



## Bayley strikes gold in Japan

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Paralympic champion Will Bayley won his third consecutive tournament this year, taking gold in the men's class 7 singles at the PTT Japan Open in Tokyo.

World champion Ross Wilson (men's class 8), Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9) and Megan Shackleton (women's class 4) all took silver in their respective events and there were bronze medals for Jack Hunter-Spivey (men's class 5), Aaron McKibbin (men's class 8) and Kim Daybell (men's class 10).

Bayley came through his group without dropping a set against Chen Silu from Hong Kong, Kazuya Kaneko from Japan and Naazim Khan from India. A 3-0 win against Daniel Horut from Czech Republic sent him through to a semi-final against his old rival Jochen Wollmert and he beat the German three time Paralympic champion 3-1.

In the final he faced the talented Dutchman Jean-paul Montanus, who beat Bayley to win the European title in 2015, but today it was Bayley who came out on top, fighting back from 2-1 down to take a tight fourth set 15-13 and then clinch the gold 11-8 in the fifth.

"This was probably my best win of the season so far," said Bayley. "It feels amazing to have won three tournaments in a row and I just want my level to get better and better. J-p is always a tough match as he is a great player so I know that I have to play my best to win. When I was 2-1, 5-1 down I changed my tactics and felt more confident in the last set but it was so tough."

Facey Thompson produced the star performance on day one with a 3-1 defeat of top seed Iurii Nozdrunov, the world No 2 and world silver medallist from Russia, and topped his group with 3-0 wins against last year's Slovakian Open champion Lev Kats from Ukraine and Pablo Catalan Jnr from the Philippines.

He received a bye into today's semi-finals where he beat Daniel Gustafsson, the world No 5 and world team gold medallist from Sweden, in four tight sets before losing in the final to the Chinese former world and Paralympic champion Ma Lin, who now represents Australia.

"I thought I played very well against everyone up to the final," said Facey Thompson. "I had a lot of confidence

and focus coming in here – I believed in myself and it gave me the best chance. The final was a difficult match as he is such a world class player but he played really, really well so credit to him.”

Shackleton started the round-robin women’s class 4 singles with 3-0 wins against the Oceania champion from Australia Lisa Di Toro and 17 year old Wassana Sringam from India. Today she beat Lisa Hentig from Germany 3-0 and a 3-1 loss in the final match to Wijittra Jaion, the world No 8 and Asian Para Games bronze medallist from Thailand, meant that she took the silver with Jaion taking the gold.

“So far I’m pleased with how I’ve played here,” said Shackleton. “I played quite well against Jaion but just a few errors cost me the close sets in the end. I’m looking forward to building on this and hopefully upping my level for the Czech Open and the Europeans next month.”

Wilson was a 3-0 winner against both Hideo Tamai from Japan and the former world no 4 and 2018 Asian Para Games medallist Phisit Wangphonphathanasiri from Thailand, and secured top place in his group with a 3-1 win against Hyeongwon Kim, the 2017 Asian Para Youth Games silver medallist from Korea.

After dropping the first set he came back to beat Maksym Nikolenko, the Ukrainian world No 5 and Paralympic team gold medallist, 3-1 in the quarter-final and then defeated another Ukrainian, the world No 4 Ivan Mai, 3-1 in the semi-final.

In the final against world No 1 Viktor Didukh he lost a tight second set 15-13 and fought back to take the third before the Ukrainian secured the match and the gold 11-7 in the fourth.

“It has been a successful competition,” said Wilson, “but I would have loved to have got the gold. My match against Didukh was closer than in Slovenia but I’d like to improve my quality the whole way through the match as I felt I was only playing well in patches. I’ll look to do better next time and take the positives from this leading up to the European Championships.”

McKibbin beat the 2017 Oceania champion Nathan Pellissier from Australia 3-0 and put up a good performance to beat Nikolenko 3-1. He went through to the quarter-finals as group winner after a 3-0 win against Arufuhiro Kazu Tateishi from Japan and beat Wangphonphathanasiri in four close sets before losing the semi-final to Didukh 3-0.

“I’m really happy to have beaten the world No 5 and the Asian Games bronze medallist here,” said McKibbin. “It’s been a constant improvement for me this year and I’m happy to have taken another medal in singles. I felt I played well in the semi-final but Viktor was just too good today and he was onto everything I tried. I know what I need to work on, I’ve made a lot of progress and that’s the next level I need to get to so it motivates me for the coming weeks leading up to the Europeans.”

Daybell went straight through to the semi-finals as group winner after 3-0 defeats of Jagannath Mukherjee from India and Joel Coughlan, the Oceania champion from Australia. The 26 year old from Sheffield who works part-time as a junior doctor in a North London hospital, lost out in a five-set semi-final to Nariaki Kakita from Japan who went on to take the gold.

“I struggled a little bit today against Kakita and fair play to him he played very well,” said Daybell. “I feel a bit disappointed with my performance but that is the way it goes sometimes. I’ll go back to the drawing board and try and get some more hours of training in. It hasn’t been easy making the transition into work and training and I don’t feel I’ve got it quite right yet but all I can do is keep trying.”

Hunter-Spivey topped his group with 3-1 wins against the Japanese debutant Ryota Nakamura and Gerardus Van Grunsven from the Netherlands and then won his quarter-final against Kentaro Doi from Japan 3-0.

That set up a semi-final against his great friend and team partner Tommy Urhaug and the Norwegian former Paralympic champion took the match 3-1 before going on to take the gold.

“I feel that my overall level has been high,” said Hunter-Spivey. “In the semi-final I played some really good table tennis and executed what I’ve been working on in training well but I made too many unforced errors and Tommy took full advantage of it. He’s an amazing player and he was the better man on the day. I’m really happy

to take a medal out here especially with a year to go until the Paralympics.”

Billy Shilton was beaten 3-0 by world No 4 Ivan Mai from Ukraine in his group but joined McKibbin and Wilson in the knockout stages of men’s class 8 after 3-0 wins against Takumi Shukonobe from Japan and the Asian Para Games team silver medallist Komkrit Charitsat from Thailand. He was beaten 3-0 by Didukh in the quarter-finals.

In men’s class 9 Josh Stacey started with a 3-0 win against Sukij Samee, the Asian Championship team medallist from Thailand, and after a 3-0 loss to the Japanese world No 4 and World Championship bronze medallist Koyo Iwabuchi he battled his way to the quarter-finals with a 3-2 win against Wong Chi Yin the Asian Para Games bronze medallist from Hong Kong. The 19 year old Welshman went out of men’s class 9 after a 3-1 loss to Gustafsson.

Martin Perry was unlucky not to progress from his group in men’s class 6 after losing to 17 year old Marios Chatzikyriakos from Greece 3-2 and Thomas Rau, the former world and European medallist from Germany 3-1. Although he beat the 25 year old Frenchman Esteban Herrault 3-2 he lost out on a place in the knockout stages on countback.

Fliss Pickard went out of women’s class 6 at the group stages after 3-0 losses to the world champion and world No 1 Maryna Lytovchenko from Ukraine and Kunwoo Lee, the Korean world No 5, but did beat Poonam Poonam from India, last year’s Thailand Open bronze medallist, 3-0.

The tournament continues with the team events tomorrow.

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