

Shilton delivers a golden finale

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The BTTAD squad with their medals. Back, from left: Martin Perry, Kim Daybell, Billy Shilton, Ashley Facey Thompson, Ross Wilson. Front: Megan Shackleton

The GB Para Table Tennis Team finished the first Cote d'Azur International in Hyères les Palmiers on a high when 16-year-old Billy Shilton and Swedish partner Nicklas Westerberg took gold in the men's class 7 team event. Kim Daybell and Ashley Facey Thompson won a bronze in the men's class 10 team event and Paisley's Martin Perry claimed a men's class 6 team bronze with his partner Domingo Arguello from Costa Rica.

Shilton, from Stonehouse in Gloucestershire, and Westerberg reached the final with a 3-0 win over Argentina in the morning's semi-final. Westerberg beat Pablo Ferro 3-0 and Shilton defeated Aleksy Kaniuka by the same score and they went on to clinch the tie with a 3-0 win in the doubles.

That took them through to face the Brazilian/German combination of Felipe Figueiredo Formentin and Jorg Schnelder in the final – a repeat of their group match which Shilton and Westerberg had won 3-2. In the opening singles against the Brazilian Shilton held his nerve to take a very close opening set 16-14 and went on to take the next two sets 5 and 6 to put his team 1-0 up. Westerberg then played a great match to beat the powerful Schnelder 3-1 and avenge his defeat by the German yesterday, before combining with Shilton to win the doubles 3-0 and the final 3-0.

"I knew that if I won the first set I would have a very good chance to win the game," said Shilton, "and it was really close but luckily I managed to pull through. I think I relaxed then and I was playing really well – I knew that if I played my best it would be difficult for him to beat me. We played really well in the doubles – we haven't played together before this tournament so to win comfortably was really good."

It was a great performance by Shilton, who was winning the second gold medal of his short international career and is a real prospect for the future.

"This gold medal means a lot more because when I won gold in Slovenia I was watching Will (Bayley) and Paul (Karabardak) and getting inspiration from what they were doing so to do it on my own with Nicklas is fantastic. I think I've improved a lot this year and all the coaches have really helped me. This is going to drive me on and keep me training hard so hopefully I can keep on improving."

Daybell and Facey Thompson had a tough semi-final against a talented Dutch team. In the opening singles Facey Thompson played well against the higher ranked Gerben Last but the Dutchman showed his greater experience in the big points to win 3-1. In the second singles world number eight Bas Hergelink produced his best form against Daybell, who could not find his touch today and although the Leeds University medical student levelled at 1-1 he could not prevent Hergelink from taking the match 3-1 with some stunning winners. The GB pair rallied bravely to take the doubles 3-1 but Daybell has played a lot of matches recently and although he fought hard he had no reserves left for the fourth singles which Last won 3-1 to take the Dutch into the final.

"It was hard," admitted 22 year old Daybell. "We've both played a lot of matches this tournament and we were feeling it today but we gave it our best shot and I think we played against a very good team and we gave them a run for their money. Table tennis is so fast and you have to make sure your movement is on point and you are as sharp as you can be and that showed up today, especially with me as I felt a bit sluggish, but it wasn't a bad performance."

Winning all their doubles matches in this tournament against some of the top European teams augurs well for next season and Rio in 2016.

"We've played well here in doubles," said Facey Thompson, "and this is our first team event together for a while so I'm happy with that. I'm really happy to have won two medals – I'm disappointed not to have got to the final

in either singles or team but it was good overall and I'm happy to have a bronze in both."

The 19 year old Sheffield based Londoner has also shown great improvement this season with wins over top ten players and has a promising future.

"I'm happy with the way things are going," he said. "I've been working hard in training, playing better and believing in myself more. Everything is coming together – I've got things to work on in training but I'm making progress and I just need to keep on progressing."

Having won their first three matches in the round-robin men's class 6 team event Perry and Arguello knew that a win in their final match against Germany would give them the gold medal. Singles gold medalist Thomasz Kusiak was too strong for Arguello in the opening singles and although Perry won the first set against Tim Laue and had chances to win the next three the German showed his experience in taking the match 3-1. Arguello and Perry took a 2-1 lead in the doubles but the German pair came back to win a tight fourth set and took the match 11-4 in the fifth.

