



## Bayley and Karabardak win thriller to reach final

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Will Bayley and Paul Karabardak produced a superb performance to reach the final of the men's class 6-7 team event at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium this evening.

They did it the hard way, Bayley beating class 7 world champion Jordi Morales 3-0 and Karabardak beating the class 6 world No 1 Alvaro Valera 3-2 after the Spanish pair had edged the doubles match 3-2.

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Bayley and Karabardak last played Valera and Morales in the World Championships in 2014 when the Spaniards went on to take gold and they started slowly in the doubles today, losing the first two games 11-4, 11-8. They came roaring back to take the third 11-1 and then edged the fourth 12-10 but then lost a titanic battle for the deciding game 17-15 to give the advantage to Spain.

Morales beat Bayley in the World Championships in 2018 on his way to the title but after taking a close first game 14-12 Bayley took control of the match, taking the second game 11-8 and the third 11-8 to win the match 3-0 and level the tie at 1-1.

Karabardak had never beaten Valera in 12 previous matches and the Spaniard, a former world, Paralympic and European champion, took the first game 11-5. But the Welshman is full of confidence after taking his first Paralympic medal in the men's class 6 singles and he was inspired tonight. He took the second 11-5 and then kept his focus in a nailbiting third to edge it 14-12 but Valera is a great competitor and he hit back to take the fourth 11-5 and take the match into a decider.

Karabardak led 4-1 and 5-2 but Valera levelled at 5-5 and there was never more than a point in it until the Welshman converted his first match point at 10-9 to take the game 11-9, the match 3-2 and the semi-final 2-1 and spark jubilant celebrations from the British team.

The final is on Friday at 5am UK time.

"After the doubles I was feeling that we could still win the match," said Bayley, "because I've got Paul Karabardak in my team. I think it showed with my singles the way I played Jordi that I knew we were well in it. I never gave up that hope that we could still win the match. Paul playing the way he is and the way he played in the singles I had no doubts that he could beat Valera but the way he beat him – he's a legend.

"It was a brilliant win (for me) against Jordi. We had some good rallies and he played quite well in the match so I feel I'm playing my best form. It's good to win those sort of matches 3-0 as it gives me a lot of confidence for when we play China in the final and I believe we can beat anyone."

Karabardak had already produced some great performances to take bronze in the men's class 6 singles but his win against Valera was one of the best of his illustrious 20-year career.

"It's like a miracle and I can't believe it," he said. "I knew that I had a chance and I just stuck to my game plan and I dug deep. It's hard to have confidence when you've never beaten someone before but Will got behind me and Andy (coach Andrew Rushton) got behind me and all the team got behind me and that really lifted me. I managed to take the second set and I thought I'm in this and I've got a good chance here.

"The third game was crucial. If he wins maybe I go away and if I win then maybe I've got a great chance of winning. It put him on the back foot and I think it put the pressure on him and really made him doubt himself and I think that was why it was key to the victory.

"In a Paralympic semi-final against the world No 1 – an absolute legend of the game – you don't normally do that so I think it probably is one of my best wins".

Former England international Rushton has had many great days as a player and could not have been more proud of his team.

"This is by far my best day as a coach," he said. "We had Jack (Hunter-Spivey) beating Tommy (Urhaug) who is a legend for a singles medal at my first Paralympic Games as well, but to do it in a semi-final . . . the way that Will applied himself, the energy that Paul gave and the way that he stuck to the tactic in those crucial moments and the way we came together as a team and gave that energy – it is the best coaching day of my life."



Megan Shackleton and Sue Bailey (photo by imagecomms)

After the emotion of winning their quarter-final against Jordan, Sue Bailey and Megan Shackleton lost their women's class 4-5 semi-final to the Chinese team of class 5 world No 1 Zhang Bian and class 4 World number one Zhou Ying 2-0 but had already secured a bronze medal.

"They're a really strong team so we knew it was tough coming in," said Bailey, "but we knew we had a bronze medal so we just wanted to enjoy it and play the best we can."

"We played so well in the doubles so I'm just so proud of us as a team. It's been such a long time coming so I'm thrilled to bits we've finally got that medal and at Megan's first Paralympic Games. What a fantastic partner I've got and I can't wait for the future for us both."

"Coming back from what I felt was a slightly disappointing singles where I'd like to have progressed a bit further," said Shackleton, "I just brought all those feelings into the team event."

"I felt that I managed to play a better level and I'm really pushing some of the top guys now so to take a medal at my first Games is an incredible feeling."

"I'm so excited for the medal ceremony. I've imagined myself on the podium and representing GB at the Paralympics since I was very young so to finally make that dream a reality is a surreal feeling."

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