to win that match to be fair. I played well and I'm happy to get through it and win.

"The level is definitely getting better and better every year and I'm getting challenged more every year. I always look forward to playing here and I take it very seriously. I'm very proud to be National champion."



Megan Shackleton

Shackleton took the class 4 title and in the absence of Sue Gilroy she combined with Mark Palmer to win the Open Wheelchair doubles title, beating defending champions Hunter-Spivey and Bullen in the final.

"I'm really pleased to get to my first Open final at the Nationals," she said, "and to push Jack so close just shows the improvement I've made and it is a great year for me to be improving at that rate.

"I've never played with Mark before but I've been in the doubles final four years in a row and always got silver so to get the win was really good. I really enjoyed playing with Mark – we have really similar games and I think that

worked well for us because I knew how to set points up for both of us. We understand how we like to play and I think that worked in our favour.”

Pickard was unbeaten in the round-robin Open Ladies Standing singles but Grace Williams showed her improvement by taking the third set in their match and is one to watch for the future.

“I feel I played well in parts and not so well in others,” said Pickard, “but I’m happy to get through. I think mentally for me there is a massive difference this year – knowing how to win even when times are tough and that was really noticeable this tournament.

“Having young players improving all the time has been brilliant and pushed me further. I’ve got that motivation in training as well as internationally and to have that competition from the up and coming girls is just what you want.”

Although world champion Wilson retained his men’s class 8 title he aggravated a back injury and was unable to defend his Open standing singles title. The other individual class winners were Tom Matthews (class 1-2), Kevin Plowman (class 3), Martin Perry (class 6), Will Bayley (class 7) and James Adams (class 11).

Romain Simon came out on top in the round-robin Open Wheelchair B class and Tom Johnson won the round-robin Open Standing B class, while Ryan Morton beat Tim Fields in the final of the Open Standing C class.

Dylan Tynan retained his Junior singles title, beating Maximillian Flint 3-1 in the final, and Harry Fairchild beat Andrew Tonkin in the Downs Syndrome final.

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