



Hunter-Spivey and Matthews impress in Tokyo

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Impressive wins for Jack Hunter-Spivey (men's class 5) against the world No 2 Cheng Ming Chih from Chinese Taipei and Tom Matthews (men's class 1) on his Paralympic debut over the world No 3 Ki-won Nam from Korea were just two of the highlights of some great performances by the ParalympicsGB table tennis team in the morning session at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium today.

There were also superb wins for Paul Karabardak (men's class 6) over world No 4 Bobi Simion from Romania, Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9) over the world silver medallist Iurii Nozdrunov representing the Russian Paralympic Committee, and a first win for Joshua Stacey in his first Paralympics.

You can watch all the action from Tokyo on the [Channel 4 website](#).

Men's class 1

Matthews showed no sign of nerves on his Paralympic debut against the Rio 2016 bronze medallist Nam and took the first two games 11-6. The Korean former world team gold medallist came back to edge the third 12-10 and again from 7-2 down in the fourth to level at 8-8 but coach Neil Robinson called a timeout and Matthews held his nerve to take the game 11-9 and the match 3-1.

"It definitely doesn't get much better than that," said a delighted Matthews. "It was a hard fight and I came out swinging and came out on top so I'm really happy. I felt quite relaxed and confident going into the match. I've got my full strength back now and I've struggled a bit the last year or two without it. I've worked hard in lockdown so I'm very proud and very happy to come out with a win.

"When it got close at the end I just tried to focus on my game really. He'd done a few good serves and caught me out but I just reset. I've been doing a lot of work with Andy Hill our team psychologist and I just took my time and came out on top. Massive credit to him as well for helping me.

"I'm loving it here. It's great being part of a bigger team with ParalympicsGB and I've just got to thank the UK Lottery players for letting me achieve my dreams and letting me continue playing as without them I wouldn't be

able to do it, so thank you very much.”

Matthews plays his second group match tomorrow against Dmitry Lavrov from the Russian Paralympic Committee.

“I’ll just keep on doing what I’m doing,” said the 29-year-old Welshman, “don’t change anything and don’t worry about anyone else, just focus on myself and keep going. Hopefully I can get through my next match and we’ll see where we go.”



Tom Matthews (ITTF photo)

Men’s class 5

Hunter-Spivey had never beaten Cheng in five previous meetings but he raced through the first game 11-3 and then took the second 11-4. The very experienced world bronze medallist from Chinese Taipei called time out in the third but didn’t manage to halt the British player’s momentum and the 26-year-old from Liverpool completed a dominant performance by taking the third game 11-3.

“I’ve put all the work in and left no stone unturned,” said an ecstatic Hunter-Spivey, “and to beat the world number two quite comfortably is a surreal feeling so I feel really emotional. I felt good going in but although I knew my level was higher, with the pandemic I didn’t know what the other athletes had been doing so it was tough to know what level they were at. It is a bit like going to the Bake-Off and making a cake and you don’t know what anyone else’s cake is like.

“All I ever wanted to do as a kid is to win a match at the Paralympics and I’ve done it and I feel like I put in a good performance. I’ve worked so hard with our psychologist Andy Hill and coach Andrew Rushton to keep focused on what my tactic was and block out the noise of anything else like timeouts. I was thinking ‘he’s going to come back, he’s going to do something’ but it turns out I’d nullified what he was doing. I’m happy with the way I played but the job is not done by any means; I’ve got to go and win my next match now.”

Hunter-Spivey plays his final group match this evening against the Belgian Bart Brands.

Men's class 6

Simion has been Karabardak's nemesis over the past few years and had won their last eight matches going back to 2015. The European silver medallist from Romania took the first game 11-7 but Karabardak fought back magnificently to take the next two 11-7 and 11-8. From 6-3 down in the fourth Simion levelled at 9-9 but the Welshman was not to be denied and he held his nerve to clinch the match 12-10 on his second match point.

"I'm unbelievably delighted," said Karabardak. "I always think I've got a chance of beating him but I haven't beaten him for such a long time and he is very tricky for me and difficult to play. But today I managed to play the right tactic and managed to get into the game. I think it played into my favour that he wasn't expecting me to play so well and I think that maybe rattled him a little bit and put him under a lot of pressure. But he still played well and pushed me all the way.

