



Silver lining for Bayley and Karabardak

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Will Bayley and Paul Karabardak could not quite reproduce the heroics of their emotional semi-final win against Spain in today's men's class 6-7 team gold medal match, but they still went down fighting against a very strong Chinese team.

Facing the Tokyo men's class 7 singles gold and bronze medallists Yan Shuo and Liao Keli, the doubles was always going to be crucial. China took the first game 11-7 and at 10-8 in the second Bayley and Karabardak had two points to level the match, but Yan and Liao came back to take it 12-10 and then ran away with the third 11-2 to take a 1-0 lead in the tie.

Bayley then took on Yan in a rematch of their singles final and once again he made a great start, taking the first game 11-7. The second game proved to be the key to the match. Bayley fought back from 5-1 down to level at 6-6 but a backhand into the net at 10-9 lost him game point and Yan eventually edged the game 15-13 to level at 1-1.

That gave him the momentum and he started to unleash his powerful forehand to devastating effect and as hard as Bayley tried to mitigate it Yan took the third 11-6 and the fourth 11-4 to win the match 3-1 and the gold for China 2-0.

"That second game was massive," acknowledged Bayley. "At 10-8 with two set points to go 2-0 up – you've got to take those chances. He played well and came back and deserved to win again. He won three sets in a row and that's tough, so I've got to hold my hands up.

"He played really well but I didn't take my opportunities and that is what sport is all about. We had another chance in the doubles at 10-8 in the second but this is what it is all about and that is why they are the champions and we're not. You have to take those chances especially against China."

"I think we had our chances and we played well," said Karabardak, "but they just had a bit too much for us in key areas. They are very strong and they move very well and I think we were a little short today and that made the

difference.”

In winning his sixth Paralympic medal Bayley became the most successful British table tennis player in the modern era of the Paralympic Games, a wonderful achievement for the 33-year-old from Tunbridge Wells.

“It means everything to me,” he said. “To win this medal with my best friend Paul makes it all the more special so I’m so happy.

“I’m so proud of Paul – what he has overcome in his life is extraordinary and to come back in this tournament after maybe a lot of people have doubted him, and maybe even he has doubted himself, shows his mental strength.

“I think his win against Valera (in the semi-finals) is probably the best moment of my whole career. I’ve won singles gold and that moment was the best moment of my career, so I want to say thank you to Paul for doing that for me because it is a moment I will never forget.”

Karabardak has played superbly in this tournament and goes home to Swansea with a team silver to add to the men’s class 6 singles bronze – his first Paralympic medals in his fourth Paralympic Games.

“I don’t think I could have dreamt of two medals,” he said. “Coming into it I just wanted to play well in the singles and try my best and try to get out of the group which I’d never done before at a Paralympics. That would have been enough for me, so to push on and get the bronze medal – I couldn’t have imagined that in my wildest dreams.

“To do it having had the wins I’ve had makes it even more special. I didn’t know if I would ever get a Paralympic medal because you just don’t know if time is running out so to win two medals is really special and I never thought I could have done that before the Games started.”



Sue Bailey and Megan Shackleton receive their class 4-5 team bronze medals today (ITTF photo)



Aaron McKibbin, Billy Shilton and Ross Wilson with their class 8 bronze medals (ITTF photo)

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