

Top trio get GB off to a flying start

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Posted On: September 08, 2014



Sue Gilroy

The GB Para Table Tennis Team made a great start to the 2014 ITT PTT World Championships in Beijing with world No 1 Rob Davies, Paralympic silver medalist Will Bayley and former Commonwealth champion Sue Gilroy all progressing through to the knockout stages of the singles tournament as group winners.

Davies was prepared for a tough match against his first opponent Endre Major and he had to show all his fighting qualities to beat the Hungarian 3-2, clinching the deciding fifth set 14-12 on his third match point after saving a match point at 11-12 with a great serve. His second match, against Silvio Keller from Switzerland, was more comfortable and he ensured he will top his group in the men's class one singles with a 3-0 win.

"I'm really happy," said Davies. "It's always good to have a difficult match at the start to get you into the competition – against Major it was particularly difficult and I left it until the last minute but he played probably the best he's played against me.

"I was a bit nervous but he played really well and it took me a while to get started so I was really happy that I came through at the end. I played a lot better in my second match so I'll try and take the positives from that and do the same again tomorrow. I've just got to take one match at a time and hopefully I'll be there at the end."

Bayley looked sharp in his first match against Samuel Shur, the Israeli who can be a tricky opponent, and the world No 2 came through impressively 3-0.

His second opponent was double Paralympic champion Jochem Wollmert who had beaten Bayley in the final in London 2012. The German has dropped down the world rankings but relishes the big occasion and when he took the first set 11-5 the British player looked in trouble. But Bayley is a fighter and maturing all the time and he came back strongly to take the next three sets and the match 3-1.

"I found the first set particularly difficult today against Jochem," admitted Bayley, "and it's nice to get that match out of the way because I don't really like playing him – I don't think he likes playing me much either.

"After the first set I tried to play a bit more controlled and make him move a little bit more because if you play just to his racket he is impossible to play – he has probably got the best technical game and I think he hits the ball better than anyone in the world."

Gilroy began with a comfortable 3-0 win against Piyawan Thinjun from Thailand and then followed up with an impressive 3-0 win against the Brazilian Joyce Oliveira.

"I'm absolutely thrilled," said Gilroy after beating Oliveira. "Obviously my opponent this morning is lower down the ranking but with an unknown you still have to give them the same respect as everybody else as you don't know if they are going to be a world-beater.

"Playing Joyce I really thought it would go to five sets so I'm really pleased with that performance. It's always a case of trying to get over the nerves and getting used to the conditions – we've trained in here but it is a totally different ball game under pressure."

Kim Daybell started his World Championships with a great win over the No 5 seed from the Czech Republic Ivan Karabec. The 22 year old medical student from Sheffield took the first two sets and although Karabec came back to win the third Daybell held his nerve to take the match 11-5 in the fourth.

"I felt really good," he said, "and felt like I played the table tennis I wanted to play against him. I've played him a lot of times, beaten him a few times and lost to him a few times so it was good to win but what was more important was the way I won the match. I was really positive and I'm feeling sharp.

Aaron McKibbin had a tough first match against the world No 1 from the Ukraine, Viktor Didukh, a talented able bodied player before he lost a leg to cancer, but the 22 year old Sheffield based Londoner acquitted himself well, levelling the match at 1-1 before eventually losing 3-1.

"I think I played to a good level," said McKibbin. "I missed a couple of points to take the first set and if I had taken one of those and then been 2-0 up it could have been very different. Towards the end he had a bit of luck but he also raised his level. I think I can take a lot of positives into the next game"

McKibbin can still progress to the knockout stages of the men's class 8 competition if he beats Marcin Skrzynecki from Poland in his second match tomorrow.

Paul Karabardak found the men's class 7 world No 1 Maksym Nikolenko from Ukraine too good in his first match, losing 3-0, but a win tomorrow against Daniel Horut of the Czech Republic will take the Swansea player through to the knockout stages.

Jane Campbell also faced the world No 1 in her first match in the women's class 3 event. At 7-5 up in the first the Londoner was proving more than a match for the Swede Anna-carin Ahlquist, whose coach then called an unusually early time-out. It proved to be the right decision as Ahlquist recovered to take the set 11-9 and went on to take the match 3-0.

Campbell plays the Croatian Helena Dretar tomorrow for a place in the knockout stages and her class 3 team mate Sara Head, from Beddau, also has a must win match tomorrow against the Mexican Sigala Lopez after losing 3-0 today to the reigning world champion from China Qian Li.

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