"When it got close in the fourth I was thinking I need to keep playing and not try and force the point and win it too quickly. I need to get myself into the point and try and win it with control; I was also thinking that it was probably my best chance to win the match because it would probably have been very difficult in a fifth set."

In his fourth Paralympic Games the 35-year-old from Swansea is in the form of his life as he bids for his first Paralympic medal.

"I think people need different times to get used to things," he said, "and I've come here and feel really relaxed and confident. It's taken me my fourth Paralympics to get that feeling and maybe it has just happened a bit later for me. Not coming here just for the singles and having the chance to play team event so having two competitions has also relaxed me a little bit. I'm really looking forward to my next match now."

Karabardak plays his final group match tomorrow against the Australian Trevor Hirth.

Men's class 8

World champion Ross Wilson was involved in a very tight match with Peng Weinan, the Asian champion and the 19-year-old from China started the best, taking the first game 11-7. Wilson came back to take the next two 11-5 and 11-6 but when Peng took the fourth 11-6 it went to a decider and although Wilson saved three match points it was the young Chinese player who edged the game 11-9 and the match 3-2.

"I think I played alright," said Wilson. "The standard was quite high – China tend to have that sort of aggressive style where if you don't counter their aggression and play with almost equal risk then you're always at threat. I think today when I was getting put under pressure to both wings I wasn't countering very well; I wasn't holding that first ball very well and I think that was probably my downfall.

"I had some stronger points like in the third set when I played well and dominated the set. In the fourth set I maybe lost a little bit of concentration and then the same in the fifth although it's not really a lack of concentration – more that as the game is going on it is harder to focus on those key things that you need to do. Because they change in the games as well you are always trying to adapt to what is going on and I just don't think I was as good as him at doing that today.

"A lack of match play affects a lot of things and that is probably the biggest one – the tighter points when you feel a bit nervous and you don't trust in your game as much and perhaps that is a bit of what happened today. But I really enjoyed the game again today – it is so nice to be playing and I'm happy here – I'm happy competing and the most important thing is I'm enjoying myself. I don't think I'm going to take this as a negative, I'm going to take it as a learning curve and push on forward for the rest of the competition."

Wilson's group will be decided by the final match between Peng and the Frenchman Clement Berthier to be played this evening.

Aaron McKibbin faced the experienced Piotr Grudzien from Poland and the Paralympic bronze medallist from Rio 2016 quickly established a 2-0 lead, taking the first two games 11-5. To his credit McKibbin fought back from 7-3 down in the third to level at 9-9 but the 29-year-old former world No 1 used all his experience to clinch the game 13-11 and the match 3-0.

"It was a strange match, to be honest," said McKibbin. "I felt really good going into the game and I felt well in myself in the match as well and thought I was going to bring a good performance but I just couldn't find my range.

"He was good at tying me up and making it quite difficult for me. I found my rhythm a bit late but even then I think I was going for the right shots I just wasn't executing them. I was making a lot of silly mistakes and towards the end I maybe tightened up a little bit and he's a good player.

"Match sharpness is definitely a thing in table tennis and I do tend to start the season slow and build as it gets towards the majors and we haven't played a competition in two years so that sharpness is lacking. But it's done now and I've got to let it go and reflect after the tournament. It's time to focus on the next match now and hopefully I can still go through the group and we start again."

McKibbin's group will also be decided this evening by the final match between Grudzien and Nathan Pellissier from Australia.



Billy Shilton in action in Tokyo (ITTF photo)

Billy Shilton had something of a baptism of fire in his first Paralympic match as he took on the world No 1 Viktor Didukh. The 34-year-old four-time European champion and former world champion from Ukraine took the first two games 11-4 but Shilton kept fighting and had two points to take the third game at 10-8 before Didukh secured a 3-0 win 12-10 in the third.

"It was obviously an amazing experience playing here," said 22-year-old Shilton, "like nothing I have seen before or competed in before and then having to play the world No 1 who is so good and has dominated for so long it was really difficult, to be honest.

"If I had taken that third set maybe that would have given me a bit of confidence and I could have pushed him a bit harder, so I was disappointed not to win that third set but on the whole it was a great experience."

