



## London 2012 medallist Paul Davies retires

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**Posted On:** November 21, 2019

Paul Davies, who won a memorable bronze medal in the men's class 1 singles at the London 2012 Paralympic Games, has announced his retirement from Para table tennis with immediate effect. The 53-year-old Welshman also won medals at world and European level, including team gold in the European Championships in 2013, and represented ParalympicsGB in Rio as well as London.

"The time is right now because I feel that I've achieved everything I could achieve in the sport," said Davies. "I've got a lot out of it and met a lot of people; I've won medals all around the world and I feel it is time to move on to the next chapter."

Davies first played table tennis at school and rediscovered the sport at the age of 30 when he started playing again as part of his rehab following a road traffic accident that left him paralysed. An invitation to a 'Come and Try Day' gave him the opportunity to try different sports and for three years he played wheelchair rugby until a shoulder injury led to him playing table tennis again at the spinal injuries club in Rookwood Hospital in Cardiff. He was selected to play for Wales in a tournament in Germany and a new career was born. Originally self-funded through Wales he has been part of the British Para Table Tennis squad since 2008.

London 2012 was his Paralympics debut and he nearly raised the roof of the ExCel building with a dramatic five-set win against the Korean Chang-Ho Lee to clinch the individual bronze medal in his class. "The buzz and excitement of London was incredible," he said at the time. "My match was the last to finish and hearing 6,000 people shouting my name was incredible – if only I could bottle that!"

That moment remains the highlight of Davies's illustrious career.

"Winning that bronze in the ExCel – that for me was life-changing," he said. "Not just for me but the whole team because me and Will (Bayley) both medalled, the girls won a team medal and the boys as well and I think that was the turning point for British Para table tennis. We'd never won so many medals in the Paralympic Games until then and we did pretty well in Rio but for me London was life changing."

The following year Davies took silver in the European Championships, losing in the final to his great friend Rob Davies before combining with his fellow Welshman to win gold in the team event. He then missed almost two years due to injury but returned to compete in Rio, where although he did not win a medal he revived memories of London with a dramatic five-set win against the Brazilian Aloisio Lima Junior in his second group match. At 10-5 down in the fifth and with the crowd at fever pitch he looked to be heading for defeat but with all his fighting spirit he levelled at 10-10 and saved a further two match points before clinching the match 14-12.

"I never thought I could have the same feelings as I had in London but when I had to play the Brazilian in Rio against the Brazilian crowd that was loud," he recalled. "I came out on top and I won that match but the Brazilian crowd got on our side as well. That provided a lot of inspiration and motivation for the team but it's still never going to be London. To have been to a home Games and an away Games – I've had a good time."

Rob Davies has been a rival and team-mate as well as a close friend and the two Welshmen have achieved great success together as a team and in singles, including an historic gold, silver and bronze in the 2017 European Championships with another Welshman Tom Matthews.

"I nurtured him (Rob) after his injury and started showing him how to play the game," said Davies. "I think I showed him too much because now he is on top which is great. Rob has done really well and I hope that Tom will come through as well and be as successful as I have been. Under the current management there is no excuse. We have the best facility going, the best coaching staff, the best performance staff and it is all there – so grab it by the scruff of the neck and just do it."

"I'm going to miss the family we have here (at the EIS in Sheffield) but I'm not going to miss getting up at 6am. I will miss the training because I enjoy the training and I enjoy the competitions. I'm 53 now – how many of these lads in the hall are going to be here at 53? I don't think it will be many. But I've had a good time and I wouldn't change anything that has happened in the past. Life is life and I'm moving on to the next chapter now. Happy days."

British team Performance Director Gorazd Vecko acknowledged the part that Davies has played in the success of the British team over the past 10 years.

"Paul has made a huge contribution to the team and when he took a medal in London 2012 we were really proud because it was a big success for us and an amazing achievement for him. He had a wonderful career and it is good that he is retiring when he is still competing at the very top level, which he showed by beating the world champion in the Czech Open this year.

"Bronze in London is the best result that he had but in 2017 at the Europeans in Slovenia we had the 1-2-3 in men's class 1 and Paul had bronze. It was a big success for us and he will always remember the day when it was three British players on the podium.

"He is a great person and I have really enjoyed working with him. He was always nice and really important for the younger players as he was helping them with a lot of good and positive advice. I wish him all the best in his personal life and whatever he decides to do next. We will look to try and keep him in Para table tennis in Britain because to lose a player with so much experience would be wrong so we hope to find a role for him in the future."

Davies epitomised the fighting spirit that has become the hallmark of the British team under Vecko but would like to be remembered for his sportsmanship as much as his never-say-die performances.

"If I could sum up in one word how I would like to be remembered as a table tennis player, it would be fair," he said. "Be fair on the table, be fair to your opponents and have fair play. Thank you and goodnight."

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