

World no. 1 Davies looking to consolidate in Belgium

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European Champion Rob Davies heads a squad of eight athletes from the GB Para Table Tennis Team who will be competing in this week's Belgian Open in Sint-Niklaas (October 31-November 2).

The 29-year-old from Brecon, who recently replaced Paralympic and World Champion Holger Nikelis as the world number one in the men's class 1 category, will be looking to consolidate his position at the head of the rankings and continue his winning run.

He said: "Two of my long term goals were to become European Champion and World number one and they have happened much sooner than I thought they would.

"I've been back training for the last two weeks and I'm hoping to keep my momentum and confidence from the Europeans going and to keep winning matches."

Davies will be joined by fellow Paralympians Kim Daybell and David Wetherill, who will both be looking to put disappointments at the European Championships behind them.

Sheffield's Daybell, 21, who combines his table tennis with studying medicine at Leeds University, narrowly missed out on a medal in both the singles and the team events in the Europeans but has been boosted by a new career best world ranking of sixth in the men's class 10 category.

"Missing out on a medal at the Europeans was very disappointing for me," admitted Daybell, "but I have bounced back after a little time off and have been training hard for Belgium, working in hospitals by day and sports halls at night."

Wetherill, from Torpoint, was unable to produce his best form in the European Championships and was also keen to bounce back to the form that saw him win team gold in Germany and reach the men's class 6 singles final at the Korean Open earlier this year.

He said: "I picked myself up after the Europeans and I've been playing really well over the last two weeks.

"It's always a privilege to represent my country and I'm going to go to Belgium and try to relax and enjoy playing. Hopefully I can help some of our young players who are competing as well."

Eighteen-year-old Jack Hunter-Spivey, from Widnes, played well in his first European Championships and will be hoping to improve his world ranking in Belgium to increase his chances of qualifying for next year's World

Championships in China.

The GB squad in Belgium includes four young players from the GB Para Table Tennis Team Pathway Squad who will be making their international debuts – Lucie Bouron, 18, from Bracknell; Lawrence John, 15, from Swansea; Megan Shackleton, 14, from Halifax, and Billy Shilton, 15, from Stonehouse in Gloucestershire.

Also competing in Belgium are 13 young players from England, Scotland and Wales who are being funded by their respective home nations. These include three players on the GB Pathway Squad – Thomas Matthews, 20, from Aberdare; Martin Perry, 19, from Paisley, and Conor Gordon, 17, from Falkirk.

“Belgium will provide some good match practice for our Performance squad players with next year’s World Championships in mind,” said GB Performance Director Gorazd Vecko. “It will also be exciting to see some of the very promising young players from our Pathway squad competing internationally for the first time and gaining valuable experience for the future.”

Written by Francesca Bullock (October 28, 2013)

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