



Bayley proud despite missing gold

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Will Bayley produced a typically gutsy performance in the final of the men's class 7 singles at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium today and although ultimately unable to beat the Chinese world No 1 Yan Shuo, who took the match and the gold 3-1, the 33-year-old can be hugely proud and is already focused on reclaiming his title in 2024.

You can watch live table tennis action from Tokyo on the [Channel 4 website](#). Paralympic coverage is also on Channel 4 and More4.

Bayley and Yan had not played since 2015 when the three-time Asian champion won both their encounters in the German Open – the only occasion they had met before today. Bayley was quickly into his stride and was impressive in taking the first game 11-4. He led 8-6 in the second but Yan was finding his range and having levelled at 8-8 went on to take the game 11-9.

The Paralympic and world bronze medallist raced through the third game, taking it 11-2 and Bayley appeared to be feeling the effects of his epic match against Yan's compatriot Liao Keli in the semi-final.

But he came out swinging in the fourth and at 6-1 it looked as if he would be able to take the match into a deciding fifth game. However, it was not to be as Yan gradually reduced his lead and although at 6-4 GB head coach Greg Baker called a timeout and Bayley led 8-6, the Chinese player used his greater reach and power to good effect and closed out the game 11-8 and the match 3-1.

"I don't think I played that bad," said a disappointed Bayley, "but I don't think I played my best. It was a tactical game and I missed some crucial balls – I didn't shut games out. I should have shut that fourth game out and it goes to a fifth and then it's anyone's game.

"I think I was a bit mentally drained from yesterday and I didn't take my chance. I didn't think I had to win that second set but when I lost it, I maybe lost a bit of confidence. It is hard to really break it down at the moment, but I think I missed an easy backhand at 9-8 and I think I had two serves after that but 'shouda coulda woulda' – if

you don't take those chances you don't deserve to win. He deserved to win – he played well so you've got to give him credit.

"Greg was telling me to stick to the process and not think about the outcome like winning the gold medal or making it to the fifth set, but I need to work on that a bit because it is easier said than done when you are in the moment. We've worked so hard both of us to try and get the gold medal and it is difficult to get it out of your mind, but I think I can improve on that for France and make sure I am more resilient in those moments because it is something I really need to work on."

In his first tournament for two years, reaching the final is a massive achievement, as Bayley acknowledged.

"Maybe the lack of massive matches in recent years was a factor," he said. "I think I need to be performing well at majors before a Paralympics – just to play in those major finals because it's been a while since I've been in that position. I need to be more consistent."

"It is amazing to get to three Paralympic finals but I still believe I can get to four and that just gives me more hunger to try and get the gold medal in France. I don't know how long I'll carry on after that but it would be great to finish with a gold in Paris. I'm already motivated now to go back. When you think you are the best player in the world and you still believe that, the regret of not winning is in the back of your mind. But that is sport – sometimes you don't win and it's OK."



Will on the podium (photo by imagecomms)

Bayley's achievement is all the more remarkable considering what he has had to overcome in the last two years and Baker knows more than anyone how hard he has worked to even compete in Tokyo.

"I'm disappointed for Will not to take the gold," said Baker, "because he has prepared for it and done incredibly well over the last 12 months. But I think we will look back at this in a few hours' time and especially after the event and look at it as an incredible achievement given the fact that Will tore his ACL not so long ago and there were question marks about whether he would even be able to come back into the sport.

"Then Covid came and he had to do all his rehab at home. He set up his own gym in his garden and we were doing zoom calls with the strength and conditioning guys and the physios helping him and the doctors. So to come here and perform the way he has done – and the work that he has put in away from his family for the last six months when he has eaten and slept table tennis – is a remarkable achievement."

Bayley now has a day off before starting the team event where he will be reunited with Paul Karabardak, the pair having won world and European team medals together before the Welshman moved from class 7 to class 6 in 2015.

"I can't wait," said Bayley. "Paul is a great player and a great friend of mine. We've been friends for such a long time and it would be a dream if we could get any kind of medal together. We're going to give it everything."

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