



## Superb win puts Wetherill in medal frame

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A win for David Wetherill over the Spanish world No 1 Alvaro Valera in the men's class 6 quarter-final was the highlight for the British team on day two of the European Para Table Tennis Championships in Helsingborg, Sweden.

Day 3 of the championships will be covered live on the BBC website – [click here to watch](#).

Otherwise it was a case of so near yet so far with 11 players losing in the quarter-final stage of their respective events including world and Commonwealth champion Ross Wilson and Paralympic champion Will Bayley, who lost in a dramatic fifth set to an inspired performance from young Swedish player Thomas Westerberg.

### Men's class 6

Wetherill secured top place in his group with a 3-1 win in his final match against Alexander Nagy from Slovakia. After beating Danny Bobrov from Israel 3-1 in the last 16 he played superbly to beat Valera 3-1 and avenge his defeats by the Spaniard in Rio 2016 and the European final two years ago.

"It's good but it is only a quarter-final," said Wetherill. "He went 1-0 up but I still felt relaxed. When you walk into a cave and poke the bear you don't come out alive and I think losing the first was quite good for me.

"I still feel like I am working my way into the tournament; I'm so rusty but I feel that I am getting better and better and feel comfortable on the table. We'll see what happens tomorrow – that puts me in a good position for Tokyo and that is the only reason I am here – to qualify for Tokyo next year."

Paul Karabardak topped his group with a 3-0 win against the 16-year-old German Benedikt Muller and received a bye into the quarter-finals where he lost a tight second set 15-13 to Thomas Rau which proved crucial as the German went on to win 3-1.

"I think the second set was the key to the match really," said Karabardak, "but he played really well. I'm normally good against him and normally win but he played above his level today so congratulations to him. Looking

forward to the team event now – Dave, Martin and I are playing really well so we'll have a good go at the team event and a good go at defending our title."

Martin Perry saved six match points in the fourth set against George Mouchthis from Greece to level the match at 2-2. Although he went on to lose the deciding set 11-6 this proved crucial as he went through to the last 16 on countback with three players in the group all recording one win.

In the last 16 he played the Russian former world No 2 Alexander Esaulov and he produced a great comeback from 2-0 down to take the match 11-6 in the fifth. He lost 3-0 to the world and Paralympic champion Peter Rosenmeier from Denmark in the quarter-final.

"When you play against Peter it is always going to be a tough match," said Perry, "but I feel that I played really well and I can't ask for much more from myself than that. I was fortunate to get out of my group on countback and then fought back really hard in the last 16 to win the match.

"After that performance I feel that I deserve to be here. I set myself a goal of reaching one stage further than the last Europeans and I've done that so hopefully in 2021 I can get a medal.

"We've got the team event to look forward to but before that hopefully Dave can go and do the business in the singles tomorrow and then after that we can focus on the team event and look to defend our title."

### **Men's class 7**

As group winner and No 1 seed, Bayley received a bye into the quarter-finals and he came up against 21-year-old Westerberg who was on a high after beating two-time Paralympic champion Jochen Wollmert in the last 16. After dropping the first set Bayley came back to lead 2-1 but roared on by the home crowd the young Swede levelled the match at 2-2 and after saving a match point converted his own to win 12-10 in the fifth.

"He is a really promising young player and played really well today," said Bayley. "I've played him a few times this season and haven't dropped a set but he played really well and it just wasn't my day. I missed out on a few great chances to win the match and he came good and won it so well done to him.

"I've had the best season I've probably ever had – winning three tournaments in a row – so it is a real disappointment when you come to a major and you don't do as well as you've done all season.

"That's sport and now I need to bounce back. This gives me massive motivation for Tokyo – it is my dream to win it again and I need to learn from this and come back stronger."

### **Men's class 8**

Wilson also received a bye in the quarter-finals having won his group but he could not find his best form and was beaten 3-1 by the world No 8 Maksym Nikolenko from Ukraine.

"It didn't go well at all," said Wilson. "I haven't played very well here in this tournament and I haven't found my feet. I was trying to make myself feel that I was ready but I didn't feel that I've had the consistency in training and I didn't come in with a very good game plan today.

"It is a weird feeling after winning the Commonwealths and the Worlds – it's nice to have all the highs but then you come here and lose in the quarter-finals. It is not what I expected to do and I just haven't performed well here.

"I will use this as motivation for Tokyo next year – it has given me a good kick to show me what it is like to lose again."

Aaron McKibbin secured top place in his group with a 3-0 win against Alyn Nicolae from Romania and took the first set in his last 16 match against Piotr Grudzien but the former world, Paralympic and European team gold medallist from Poland came back to win 3-1.

Earlier in the day there was disappointment for Billy Shilton as he lost 3-1 to Clement Berthier in his final group

match. The 20-year-old had beaten Berthier in the final of the Czech Open last week but after edging a tight second set the 19-year-old Frenchman, who won gold in the Egypt Open, grew in confidence and took the next two sets and the place in the knockout stages.

"I think the second set was crucial," said Shilton. "I was 1-0, 10-8 and if I had won that set I could have maybe won the match so it was definitely a turning point. I wasn't playing my best table tennis and I was making a lot of mistakes. When you know you need to pull it out of the bag and it is not going your way it is really difficult.

