



Stacey pleased with silver

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Joshua Stacey continued his good start to Paralympic year by taking silver in the men's class 9 singles in the Costa Brava Para Open in Platja D'Aro.

There were bronze medals for Megan Shackleton (women's class 4-5), Martin Perry (men's class 6) and Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9).

Stacey defeated David Pulpan from Czech Republic 3-0 and then pushed the Chinese former world and Paralympic champion Ma Lin, who now represents Australia, all the way losing in four very close sets (-9,10,-10,-11). A 3-0 win against Bart Van Der Zanden from Netherlands secured second place in the group and a place in the semi-finals.

Facey Thompson was a comfortable 3-0 winner against the unranked Spaniard Joaquin Azcon and was then impressive in beating the Japanese world No 2 Koyo Iwabuchi 3-0, taking a very tight second set 21-19 and then running away with the third set 11-3. Despite a 3-1 loss to the Russian world silver medallist Iurii Nozdrunov, Facey Thompson went through to the semi-finals as group winner to face his team-mate Stacey. As in Poland two weeks ago it was the 19-year-old Welshman who proved the stronger in a 3-1 win.

That gave Stacey another opportunity to play Ma Lin in the final but the three-time world champion and London 2012 Paralympic gold medallist was just too strong and took the match 3-1 and the gold.

"I think my singles as a whole was good," said Stacey. "I played well throughout but Ma Lin was a bit stronger than me on his fifth ball and it showed at the beginning of the final and it meant I was always trying to claw my way back.

"It was good experience playing him and I think I've learnt that I need to play in a composed manner while taking the opportunity to attack when it is presented to me. I'm looking forward to playing the team event now with Ashley and trying to win another medal."

With Paralympic qualification on the line Facey Thompson was disappointed in spite of a good win against the

world No 2.

"I'm not really happy with how I've played during the qualification season," he said, "and I feel that I have let myself down. In one way it is easy playing your team-mate because you feel relaxed but Josh is a good player and I'm in his pocket at the moment."

Shackleton was a 3-0 winner against the former world team silver medallist from Chinese Taipei Lee Ya-Chu and then beat Bhavina Patel, the world No 9 from India, 3-1. She secured top place in her group with a battling 3-2 win against Mi Kyoung Shin from Korea, winning an epic fifth set 20-18 after the Asian Championships team silver medallist had twice levelled the match.

A 3-0 win in the quarter-finals against Faiza Mahmoud from Egypt, the class 5 African champion and last month's Egypt Open gold medallist, took her into the semi-finals and she again played well despite a 3-1 defeat to Young A Jung, the class 5 world No 4 from Korea.

"I feel that I have found a better overall base to my game at this tournament," said Shackleton, "and I've definitely picked up a bit more confidence from getting a few wins under my belt – especially after a tough competition in Poland. I have no regrets from my semi-final – I gave it my all today but Jung played some really good stuff and is a strong player."

Perry began with a 3-0 win against the unranked Petr Hnizdo from Czech Republic but then came up against Alberto Seoane Alcazar in good form and the world team champion from Spain took the match 3-0. Perry took second place in the group with a 3-0 win against the Egyptian Ibrahim Hamadtou and was rewarded with a semi-final against world No 1 Alvaro Valera. Although the first two sets were close the Spaniard showed all his class to seal a 3-0 win.

"I never really got going in the group stages," said Perry, "and against Seoane I wasn't challenging and pushing him like I know I can. Playing Valera seemed to spark something in me and I felt that I could have definitely won the first two sets but he completely outplayed me in the third.

"The blow was softened somewhat when we shook hands and he said 'I'm sorry I got lucky on the big points.' It was nice of him to acknowledge how tight the match was and although I lost he's the best in the world and I held my own so I don't think there is anything to be ashamed of there."

Billy Shilton won team silver at the Polish Para Open with Richard Csejtey last month and after dropping the first set came back to beat the very experienced former world champion from Slovakia 3-1, 15-13 in the fourth. He topped his group in men's class 8 with a 3-0 win against 16-year-old Vit Spalek from Czech Republic and led Clement Berthier 2-0 in their semi-final but the 20-year-old Frenchman, who had won their last meeting in the European Championships last September, fought back and after edging a tight fourth set 12-10 took the match 11-7 in the fifth.

Tom Matthews has had some very close matches against the men's class 1 world No 8 Federico Falco and it was the 25-year-old Italian who came out on top here in a 3-1 win, taking a 2-0 lead and then just edging the fourth set 16-14 after Matthews had fought his way back into the match by taking the third.

The Welshman came through in five sets against the Argentinian Guillermo Bustamante Sierra, the 2017 PanAmerican bronze medallist, and was unlucky to lose out on a semi-final place on countback with Bustamante Sierra having beaten Falco to leave all three men level on points.

Sue Gilroy lost her opening match in women's class 4-5 to Mahmoud 3-2, having led 2-1, and was then beaten in three close sets by the 2018 Asian Para Games silver medallist Lu Pi-chun from Chinese Taipei. Although she won her final match against Cristina Rubio from Spain 3-0 it was not enough to put her through to the quarter-finals.

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