With Germany then losing 3-2 to Sweden in their final match that left GB/Costa Rica, Sweden and Germany with three wins and one loss each so the medals were decided on countback with Germany taking gold, Sweden silver and Perry and Arguello the bronze.

"I had chances to win my singles," said Perry. "I was 1-0 up and 5-0 in two of the sets so I'm a bit frustrated and disappointed with myself but Laue is a very experienced player and he knows how to play long and important matches. I thought we played great in the doubles; it was just unfortunate that in the fifth set they managed to get a good lead and keep it. I feel it was another match we should have won with the chances we created for ourselves."

Having reached his first singles final and taken two medals here the 20 year old has made good progress this season.

"It's been a fantastic tournament for me," he said, "I've picked up some good wins and I think I've competed really well. I just need to make sure I push on now and train just as hard as I have been because I've seen the results here and the hard work I've been doing at home is paying off."

Welshman Tom Matthews and his American partner Sebastian DeFrancesco played their final match in the round-robin men's class 1 team event against a Korean/French team and Matthews produced a determined performance to come back from 1-2 down against the Frenchman Cyril Hernandez and take the match 11-4 in the fifth. After losing a tight doubles match 3-2 Matthews took a 2-0 lead against world No 7 Hae-kon Lee and came back from 0-6 in the third set to level at 8-8. But the Korean used his experience to take the set 11-8 and despite a brave fight by Matthews Lee took the match 3-2 to clinch the tie for his team.

"I was pleased to get another win," said Matthews, "but I forced things too much and made too many errors so I need to sort that out. It was a good game against Lee. I need to work on controlling my nerves and improving my game generally; my touch play is good but my attack and blocking need to improve and also my serve. It will come in the end. In my last tournament I was beaten 3-0 by Marcus Sieger and I took him close here so it shows I'm coming on and that's the main thing."

The team finished with nine medals, including five golds.

Two of those golds were won by teenager Megan Shackleton, she took her second on Saturday when she and her Israeli partner Caroline Tabib won the women's class 4-5 team event.

After a 3-1 win against Russia in their opening match, 15 year old Shackleton and Tabib followed with a 3-0 win against France. With the women's class 4-5 team event played in a round-robin format they needed to win their final match against a combined team from Germany, Norway and the Netherlands to take the gold medal. Shackleton gave them the perfect start by beating Laurance Taburet from Germany 3-0 and Tabib then defeated the Norwegian Sabine Femtehl by the same score. The pair always looked in command against Taburet and Moerdijk of the Netherlands and won the doubles 3-0 on their third match point to clinch the gold.

"I've played well for most of the tournament," said Shackleton, who did not lose a match in France in either singles or team. "I'm really happy with how I've done and training is paying off. Caroline and I are a similar age and we're on the same wavelength and it's nice to have someone on your team who wants to win just as much as you do.

"Knowing that I've won two gold medals is going to give me a lot of confidence – I've played consistently through the tournament and hopefully I can continue to do that next season. There's still a lot of room for improvement."

Daniel Bullen and his American partner Andre Scott had a tough start in the men's class 5 team event against Germany which resulted in a 3-0 loss. They then took on the French team and with Scott winning both his singles and combining with Bullen to win the doubles they took the tie 3-1 and progressed to a quarter-final against a team from Argentina and Italy. Although Scott won the first singles against Fabrizio Bove from Italy the combined experience of Bove and his Argentinian partner Daniel Rodriguez Ochoa proved too much and they went on to take the tie 3-1.

Nevertheless the 16 year old from St Neots can be very proud of his performance in only his second international tournament.

"I've played well," he said, "although not as well as I could have and I've learnt a lot from the tournament. I've got some Grand Prix events in the UK and the National Junior League this winter so hopefully that will give me plenty of good match practice ready for next season."

Self-funded GB players Rajan Waterman and Craig Allen are also competing in the class 10 team and started with a walkover when the French team was withdrawn. Their first action was against a combined Argentina/France team and although Waterman won both his singles against Dario Neira and Benoit Grasset the doubles proved crucial and the GB pair lost the match 3-1 and the tie 3-2. A 3-0 loss to the Netherlands in their final match meant that they did not progress to the semi-finals.

Ross Wilson was withdrawn from the team event as a precaution due to some minor inflammation in his arm following his victory in the men's class 8 singles final.

Fran Bullock
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