

It's bronze for Bayley and Karabardak

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Paul Karabardak

Will Bayley and Paul Karabardak have taken a bronze medal in the men's class 6-7 team event at the 2014 ITT Para Table Tennis World Championships in Beijing after a battling performance against Ukraine which they eventually lost 1-3.

Karabardak was first to play singles against world No 1 Maksym Nikolenko and after losing the first set he came back to take the second and pushed the Ukrainian all the way in a 1-3 loss.

Bayley then levelled the tie with a 3-1 win over the European champion Mykhaylo Popov, recovering from the loss of the first set to take the next three 5, 9 and 6.

The doubles was always going to be crucial and Ukraine made the better start – taking the first two sets and seeming to be in control. However, the GB pair came back fighting and took the next two to level the match but despite some great play in the fifth they could not quite sustain their effort and Ukraine took the match 3-2 and a 2-1 lead in the tie.

It was then up to Bayley to keep British hopes alive by beating Nikolenko in a repeat of the singles final earlier in the week. After so many tough matches Bayley was clearly exhausted but fought hard all the way, saving match points in the third set and when he took an 8-4 lead in the fourth it looked as if he might stage another remarkable comeback. But it was not to be as the tall Ukrainian used all his power to hit some fierce winners and took the set 11-8 and the match 3-1.

"Popov is world No 3 and a real quality player," said Bayley, "he medalled in the singles in 2012 and here so it was good to get that win. To take them to the fifth in the doubles was a great effort and a great comeback – in the fifth set it didn't quite work out for us but I'm sure one day we will beat them in doubles. We're not far away.

"It was nearly impossible to then come back and play Nikolenko. I tried to pick myself up. I didn't start very well but it could have gone either way – it was very tight and at 8-4 up in the fourth I should finish that set off and then in the fifth I'd have fancied myself to win it but that's table tennis and we're proud of the effort we put in – we never gave up.

"I'm not going to complain – I'm world champion and I'm really proud to get a second medal in the team because I'm delighted for Paul. I've said all along that I really wanted to get a medal here with Paul in a World championship – it's an amazing achievement and I still think we can improve as a doubles pair which I hope we're going to work on in future."

"I thought I played well against Nikolenko," said Karabardak, "and I did myself better justice than when I played him in the singles as I didn't really have a chance against him when I played him then. But to push him all the way and to make him work for the win was really good.

"I think it would have been hard to get silver or gold here – I think bronze was realistic although we could have done a bit better but I'm really pleased as this is my first World championship medal and it's really special because I've won almost everything apart from a World medal and a Paralympic medal so just one more to go now and I've got the whole set."

Fran Bullock

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