

Stars gather for BTTAD National Championships

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World no. 1 Rob Davies will be on show in Grantham

GB STARS WARM UP FOR INTERNATIONAL SEASON AT NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

World number one Rob Davies and Paralympic silver medalist Will Bayley will be among the members of the GB Para Table Tennis Team taking part in The Butterfly Michael Hawkesworth Championships at the Meres Leisure Centre in Grantham this weekend (March 15-16).

This competition is also the BTTAD National Championships and represents an opportunity for young, up-and-coming players to compete against the best in the UK. As well as providing valuable match practice for the GB athletes ahead of the start of the international season it is a competition they all want to win.

Brecon's Rob Davies, who took gold in the European Championships last year, will be hoping to retain his national title in the men's class 1-2 event. Although his great friend and team mate Paul Davies, who he beat in the final last year, will not be competing due to injury he will face strong competition from another Welshman, Tom Matthews, a member of the GB Pathway Squad who took a silver medal in the men's class 1 event at the US Open last year.

"It will be good to get back to competitions," said Davies. "I've done a lot of training through the winter but haven't played a lot of matches so it will be good to get the focus back on playing and get into the routine again of pre-match warm ups and so on. The Nationals are important and will be a good test. I've been training with Tom and it is good for me to be pushed so we'll see how it goes."

Sheffield based Bayley, from Tunbridge Wells, is defending his title in the men's class 6-7 championship and also finished runner-up to Aaron McKibbin in the men's class 6-10 open championship last year.

"My main priority is to win the class 7 title again," he admits. "It would be my seventh in a row if I win it and I can then enjoy the open event on Sunday and get as far as I can. I've never won the open although I've been in the final several times. The National Championships are really important as the level is now so high and there are no easy matches. There are so many good juniors and young players coming up and keeping the pressure on us which keeps us on our toes so we are always trying to improve."

Londoner McKibbin, who is also based with the GB Team at the EIS in Sheffield, won the men's class 8 national title as well as the open class 6-10 championship last year and is looking forward to defending both titles.

"It was nice winning the National Championships last year," he said. "It's good match preparation and it's good for the confidence to win a competition like that before the start of the international season. Training has gone well for me this winter and I feel I have made a lot of improvements in my technique and my mental approach."

One of the favourites for the men's class 6-10 open championship will be Leeds medical student and former winner Kim Daybell, a class 10 player who represented GB in the London 2012 Paralympics and last year's European Championships. He won the men's class 9-10 title last year but did not compete in the open event.

"The BTTAD National Championships are really important," said Daybell. "It is a good chance for the younger players to see the top players play and to be a national champion is no mean feat so I'm really looking forward to it. I've won every nationals I've entered so far but the level is so much higher than it used to be and every year it gets tougher and tougher to beat the younger players so I will need to play as well as I can."

Torpoint's David Wetherill was runner-up to Bayley in the men's class 6-7 event last year and is another who is looking forward to kick-starting his season with a good performance in Grantham.

"The Nationals is an important event," he said, "and if I can win a national title it will mean a lot. I'm not expecting to win the open but on my day I'm capable of causing a few upsets. I'm playing really well at the moment and beating highly ranked players in training so I'm really looking forward to playing in the Nationals and seeing what happens."

Francesca Bullock (March 11, 2014)

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