



Bullen's delight at first international gold

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Dan Bullen came through the round-robin men's class 5 singles unbeaten to take gold at the ITTF Para Copa Costa Rica and there were also bronze medals for Rob Davies (men's class 1-3), Lee York (men's class 4) and Ryan Henry (men's class 8).

Bullen began with a 3-0 win against Allan Sanchez Madrigal from Costa Rica but his next match against Muhammad Mudassar from Canada was tougher and he secured a 3-1 win against the 2018 bronze medallist 12-10 in the fourth.

Another 3-1 win against Gerber Salazar from Guatemala meant that his final match against the American Ahad Bakhshaei Sarand was to decide the gold medal. The 23-year-old from St Neots fought back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2 and then saved match points before defeating the PanAmerican Championship silver medallist and top seed 13-11 in the fifth to win his first international singles title.

"I played well," said Bullen, "and I'm more pleased with my final match because last time I played him it went to five sets and I lost. I feel like I played the way I've been playing in training and the hard work is paying off.

"It feels absolutely amazing to win my first gold medal and there is a lot of emotion for me because I've worked so hard and to finally win a gold medal means the world to me.

"I'm happy with how I turned it around in the last match and I'd like to say thank you to my team-mates here who supported me and got me across the line especially when I went 2-0 down – they got behind me and helped me to focus and to win the match. I'd also like to thank Mat (Kenny) for coaching me here and all the coaches that work with me back home."

Men's class 1-3

Davies was a comfortable 3-0 winner against Emmanuel Cespedes from Costa Rica and went through to the semi-finals after a walkover against another Costa Rican Erik Nunez. The men's class 1 Rio gold medallist had to take on the class 3 Giovanni Rodriguez from Costa Rica and although the 37-year-old Welshman took the first

set 11-3 the former PanAmerican Games medallist was just too strong in a 3-1 win.

"It was good to be back in competition again," said Davies, who was competing for the first time since winning his fourth European title in September 2019 and missed Tokyo due to injury. "I'm obviously disappointed with losing as it is never nice to have a loss, but I've got to keep in mind why I came out here in the first place – just to get back into competition again – and I think it has achieved what I wanted it to do.

"The loss will just make me hungry and I can't wait to get back and start working on what I need to. We've got a good stretch now leading up to the World Championships next year and I'm looking forward to challenging myself and seeing if I can get back to where I was before."

Men's class 4

York began with a very close match against Maximiliano Rodriguez Avila from Chile and led 2-0 before the 31-year-old PanAmerican bronze medallist, who won gold in the men's class 4-5 singles at the Czech Open earlier this year, fought back to win 11-9 in the fifth. The Yorkshireman secured his place in the semi-finals with a 3-0 win against 14-year-old Sebastian Chaves Quiroz from Costa Rica and was not disgraced in a 3-0 loss to top seed Cristian Gonzalez Astete from Chile, the class 4 PanAmerican champion.

"It was so nice to get my first international win," said York, for whom this was also a first international medal. "It feels like a huge weight has been lifted and what I have been working on in training is finally paying off. The matches where I lost I felt were much closer and I have taken many things away from them that I can address and work on in the training hall when I'm back home."

Men's class 8

Henry came through a tough opening match against the higher ranked Paul Leonardo Polo Astudillo from Ecuador, beating the former PanAmerican Games bronze medallist 11-7 in the fifth. The 21-year-old from Ardrossan took top place in the group with 3-0 wins against Hernan Domingo Solis Roodriguez and Andres Mendez Ramirez, both from Costa Rica, and faced the American Marco Makkar in the semi-finals.

It was another close match and Henry led 2-1 but the 37-year-old PanAmerican team silver medallist edged the fourth set 14-12 and took the fifth and deciding set 11-9 for a narrow 3-2 win.

"I don't feel I played as well as I could have throughout the competition," said Henry, "but I managed to battle through some matches with good fighting spirit. It was good to play a variety of players and experience international competition again after two years out due to COVID restrictions. I know what I need to work on moving forwards."

Women's class 8-10

Class 8 Grace Williams was competing in the combined women's class 8-10 singles and she had a tough opening match against the class 9 European bronze medallist Anastasia Kostenevich, which the 34-year-old Russian won 3-0. Williams won her second match against Carina Ugalde from Costa Rica 3-0 but did not progress from the group after a 3-1 loss to the class 9 teenager Jessica Alzate Mejia from Colombia.

The tournament continues with the team events that conclude on Sunday.

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