



## Bland & perry make the podium in Spain

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Martin Perry and Alex Bland followed up their singles medals by taking bronze in the men's class 6-7 team event on the final day of the ITTF Costa Brava Spanish Para Open in Platja d'Aro but there was disappointment for Dan Bullen and Lee York who missed out on a medal in the men's class 4-5 team event on countback.

### **Men's class 6-7**

Perry and Bland came through their group after 2-0 wins against the second Spanish team of Pablo Romero Parreno, Gonzalo Rodriguez and Antonio Consuegra and the Russian/German combination of Mars Gabdullin, Benedikt Muller and Henrik Meyer, taking the doubles against Gabdullin and Muller 3-1 and Perry beating Meyer 3-1.

They went on to beat the Dutch team of Dustin Eier and Yannick Paredis 2-0 in the quarter-final, winning the doubles 3-0 and Bland taking the first singles against Eier 3-0. That took them through to a semi-final against the top seeds and European bronze medallists from Poland, Maksym Chudzicki and Michal Deigslar, and they had to settle for bronze after they lost the doubles 3-1 and class 6 Perry was then beaten 3-0 by class 7 Paralympic bronze medallist Chudzicki.

"I'm really happy with how the team event went," said Perry. "Alex and I played some really good doubles and we both had solid individual performances. Overall, despite being disappointed not to get to the final of the singles I'm actually quite happy and feeling positive for the French Open in a few weeks.

"I've really enjoyed working with Matjaz (Sercer, BPTT Pathway coach) – we already have such a good relationship after one competition and I'm really looking forward to the future working with him."

Bland can also take plenty of positives from his performance here.

"I feel that Martin and I played well together in the team, and we seemed to complement each other well in the doubles," said the 22-year-old from Rotherham. "We won every match 2-0 up to the semi-finals where we lost to a strong Polish team that is having a good tournament as well. I think we showed good fight in all our

matches, and I have taken several things away from this tournament to work on back at home in training.”

Performance athlete Perry was full of praise for Bland and the other Pathway athletes competing in Spain, in what was the first tournament for them since 2019 due to the pandemic.

“The Pathway players out here have done themselves proud and credit to Shaun (Marples, BPTT Pathway Manager) and Matjaz for coaching them. They have instilled some great attitude in them and they’ve all fought exceptionally well and have had some good results.

“They have also helped me prepare for my matches and it has been good to have them here. They are in a different position as they are trying to get their first wins and you see that happening and their elation and joy. It is a bit different for Fliss and me as Performance athletes because it is our job and the Pathway element brings back that love and joy for the game – they obviously want to win but they have so much energy and passion for the game and that has reinforced my energy and passion for the game.”

#### **Men’s class 4-5 RR**

Class 5 Bullen and class 4 York lost their first match in the round-robin event to the class 5 European bronze medallists from Norway 2-0, world No 4 and London 2012 Paralympic champion Tommy Urhaug combining with Sebastian Vegsund to win the doubles 3-0 and Vegsund winning a close singles against York 3-1 after the 32-year-old from Wakefield had taken the first set 11-4.

The British pair bounced back to win their second match against the Czech/Dutch partnership of Jiri Zak and Sem Roelofs 2-0, getting the better of a close battle in the doubles 3-2 and Bullen showing great determination to fight back from 2-1 down against Roelofs to beat the Dutchman 13-11 in the fifth.

In their last match they took on British self-funded athlete Simon Heaps and Daniel Mateo from Spain and after winning the doubles 3-0 Bullen beat Mateo 3-0 to seal a 2-0 win. With Norway losing to Czech Republic/Netherlands, three teams finished level on points but after countback Norway took the gold and Czech Republic/Netherlands the silver with only two medals awarded.

“It was a great experience and some good results for me,” said 23-year-old Bullen from St Neots. “I felt that I still played my game when it got close and after losing to Sem yesterday it was good to get the win today. Of course it is disappointing to come so close to a medal but there are a lot of positives to take from the competition and if we play like this in the future I believe there will be a lot of success to come.”



Dan Bullen and Lee York (ITTF photo)

### **Women's class 6-10**

Fliss Pickard and Grace Williams began with a 2-0 win against the second Spanish team, combining to win the doubles against Pilar Gonzalez and Amanda Chenoll Gonzalez and Williams beating Chenoll Gonzalez 3-0 in the first singles match.

They lost 2-0 to the world and European team medallists from Germany, class 10 Marlene Reeg, winner of the class 7-10 singles, and Lena Kramm, and did not progress to the knockout stages after a 2-0 defeat to the French/German partnership of Lucie Hautiere and Tiziana Oliv, losing a close doubles match 3-1 and Williams going down fighting to Hautiere in four close sets.

### **Men's class 3 RR**

In their first international tournament class 2 Andrew Guy and class 3 Andrew Green faced tough competition in their first match from the class 3 French/Russian partnership of singles silver medallist Francois Geuljans and bronze medallist Mikhail Neystroev and were beaten 2-0.

They then lost 2-0 to the top seeds from Spain and Kuwait, class 3 singles gold medallist Roberto Rodriguez and bronze medallist Yaqoub Alqasem winning the doubles 3-0 and Iker Gonzalez from Spain beating Green 3-0 after edging a close first set 13-11.

In their final match against the Russian team of Rail Galiakberov and Aleksei Konovalov they lost the doubles 3-0 and Green lost 3-0 to Galiakberov.

### **Men's class 6-7**

Theo Bishop teamed up with class 6 singles gold medallist Esteban Herrault from France and after a 2-0 loss to Poland they put up a great fight against the Spanish team of Alberto Seoane Alcazar and Francisco Rodriguez,

losing a very close doubles 11-9 in the fifth and the very experienced former world and European team medallist Seoane Alcazar beating Bishop 3-1 in the deciding singles after Herrault had levelled the tie by beating Rodriguez 3-0.

#### **Men's class 9 RR**

Craig Allen and Sean Geoghegan from Ireland lost their first match in the round-robin event to the French/Hungarian partnership of Lucas Didier and Barnabas Retter 2-0. They then combined well to win the doubles against the second Spanish team of Pablo Ascaso and Jose Maria Nieto 3-0 before Geoghegan secured a 2-0 win by beating Ascaso 3-2.

They were then beaten 2-0 by the top seeds from Spain, losing the doubles against Juan Perez Gonzalez and Ander Cepas 3-0 and 17-year-old singles gold medallist Cepas beating Allen 3-0, and finished out of the medals after a 2-0 defeat in their final match to David Pulpan and Vit Spalek from Czech Republic.

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