

GB strike gold in Belgian Open

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Kim Daybell picked up two medals in Belgium including a singles gold

The GB Para Table Tennis Team struck gold at the Belgium Open with European Champion Rob Davies (class 1), David Wetherill (class 6) and Kim Daybell (class 10) all winning their singles events in Sint-Niklaas.

Both Daybell and Wetherill were able to add to their gold medals with bronze medals in their respective team events alongside partners Nathan Thomas and Martin Perry respectively.

Meanwhile, 18-year-old Jack Hunter-Spivey was also successful in Belgium as he returned with a silver medal from his class 5 singles.

It was a day to remember for the GB squad with the three individual champions coming during a golden afternoon of action.

Davies, the world number one, had to come from 2-1 down in his final against old rival Jean-Francois Ducay from France, who had beaten Paralympic and world champion Holger Nikelis in the semi-finals. The 29-year-old from Brecon, who had earlier recorded a much easier 3-0 victory against Ducay in the group stages, showed all his fighting spirit to clinch the gold 3-2.

Leeds medical student Daybell, 21, also showed great resolve on his way to winning gold, coming back from 2-0 down against Karim Boumedouha from France in the semi-finals before beating the Russian Pavel Lukyanov 3-1 in the final.

Wetherill, from Torpoint, put a disappointing European Championships performance behind him by beating Tim Laue from Germany in the final 3-1, having earlier beaten Michael Azulay of Sweden 3-1 in the semi-finals.

Meanwhile, Hunter-Spivey, 18, from Widnes, beat Ching-Chin Tsai of Chinese Taipei 3-1 in his semi-final and took the first set off the world number three Valentin Baus in the final before the German's greater experience told in a 3-1 win.

Full of confidence after the individual events, the GB squad secured another two medals after excellent performances in Sint-Nicklaas through Daybell and Wetherill.

Daybell was partnered by Welsh squad member Nathan Thomas in the men's class 10 team event and they reached the semi-finals before losing to the Russian combination of Pavel Lukyanov and Iurii Nozdrunov 3-0.

"Lukyanov played a good game today," said Daybell. "We always have very close matches so I was really pleased to beat him in the final yesterday. It was really nice to win gold in the singles as I haven't won a tournament for a while. There were some good players here and I was able to get myself into the zone and raise

my game when it mattered.”

Wetherill and his 19-year-old partner Martin Perry, from Paisley, who is part of the GB Pathway Squad, also reached the semi-finals of the combined men's class 6-7 team event where they lost 3-1 to the Swiss/Israeli combination of Valentin Kneuss and Shmuel Shur. Wetherill, 23, gave his team a great start by beating Kneuss 3-1 but with Perry losing both his singles ties to the more experienced Kneuss and class 7 player Shur the doubles proved crucial as the GB pair lost 3-0.

Nevertheless, the Englishman was pleased with his performance in Belgium following his disappointment at the European Championships:

“I feel that I did what I wanted to do here,” said Wetherill. “It's been a difficult season for me, with injuries, some good wins but some bad losses. So it's been good to win a gold medal here and get some of my confidence back.”

Head Coach Greg Baker was more than pleased with the team's efforts.

He said: “It's been a very good tournament. It could have been difficult for the players who competed in the European Championships to get themselves motivated but they all stepped up and it was good for the young players out here to see our Performance Squad players do well. Some of the young players on our Pathway Squad also had good wins and showed that they have real potential if they continue to work hard.”

Written by Francesca Bullock (November 5, 2013)

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