

Bayley reveals Euro target as GB squad hit the road to Rio

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Will Bayley

The GB Para Table Tennis Team begins the vital qualification season for the 2016 Paralympic Games with seven players competing in the Hungarian Open, which begins on Friday.

Meanwhile, world champion Will Bayley will be among six elite GB players competing in the Butterfly Michael Hawkesworth Championships (BTTAD National Championships) in Bristol (March 14-15) before heading out to Italy for the first factor 40 tournament of the season, the Lignano Master Open (March 19-21).

Bayley (class 7) will be joined in Bristol by women's class 4 world silver medalist Sue Gilroy, defending National Open champion Kim Daybell (class 10), Paralympic bronze medalists Jane Campbell and Sara Head (class 3) and Liverpool teenager Jack Hunter-Spivey (class 5), while the GB team for Hungary includes Paralympic medalists Ross Wilson and Aaron McKibbin (class 8), fellow Paralympian Paul Karabardak (class 7), Ashley Facey Thompson (class 9), Megan Shackleton (class 4) and Pathway Squad members, Billy Shilton (class 7) and Tom Matthews (class 1).

Sheffield-based Bayley, from Tunbridge Wells, won the men's class 7 world title in China last September but has certainly not been resting on his laurels.

"We've had a great few months' training," he said, "including a week in Slovakia training against their top Olympic players which was amazing. I've been working a lot on my fitness and speed around the table and trying to get a bit more power into my backhand and I hope that will show this year.

"I don't think I feel any different going into this season as world champion – it's a new season and everyone wants to beat each other. I don't want to think about the past – although it is nice to say I'm world champion it is on to the next major championship, which is the Europeans at the end of this season. That's my next big target now."

Wilson, from Minster in Kent, won a team bronze in London 2012 and returned last October from a two-year absence due to injury to win gold in the men's class 8 singles in France. Hungary will be the next step for the Sheffield-based athlete on the road to Rio and the 19 year old, who was world ranked No 2 at the end of 2012, is looking forward to the challenge.

"Winning in France was definitely a boost," Wilson admitted, "but I think more than anything it has motivated me even more to win tournaments. I'm excited and ready to be part of the team again because I have missed that. It's been a while since I was part of a full strength GB squad at a competition so I'm looking forward to that.

"Before London, I was a bit nervous about trying to qualify and it was always on my mind that I wasn't going to get there but this time around I want to win more tournaments and get my spot back at the top of the world rankings rather than just aiming to qualify for Rio."

GB Performance Director Gorazd Vecko said: "It is important for the GB players to compete at the National Championships but the players we are taking to Hungary need to play in as many international tournaments as possible to give them the best chance of qualifying for the Paralympic Games in 2016.

"Our athletes need to qualify by the end of this year so it is a massively important season and we also have the European Championships in Denmark in October, which will be the last major event for the team before Rio."

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