"I'll focus on the team event now, try to put that result in the back of my mind and just try and play the best table tennis I can."

#### Men's class 9



Ross Wilson in Helsingborg (ITTF picture)

Ashley Facey Thompson lost the first set against Pawel Konstantyn 17-15 but the former European team medallist from Poland won only six more points in the match as the 24-year-old Londoner cruised through the next three sets to make it three wins from three in his group. He played 18-year-old Lev Kats from Ukraine in the quarter-finals and came heartbreakingly close to reaching his first major semi-final. After fighting his way back from 2-0 down to force a deciding set he had match point only to see his opponent save it with a net cord and then go on to take the match.

"I did well to come back and he got lucky with the net cord at the end," said Facey Thompson. "I didn't play that well but I believed and I brought it back but I couldn't stop thinking about the net cord. I should have changed the next serve but I can't think about that now."

Josh Stacey went through to the knockout stages as group winner on countback after a 3-0 win against Tonnie Heijnen, the former world, Paralympic and European team gold medallist from Netherlands. He was drawn against Juan Bautista Perez Gonzalez, the World and European bronze medallist from Spain in the quarter-finals, losing in three close sets.

"I didn't convert when I had the chances," said Stacey. "I had set points in two sets and I didn't take any of them.



I think that would have flipped the tide of the match and I would have been in control but he was better when it really mattered."

#### **Men's class 5**

Jack Hunter-Spivey received a bye into the quarter-finals after topping his group with a 3-1 win against Milos Tesar from Czech Republic. He was unlucky to be drawn against Ali Ozturk, the world and European champion from Turkey, and he led 2-0 before Ozturk used all his experience to come back and take the match 3-2.

"I was relaxed going into the match and focused," said Hunter-Spivey, "but maybe that went a bit too cold in the next three sets. I focused as best I could and fought as hard as I could but I think my persona could have been a bit more fiery. He started to play better and he's won these championships before but I'm really disappointed to lose after being in such a good position.

"It is very frustrating and I always feel like the bridesmaid and never the bride at these major competitions but I'll get there one day."

#### **Men's class 10**

Kim Daybell lost a very tight five set match to Igor Misztal, the 22-year-old World and European team gold medallist from Poland, but took second place in his group. That took him through to a quarter-final against another Polish player Patryk Chojnowski, the world and European champion, and the world No 1 was just too strong in a 3-0 win.

"It would have been good to win this morning and top the group but it was a good game," said Daybell.

"Everyone at this level is playing so well and every game is hard. I can't be too disappointed overall with my singles tournament. It was a tough draw – Patryk is a world class athlete and there is not much I could do. Sometimes you have to accept it if you are beaten by the better man.

"We've got three strong players now in the team competition and I'm looking forward to playing in the team event with Ash and Josh – it is always an honour."

#### **Men's class 1**

As top seed and group winner Paralympic champion Rob Davies received a bye into tomorrow's semi-finals.

Tom Matthews beat Timo Natunen from Finland 3-0 in his final group match but was bitterly disappointed to lose his quarter-final 3-1 against the Russian Dmitry Lavrov, European bronze medallist in 2015.

"Lavrov played really well to be fair," said Matthews. "He was clinical on my serves and he came out on top and congratulations to him. There is a lot to build on – I'll go back into training and see where we go from here."

Paul Davies was also very disappointed to lose 3-0 to Sylvio Keller from Switzerland in his second group match but went down fighting as always, saving match points in the third before losing it 18-16.

"I've got to give it to Keller he played well," said Davies. "I wasn't on my game but he deserved to win in the end. 18-16 in the third set says a lot but it was a bit too late by then, I should have done the business earlier. He is an awkward player – he does good things with the ball and I didn't deserve it today. I could hear Rob (Davies) in the crowd cheering me on and the whole team have been so supportive but it wasn't meant to be today."

#### **Women's class 4-5**

Megan Shackleton had lost to Carlotta Ragazzini at the Czech Open last week but she went through to the quarter-finals after a 3-0 win against the Italian. She never recovered from a slow start against the world No 4 from Germany Sandra Mikolaschek and was beaten 3-0.

"I think in the beginning I was rushing a little bit too much," said Shackleton. "I believe in myself at this level now that I can beat the top players but it is sometimes getting that balance between finding the right time to play certain balls in a rally. I feel that in the third set I did start doing some better stuff but at that point it was a little

bit too late and Sandra was playing really well, to be fair.

Sue Gilroy went out of women's class 4-5 after a 3-1 loss to Jelena Sisic from Croatia in her final group match.

#### **Women's class 6**

Fliss Pickard fought off the challenge of Gabriela Constantin from Romania in her second group match, coming back from 8-3 down to take the crucial third set 14-12 and going on to win 3-1. In her quarter-final against Stephanie Grebe, the world and Paralympic medallist, she fought hard again but the German world No 4 took the match 14-12 in the fourth.

"I feel that it is just small margins now and I belong in that top few girls," said Pickard. "It is just little things and I'm really pleased with my progress. It has been tough moving to Sheffield and a big change for me but I can see the difference it has made and it has been brilliant. I'm going to keep grafting; I'm obviously doing the right things and it is just a matter of time."

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