



Gold for McKibbin and Shilton

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Aaron McKibbin and Billy Shilton provided the perfect finish for the British team at the ITTF Para Polish Open in Wladyslawowo by taking gold in the men's class 8 team event, beating the former Paralympic, world and European team champions from Poland in the final.

Fliss Pickard took silver in the women's class 6 event with her Norwegian partner Merethe Tveiten but there was disappointment for Kim Daybell and Ashley Facey Thompson and Josh Stacey with his Dutch partner Bas Hergelink as they were knocked out of men's class 9-10 in the quarter-finals.

McKibbin and Shilton progressed to the knockout stages with 2-0 wins against Italy/Romania, Hungary and Poland 2, combining to win all three doubles matches and Shilton continuing his great form in the singles competition by winning his singles matches against the Italian Samuel De Chiara, Rio Paralympic silver medallist Andras Csonka from Hungary and Mariusz Olczak from Poland.

In their quarter-final they had to fight hard to win the doubles against Netherlands, coming back from 2-0 down to beat Roy Van Der Burg and Devin Wassink 11-5 in the fifth and Shilton secured the tie with a 3-0 win against Van Der Burg.

Their semi-final opponents were former world champion Richard Csejtey from Slovakia and the Belgian former world No 1 Marc Ledoux but McKibbin and Shilton won the doubles 3-1 before Shilton avenged his defeat in yesterday's singles final by Ledoux in style, beating the experienced Belgian 7, 6 and 2.

In the final against Marcin Skrzynecki and Piotr Grudzien they once again fought back from 2-0 down to take the doubles 12-10 in the fifth and Shilton rounded off a successful tournament with an emphatic 3-0 victory against Skrzynecki.

"I'm really happy to have won gold," said Shilton, "and it was great to do it with Aaron and to continue our doubles form from Slovenia. I felt that it was a bit of a revenge win beating Ledoux as I was devastated when I lost to him in the final of the singles. I think my ball placement was better today and this allowed me to play the

shots I needed to win the match.

"This tournament has been a breakthrough for me – after beating Emil (Andersson) in the singles yesterday it gave me a lot of confidence and I really believed in my ability from that point on. I am really excited now for my next competition."

"We played really well in the doubles in the final," said McKibbin. "It's been great playing with Billy – he's had a fantastic competition so I'm very happy for him as I feel he has put himself in the mix of qualifying for Tokyo. Personally I'm happy that I continued my form from Slovenia, winning all my singles matches against foreign players.

"I was disappointed to lose to Billy yesterday as it is normally a match I feel that I would win but we play against each other a lot and he has clearly hit another level out here which is fantastic for him and for the team as a whole. I'm happy that I have put myself in a good position to qualify for Tokyo now having lost only two matches in my last two competitions but I just want to keep pushing and not be satisfied with how things have gone."

Pickard and Tveiten began with a 2-0 win against Iraq with Pickard defeating Najlam Al Dayyeni 3-1 after winning the doubles with Tveiten 3-0. The British/Norwegian partnership survived a spirited fight back from the Swedish pair of Emelie Endre and Caisa Stadler before winning the doubles 3-2 and Pickard secured the tie with a 3-0 win against Endre.

Their final round-robin match against the world No 2 from Russia Raisa Chebanika and the Romanian Gabriela Constantin proved to be the one that decided the gold medal. The Russian/Romanian partnership won the doubles 3-1 but Pickard levelled the tie with a gutsy win against Constantin 16-14 in the fifth before Chebanika secured the gold for her team with a 3-0 win against Tveiten.

"I'm very pleased to come away with another silver medal," said Pickard. "My match today against Constantin is definitely the toughest battle I have ever had. This tournament has shown me that when my mind-set is right I can be one of the best players in the world. Now I have some time to go away, work hard and come back stronger but the key is to focus on myself and control what I do."

Having started with a 2-0 win against the Japanese/Polish combination of Nobuyuki Suzuki and Robert Cwenar, Daybell and Facey Thompson came through their group despite a 2-0 loss to Poland in which they were edged out in the doubles 12-10 in the fifth. In the quarter-final against Italy they won the doubles 3-1 but lost both singles – Facey Thompson losing 3-1 to class 10 Lorenzo Cordua and Daybell beaten in four tight sets by class 9 Paralympic bronze medallist Mohamed Kalem.

Stacey teamed up with class 10 Hergelink and they won their group with 2-0 victories against the Chilean/Bulgarian partnership of Manuel Echaveguren Farias and Ventsislav Arsov and Italy. They took on Spain in the quarter-final and after losing another close doubles match 3-2 Stacey put up a great performance against the class 10 Paralympic team silver medallist Jorge Cardona, fighting back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2 before the experienced Spaniard clinched the match 11-9 in the fifth.

Megan Shackleton and her team partner Tamara Leonelli Leonelli from Chile lost their first two matches in the round-robin women's class 4-5 team event against Jordan and world champions Serbia but Shackleton lost nothing in a 3-1 singles defeat to the class 5 world No 2 Khetam Abuawad from Jordan.

The British/Chilean combination produced their best performance in their last match against the Russian Aleksandra Vasileva and Zorica Popadic from Serbia, winning the doubles 3-0 and Shackleton completing a 2-0 win with a 3-1 defeat of Vasileva to avenge her loss to the European team silver medallist in the singles competition.

Although Martin Perry and his Swiss team partner Valentin Kneuss did not win any of their four matches in the round-robin men's class 6 team event Perry won his singles against Petr Hnizdo from Czech Republic 3-0, lost a titanic battle against the Chilean Matias Pino Lorca 17-15 in the fifth and played another good match against Alvaro Valera, losing 3-1 to the world No 1 from Spain.

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