



## Four hit gold standard for Para GB

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The British Para table tennis team ended the PTT Finland Open in Lahti on a high with team gold medals for Ashley Facey Thompson and Joshua Stacey in men's class 9, Martin Perry in men's class 6 and Lucie Bouron in women's class 4-5, silver for Fliss Pickard in women's class 6-7 and Billy Shilton in men's class 8 and bronze for Kim Daybell in men's class 10.

[It follows a haul of silver and bronze medals for Para GB athletes in the individual competitions.](#)

Facey Thompson and Stacey beat the combination of Bart Van Der Zanden from Netherlands, Raimondo Alecci from Italy and Sean Geoghegan from Ireland 2-0 and topped their group with a 2-1 win against the Japanese team of Koyo Iwabuchi and Takumi Shukunobe.

After a 2-0 semi-final win against Esa Miettinen from Finland and Aviv Gordon from Israel they faced Japan again in the final and after combining with Facey Thompson to win the doubles 19 year old Welshman Stacey secured the gold with a hard-fought 3-2 win against world No 3 Iwabuchi.

"It was a weird feeling playing a team we had already played in the final," said Stacey, "but me and Ash had a really good focus in the doubles and dictated throughout.

"In the first set against Iwabuchi I was down heavily and managed to win it 12-10 before losing the next two sets. I struggled a lot with his serves but in the fourth set I decided to commit to my receive a lot more and it presented me with an opportunity to attack strongly into either corner. I took the fourth set comfortably and in the fifth it was very close throughout but I felt I was dictating what pace the game was being played at and I managed to win it in the end."

"Josh and I played well in the team event," said Facey Thompson. "Our doubles was strong overall and our morale and team work was at its highest level."

Perry teamed up with Marios Chatzikyriakos from Greece and 18 year old Haris Eminovic from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who was making his international debut. They won all their matches in the round-robin men's

class 6 team event, recording 2-0 wins against Finland, Russia and Israel/Norway and clinching the gold with a 2-0 win against the German/Czech combination of European bronze medallist Thomas Rau and Petr Hnizdo.

"Marios and I played good doubles together," said Perry. "I don't remember us playing together in the past but we have a good relationship off the table so I think that helped massively as we had great communication. Haris was supporting us so strongly and it made playing that little bit easier as he was just so happy to be involved and would just cheer and try to push us on."

"I hurt my knee a little in the last doubles and so my game plan in the singles against Hnizdo was to play tactically in order to limit my time standing up and it paid off with a 3-0 win. I've played a lot of competitions this year and I think it is starting to catch up with me physically so it will be good to have a few days rest before heading to the China Open in Shanghai."

Class 3 Bouron from Bracknell and team partner Caroline Tabib, the class 5 world No 7 from Israel, started with a 2-0 win against the Chinese Taipei team of class 4 Asian Para Games silver medallist Lu Pi-chun, class 5 world bronze medallist Hsiao Shu-chin and Lee Ya-Chu.

That result proved decisive in the end as after a 2-1 win against the top seeds Russia/Turkey/USA represented by two-time European team medallist Aleksandra Vasileva, Irem Oluk and Valerie Rolph they lost their final match against the German team of class 4 world No 5 Sandra Mikolaschek and Lisa Hentig 2-0. This left them level on points with Chinese Taipei but the result of their match decided the gold in favour of Bouron and Tabib.

"I'm really happy to win gold in the team event," said Bouron. "Caroline and I were quite strong playing doubles together which definitely helped us to clinch top spot. Playing up in class 4-5 was a challenge for me but it was great to experience a different style of play."

Pickard and Maryna Lytovchenko, the world No 1 and world champion from Ukraine, were 2-0 winners against the Swedish/Finnish combination of Caisa Stadler and Rita Lahtinen and the German/Norwegian team of Corinna Hochdorfer, team gold medallist in the 2017 European Championships, and European team bronze medallist Nora Korneliussen. Their final match against Russia was to decide the gold and it went to world No 2 Raisa Chebanika and European champion Maliak Alieva after a 2-0 win.

"Playing with Maryna was great experience," said Pickard, "learning from her, not only her shot selection, but the way she approaches matches. I felt we played well together in doubles but I feel I let her down in the singles. I need to find a way to bridge the gap to get to the level of the top five players and I will – it is just a matter of time."

Shilton and former Paralympic team gold medallist Marc Ledoux from Belgium topped their group after 2-0 wins against the Israeli/Italian team of Zeev Glickman and Samuel De Chiara and the Norwegian/Russian partnership of Brage Titlestad and Nikita Novikov. They won their semi-final against Leonardo Aritonang and Abdul Abdullah from Indonesia 2-0 but lost the final to the powerful Ukrainian team of world No 1 Viktor Didukh, world No 4 Maksym Nikolenko and world No 5 Ivan Mai, Didukh taking the gold for his team with victory over Shilton in the singles.

"I was happy with my level overall during the tournament," said Shilton, "and disappointed not to have beaten Nikolenko in the singles yesterday after being 2-2. I'm happy to get silver in the team and really enjoyed playing with Marc."

Daybell and Benoit Grasset from France lost their first group match to the Indonesia team of world No 2 David Jacobs and Komet Akbar 2-1 but progressed to the semi-finals with a 2-0 win against Ivan Karpov and Ivan Shmuilo from Russia. They were beaten 2-0 in their semi-final against the European silver medallists from France, losing the doubles to Mateo Boheas and Gilles De La Bourdonnaye and Daybell losing a close singles to world No 4 Boheas 3-2.

"I had some good performances during the tournament and was disappointed not to turn them into wins," said Daybell, who combines his table tennis with working as a junior doctor in a North London hospital. "It's been a tough season but I have to keep trusting in my game and hopefully I can turn things around."

Marc Bonnar teamed up with Timo Natunen from Finland and Nuno Duarte Almeida from Portugal in men's class 1-2 and they lost their three matches against Russia/Ukraine, France and Japan. Dan Bullen and Lee York went out of men's class 4-5 after losing their three group matches to Chinese Taipei, Indonesia and Japan.

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