

Returning Wilson spearheads medal bid in France

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Ross Wilson

The GB Para table tennis team is assured of at least five medals in the singles events at the first Cote d'Azur International in Hyères les Palmiers after Megan Shackleton (women's class 4-5), Ross Wilson (men's class 8), Ashley Facey Thompson (men's class 9), Kim Daybell (men's class 10), and Pathway player Martin Perry (men's class 6) all reached today's semi-finals.

Wilson, competing in his first international competition since London 2012, got off to a perfect start with a 3-0 win over Alejandro Perez from Argentina. He followed up with an emphatic 3-0 win over the Norwegian Fredrik Johansen to top his group and move into the quarter-finals, where he defeated the German Johannes Urban in three sets.

"It is really good to be back," said Wilson. "It's been hard not competing for so long but getting back into it brings back all the feelings of previous competitions and memories of London 2012. I really enjoyed it and getting straight into the semi-finals in my first tournament is a confidence booster."

Facey Thompson enjoyed the best win of his career in beating the men's class 9 world No 3 from Russia Iurii Nozdrunov 3-2. The 19-year-old Sheffield-based Londoner held his nerve when Nozdrunov levelled and 2-2 and finally clinched a well-deserved victory 12-10 in the fifth.

A 3-0 win in his second group match against Max Van Amerongen from the Netherlands secured his place in the quarter-finals, where he faced another Dutchman Ronald Vliverberg. Once again Facey Thompson showed great courage and resolution to fight back from 1-2 down and take the match 11-8 in the fifth.

"I believe in myself more now," said Facey Thompson. "I've been training hard and my game is better. I'm going on to the court relaxed and doing my best and the outcome is I'm winning matches and I'm really happy and enjoying it."

Daybell continued his great form from last month's World Championships in beating Irishman Thomas Davis 3-0 followed by Vladimir Glazov from Russia 3-0 and clinched his place in the semi-finals as group winner with a 3-0 win over Benoit Grasset from France.

"I feel it was a good performance overall," said Daybell, "nothing special but I think I just did the basics right and it was enough to see me through."



Megan Shackleton

Shackleton began with a 3-0 win over Delphine Mavouza from France and ensured that she would top her group and progress to the semi-finals by beating the class 5 player from the Netherlands Yvette Moerdijk. The 15 year old was delighted with her day's work.

"I'm really pleased because I was so nervous to start with," she admitted. "I think I finally settled down into my game and put into practice what I've been doing in training, so I'm happy. Now I've got a medal I feel that I've lifted the pressure off myself a bit so I'm looking forward to the semi-final."

Paisley's Martin Perry had chances in all four sets against the German Thomasz Kusiak in losing his first match 1-3 but was a 3-1 winner over George Mouchthis from Greece and then progressed to the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Domingo Arguello from Costa Rica. In the quarter-finals he showed great determination to beat Sun

Gil Kim from Korea 11-6 in the fifth, taking a 2-0 lead and fighting back when the Korean levelled the match at 2-2.

Gloucestershire teenager Billy Shilton also topped his group with 3-0 wins over Auden Magnus Hjelseng from Norway, Hans Speek from the Netherlands and Teak Kon Kim from Korea and a walkover in the last 16 earned him a quarter-final against the double Paralympic champion Jochem Wollmert. Unsurprisingly the German's experience proved too much for the 16 year old but he is improving all the time and a great prospect for the future.

Daniel Bullen won his first match in three close sets against the higher ranked Frenchman Philippe Durieux and followed that with a good 3-0 win against Jang Sub Choi from Korea. A walkover in his final match left him top of his group and took him into a quarter-final against Fabrizio Bove, but the Italian proved too strong in a 3-0 win.

Welshman Tom Matthews was disappointed not to progress from a tough group in men's class 1. In his first match he was involved in a great battle with the experienced Marcus Sieger from Germany and went down fighting 7-11 in the fifth. He then played really well against the Paralympic silver medalist and world No 3 Jean-Francois Ducay, taking the third set and pushing the Frenchman all the way in the fourth in a 1-3 loss. Matthews finished on a high note with a 3-0 win against Cyril Hernandez from France and can now look forward to the team competition.

Self-funded athletes Rajan Waterman and Craig Allen were also competing here for GB and although neither progressed from their group Waterman had a good win against the Brazilian Claudio Massad 3-1 and Allen defeated Brage Aesoy Titlestad of Norway.

Fran Bullock

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