

# Bayley wins gold as GB shine in Slovenia

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Paralympic silver medalist Will Bayley won his second gold medal of 2013 with a battling performance in the men's Class 7 event in the Slovenian Open and there were two further medals for Gorazd Vecko's young GB team with Rob Davies and Kim Daybell taking bronze in their respective events.

Bayley, 25, has struggled to find his top form this week but is maturing as a player and is finding a way to win when not at his best. In the final he had to save four set points in the second set and another in the third against the talented Egyptian Sayed Youssef before taking the match 3-0 (11-6, 14-12, 12-10).

"I didn't play my best but I think I played tactically really well today," said Bayley, "he's a very good player and he's got very good shots. To be able to win when I'm not playing well is really important so I'm really pleased."

Nine of the GB Para Table Tennis Team's Performance squad are competing in Slovenia and eight progressed from their respective groups to reach the quarter-final stages, with Bayley (Class 7), Davies (Class 1), Daybell (Class 10) and Ashley Thompson (Class 9) all topping their groups.

Sheffield based Bayley, who regained the world number 1 ranking after winning in Italy earlier this season, had to fight hard on day one and was taken to five sets in his second group match by the Belgian Ben Despineux before winning a tense five set quarter final against Jordi Morales of Spain.

"I don't think I would have won that match a year ago," admitted Bayley, who showed all his character and determination to close out the match. "I have to draw on the belief that I've beaten these players and I can take confidence from coming through two close matches when I'm not playing well."

Rob Davies, 28, a former rugby player from Brecon who is competing for the first time since London 2012, recorded a superb first win against Jean-Francois Ducay, the Frenchman ranked number 3 in the world who ended his Paralympic dream in London, on the way to winning his group.

"Just brilliant," he said afterwards. "I've been in a fifth set so many times before against him and I didn't want the same to happen as happened in London. I was really determined not to let it happen again so grit got me through."

Davies followed up with a 3-0 win against Polkareb of Slovakia and then produced another gutsy display to beat Major of Hungary in the quarter-finals 3-1 to earn a semi-final against the reigning Paralympic champion and world number 2 Holger Nikelis of Germany. Davies won the first set and had chances in the next three before eventually going down 3-1.

"I'm quite pleased with the whole match but a bit frustrated," said Davies. "There was only two points difference

in every set that he won but to get to the semi-final and to be so close to the Paralympic champion in my first tournament back I've got to be quite happy."

Kim Daybell, a 20 year old medical student from Sheffield, also showed great determination and courage in winning his quarter final against Karim Boumedouha from France, saving a match point in the fourth set and a further four match points in the deciding fifth before clinching it 14-12.

"It wasn't my best performance," admitted Daybell, "it was late on in the evening and I was a bit sluggish so it was all about grit and grinding the game out. My coach said if you can win when you are not playing well then you can definitely win when you are playing well so I've got to take the positives from it."

Daybell had his chances in the semi-final and went down fighting 3-1 against the more experienced world number 6 Pavel Lukyanov from Russia. "Overall it's been good," he said, "but there are still lots of things I can work on. I'm pleased to get a medal – it's my first singles medal for a while so it's always nice."

Ashley Thompson, 18, from London, recorded two good wins against higher ranked players, including world number 9 Frederic Bellais from France, before losing to the experienced Dutchman Tonnie Heijnen in the quarter-finals.

"I had chances to come back but made a few mistakes," he said. "Hopefully I can learn from this – I had a good start to the tournament and this was probably the best I've played in a long time so I'm very happy with two good wins."

Aaron McKibbin (Class 8), Paul Karabardak (Class 7), Paul Davies (Class 1) and Sara Head (Class 3) all recorded wins in their group matches to reach the quarter final stages of their singles events. The tournament continues with the team events, with nine players from the GB Performance squad in action. The medals for the team competition will be decided on Saturday, May 11.

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