



Shilton and Pickard are gold stars

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Gold medals for Billy Shilton in men's class 8 and Fliss Pickard in women's class 6 were the highlight of seven singles medals for the British Para Table Tennis Team at the PTT Czech Open in Ostrava today.

Welsh teenager Josh Stacey took silver in men's class 9 and there were bronze medals for Megan Shackleton (women's class 4), Rob Davies (men's class 1), Martin Perry (men's class 6) and Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9).

Shilton won his three group matches against Yordan Mitev from Bulgaria (3-0), Banyu Tri Mulyo from Indonesia (3-1) and the Romanian Alyn Nicolae (3-0) and then reached the quarter-finals with a 3-0 win against Leonardo Aritonang from Indonesia in the last 16.

He came through in five sets against the Hungarian silver medallist from Rio 2016 Andras Csonka and then beat the Paralympic and world team gold medallist from Poland Marcin Skrzynecki 3-1. In the final against 19 year old Frenchman Clement Berthier, who had won gold in the Egypt Open earlier this year, Shilton was always in control and he took the match 3-0 and the gold.

"I'm really pleased to have won the gold," said 20 year old Shilton, "especially with Tokyo just around the corner and every match and every win means a lot (in terms of qualification). I was satisfied with my level and in the last couple of weeks in training I've made a few small adjustments to help me and I feel that it has really paid off."

Pickard began the round-robin women's class 6 event with a 3-0 win against the German Celine Pistora before coming through in five sets against Svetlana Nesterenko after the Russian had fought back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2. That match proved decisive as Pickard went on to beat another Russian Fatma Fattakhova 3-1 but lost her final match against the Polish former world champion Katarzyna Marszal 3-1. With Marszal having lost two matches and Pickard and Nesterenko only one the gold was decided by the result of their match yesterday.

"It's obviously great to win gold," said Pickard. "Marszal played really well so credit to her. My level was OK but I

definitely feel that if I can be positive then I can beat anyone in the world and I am excited for the Europeans now."

Stacey came through his group without dropping a set against Kusananto from Indonesia, David Pulpan from Czech Republic and the German Laurenz Fehling. He earned a bye into the semi-finals where he got the better of his British team mate Facey Thompson 3-1 which took him into the final against world No 7 Juan Perez Gonzalez. Although Stacey had won both their previous meetings this season it was the experienced Spaniard, bronze medallist in the World Championships last year, who proved the stronger today in a 3-1 win.

"I think I've played at a good level at this tournament," said Stacey, "and I'm feeling confident going in to the team event. In the final I managed to win the first set from 6-2 down but Perez started to serve a lot of different spins on my forehand and I presented him with too many opportunities to attack me. I struggled from then onwards and he managed to win a close fourth set to take the match."

Facey Thompson beat Sukij Samee from Thailand 3-0 and Elias Monden from Germany 3-0 but lost 3-1 to the experienced former world No 4 from Hungary Dezso Berezki in his group. A walkover in his quarter-final against Tibor Chmela from Czech Republic set up the all-British semi-final clash and after winning the first set the 24 year old Londoner had to give best to his young team-mate.

"I haven't played so well here," said Facey Thompson, who will partner Stacey in the team event. "I've struggled to get my game together and in the semi-final I wasn't aggressive enough and was too defensive. But onwards and upwards for the team event now."

In her group matches Shackleton narrowly lost another great battle against her old rival Aleksandra Vasileva which the Russian edged 3-2 after the British player had twice fought back to level. The 20 year old from Todmorden was a 3-0 winner against the Serbian Kristina Arancic and Jelena Sisic from Croatia and then beat Lu Pi-chun, the World Championships team silver medallist from Chinese Taipei, 3-1 in the quarter-finals. She pushed the Japan Open gold medallist Wijittra Jaion all the way in their semi-final which the world No 7 from Thailand eventually won 3-2.

"Overall I think I played quite well," said Shackleton, "and I felt I pushed her (Thaion) until the very last point. Unfortunately a few cheap errors in the fifth set made it hard for me to come back from."

Perry topped his group with three wins from three but had to fight back from 2-0 down against Raimondo Alecci to beat the experienced Italian 11-6 in the fifth. He received a bye into the quarter-finals where he beat the Italian teenager Matteo Parenzan 3-0 and played well in defeat against the World and Paralympic champion Peter Rosenmeier from Denmark, who took the match in three sets (11-7, 13-11, 12-10) before going on to win the gold.

"I feel that with every match my level has risen out here," said Perry. "I was really happy to get the win over Alecci because I had never beaten him before and it was great to fight for the win. Parenzan has improved a lot and is a tricky player but I made sure that I was on top of my game and tried to dictate the play as much as possible and it paid off.

"I knew it would be tough against Rosenmeier but I played some really good table tennis and proved that I can mix it with the best in the world. I had chances to take the second and third sets but didn't capitalise. However, I think this is good positive momentum going into the European Championships."

Davies topped his group and with three wins from three but had to battle hard against the talented young Italian Federico Falco before coming through 11-8 in the fifth. He received a bye into the semi-finals where he was beaten 3-0 by the world champion from Korea Hyeon-Uk Kim.

"I'm never happy to lose but at the moment it is all about rankings for Tokyo and so for that it wasn't such a bad result," said Davies, who will bid to win his fourth consecutive European title later this month. "I'm pleased to have beaten the guys I have and I'm looking forward to a few days training next week and working on a few things before the Europeans."

Tom Matthews lost in three close sets to Young Dae Joo, the world No 1 and world and Paralympic silver medallist from Korea, in his group but joined Davies in the knockout stages of men's class 1 after beating the

Hungarian Janos Kaiser and Marian Kamien from Slovakia 3-0. He lost his quarter-final against Kim 3-1.

Paul Davies brought back memories of his bronze medal winning match in London 2012 by coming back from 2-1 down to beat Kim 3-2 in his first men's class 1 group match but he lost out on a place in the knockout stages on countback after a 3-1 loss to defending champion Endre Major from Hungary.

Jack Hunter-Spivey was beaten 3-1 by Nicolas Savant-Aira, the former European champion from France, in his second group match but reached the quarter-finals with wins against Isak Anders Nyholm from Sweden and the Russian Alexander Abolmasov. He lost a very close match to the Rio 2016 bronze medallist and former world No 1 Mitar Palikuca from Serbia 3-2, having fought back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2.

Also competing in Ostrava are four members of the British Pathway and Development squads.

In men's class 8 Ryan Henry lost nothing in a 3-0 defeat to Skrzynecki but was then beaten 3-1 by 15 year old Anton Grankvist from Sweden. A 3-1 win against Samuel De Chiara from Italy in his final match left Henry level on points with his Swedish and Italian opponents but he lost out on a place in the knockout stages on countback.

Alex Bland lost 3-0 to Chalermpong Punpoo, the Asian championships bronze medallist from Thailand, but a hard-fought 3-1 win against the Austrian Christian Scheiber took him through to the last 16 of men's class 7 where he lost 3-1 to the Polish Open silver medallist Maksym Chudzicki

Lucie Bouron had a tough first match against Jiyu Yoon and the World number three from Korea took the match 3-0. The 24 year old from Bracknell went out of women's class 3 after a 3-1 loss to Sanja Mijatovic from Serbia.

In men's class 2 Noel Thomas was beaten 3-0 by the two-time Paralympic champion and former World number one Jan Riapos from Slovakia and 3-0 by Martin Zvolanek from Czech Republic.

The tournament continues with the team events that conclude tomorrow.



Alex Bland in action in Ostrava (ITTF picture)

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