Shilton plays his final group match this evening against the African champion Victor Farinloye from Nigeria.

Men's class 9

Joshua Stacey won his first match on his Paralympic debut, beating Chao Ming Chee, the 24-year-old Asian Para Games bronze medallist from Malaysia, 3-0. The 21-year-old looked in control throughout and held his nerve in the third game when Chee came back from 6-3 down to lead 9-8 before Stacey took the game 11-9 and the match.

Unassuming as ever, the young Welshman was not about to get carried away by his first win at a Paralympics or see it as a milestone in his still relatively short career.

"I think I want something a bit brighter and better to be one of my milestones and obviously a medal would be ideal," he said. "Of course it's a nice feeling to win so I'm happy. I think I played pretty well in patches. I let my game flow a little bit better which gives you a better opportunity to get into points and didn't give my opponent many chances. I'm definitely getting settled into the tournament now – I felt I was moving better today."

Stacey plays his final group match this evening against Mohamed Amine Kalem from Italy.



Joshua Stacey (photo by imagecomms)

Facey Thompson and Nozdrunov have played many times and the 31-year-old former world No 2 held a 21-3 win/loss record against his younger British opponent coming into today's match. He made the better start, taking the first game 11-8 but Facey Thompson edged the second 12-10 and took the third 11-8. Nozdrunov levelled the match by taking the fourth 11-9 but Facey Thompson regrouped and took the match 11-7 in the deciding game.

"It was an up and down match," admitted the 26-year-old Londoner. "Mixed emotions – I doubted myself and then trusted myself but I came through and felt better at the end. I had the momentum at the end of the fifth game; I believed more and more and it came my way."

"It was hard after losing the fourth. I thought I was going to win 3-1 and my mind went too far ahead and I lost my focus and you can't do that against a great player like him. I was frustrated but I regrouped and played unbelievably well in the fifth – my tactics were perfect.

"I've finally got my first win at a Paralympics. I think now I feel more relieved because that was a weight on my shoulders – two Games and I hadn't won a singles match and that was in my head for a long time even going into this match. I've finally won one and I'm proud of myself that I came through.

"Yesterday was heart-breaking as I was 2-1 up again and maybe I should have won two matches but that is sport – Koyo (Iwabuchi) played amazingly well. The whole group is crazy everyone is beating each other and no one has gone through yet so the next match is really important. It's the group of death but I'm proud of how I did today."

Facey Thompson plays his final group match this evening against the European silver medallist Lev Kats from Ukraine.



Ashley Facey Thompson (photo by imagecomms)

Women's class 4

Megan Shackleton needed to win her second group match against Bhavina Hasmukhbhai Patel from India and she made a brave attempt, fighting for every point but eventually losing in four close sets 7-11, 11-9, 15-17, 11-13.

"My goal was to get out of the group stages here," said the 22-year-old from Todmorden, "and I think I was more than capable of it but I felt the pressure a little bit and didn't quite manage to settle myself into it match the way I would have liked. But I carried on fighting as best as I could and I can be proud that I didn't give up and I fought to the end.

"I've grown up watching the Olympics and the Paralympics and I've set myself that goal from being a little kid so to have realised that dream is like a win in itself. I'll keep playing and keep building the experience and next time I'll get out of the group stages and start taking medals – that's my goal.

"I'm really looking forward to the team event. Me and Sue (Bailey) have been doing some great stuff together over the last few years and it will be a nice experience for Sue to play team event in the Paralympics again and we'll see what we can do together."

Sue Bailey also needed to win her second match and was bitterly disappointed to lose 3-1 to the former world team silver medallist from Chinese Taipei Lu Pi-chun.

"I was flying at the qualification tournament," said Bailey, "and felt really good coming into this tournament. I felt really confident going into the match yesterday but as soon as my serves started being called my confidence just went because when you are giving the number two in the world point after point you just lose your confidence in your own ability and service."

"I was so disappointed with how I played yesterday and it was very difficult to get myself back up. I tried to regroup today although I do find her awkward but I've beaten her many times. I was just hesitant and I wasn't flowing like I was when I came into the game yesterday."

"Win or lose I think that is what frustrates me more that I haven't shown how well I can play. I just need to take a couple of days out now, support the rest of the team, get practising some doubles with Megan and start again."

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