

Bayley leads GB challenge in Italy

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Posted On: March 18, 2014



Will Bayley defended his National crown earlier in the week

Lignano Master Open (March 19–22, 2014)

Paralympic and European silver medalist Will Bayley will be bidding to retain his Lignano Master Open title in Italy this week (March 19–22) in the first international competition of the 2014 season for the GB Para Table Tennis Team.

Sheffield based Bayley, from Tunbridge Wells, won his seventh National title at the weekend in the class 7 men's singles and is in good form ahead of a season that will climax with the World Championships in China in September.

"I feel confident that I can do well this season," he said, "and I'll be doing my best that's for sure. I don't want to be peaking in Italy I want to be peaking for the World Championships but hopefully I can play well throughout the season and then play really well in China. I feel I've improved from last year; I feel match sharp and I'm really looking forward to playing in Italy."

Bayley's class 7 team mate Paul Karabardak finished last year by taking two gold medals in the US Open and will be hoping to continue that form in Italy.

"I hadn't beaten a top ten player for about a year and a half," said the Swansea player, "and so to go to the US and beat two top ten players gave me confidence that I can still do it against the best players in my class and hopefully I can use that to kick on this year. The first competition of the year is always tough after the winter break but I've done the hard work and hopefully I can get some good results in Italy."

Fellow Paralympian David Wetherill ended last year with a confidence boosting win in the Belgium Open after a disappointing European Championships and is also hoping to build on that success in Lignano.

"Italy is a massive stepping stone for me," admitted the 24 year old from Torpoint, "but it will be a good marker for me to see where my game is. I've been working on my match play and feel excited and positive – I had some good results last year but some bad ones as well so it is good to start afresh. I love playing tournaments and can't wait to play in Italy."

Sheffield based Londoner Aaron McKibbin, bronze medalist in London 2012, also heads to Italy and is looking to build on the progress he made last season.

"I want to go to Italy and play positively and with confidence," said the 22 year old. "I believe now if I play my game I can take anyone and it's down to me to prove it this season and show that all the hard work I'm putting

in is paying off.”

The GB team in Italy is completed by London teenager Ashley Facey-Thompson (men’s class 9), Welshman Tom Matthews (men’s class 1) and Barnsley’s Sue Gilroy (women’s class 4) – as well as three members of the GB Pathway Squad – Billy Shilton, 15, from Stonehouse in Gloucestershire (men’s class 7), 19 year old Felicity Pickard from Burnley (women’s class 6) and Megan Shackleton, 14, from Todmorden (women’s class 4).

by Francesca Bullock (March 18, 2014)

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