

Davies & Matthews strike gold in Germany

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Posted On: June 01, 2015



Billy Shilton picked up a great win against a Chinese opponent as he and Will Bayley won silver

Rob Davies and Thomas Matthews won gold in the men's class 1 team event at the Bayreuth Open in Germany and the GB team also took silver with Will Bayley and Billy Shilton in men's class 7 and bronze with Ashley Facey Thompson and Aaron McKibbin in men's class 9 and Sue Gilroy and Megan Shackleton in women's class 4.

The men's class 1 team event was played in a round-robin format, and with both GB and Korea/Switzerland unbeaten after three wins from three matches their final match would decide the gold medal. Korea/Switzerland struck the first blow with a 3-0 win for Ki-Won Nam over Matthews. Davies then levelled the tie for GB by beating Silvio Keller 3-0 and the Welsh pair then combined really well to win the doubles 3-0.

Davies had lost to Nam in the final of the singles on Thursday and once again the attacking play of the Korean proved decisive in a 3-1 win to leave Matthews needing to beat Keller to secure the gold. He did so brilliantly, winning the first set 11-4, taking a tense second set 15-13 and then holding his nerve to win the third 11-9, the match 3-0 and the gold for GB 3-2.

"I just gathered my thoughts and tried to play my table tennis and luckily I got the win," said Matthews. "Winning the doubles with Rob gave me confidence to go and play my next match. He is a great team partner – he was talking to me and saying there is no pressure on me and to just carry on going.

"I nearly cried at the end, to be honest – it was just thanks to Rob for helping me through and keeping me calm. I've never beaten Silvio before so it is a great win for me. To get two medals at a factor 40 – I'm over the moon."

Although happy to win gold Davies was disappointed to lose for the second time to Nam.

"Fair play to him, he's played well all tournament," he said. "He hasn't lost a game and he was the better person on the day. I've got some things to work on and I'll come back from it.

"We both worked as a team and came away with the gold so we've got to keep working as a team. The doubles worked really well today and we've got Paul Davies coming back which I'm really excited about, so hopefully the three of us will lift each other's levels."

Bayley and Shilton reached the final with a superb win in the semi-final against China. Bayley gave them the perfect start with an impressive 3-0 win against Keli Liao and Shilton played well in defeat against Shuo Yan, taking the second set against the Chinese player. The GB pair won only four points in the first set of the doubles but came back strongly to take the second and after winning a close third 15-13 they took the fourth set 11-3 for a 3-1 win.

In the first of the reverse singles Bayley was looking to avenge his defeat by Yan in the singles competition but the new class 7 Chinese player has quick hands and hits the ball with great power and although Bayley had his chances and fought back from 2-0 down to win the third set Yan took the fourth to win the match 3-1.

That left Shilton to play the deciding singles against Liao and when the world No 6 took the first set 11-3 it looked as if his experience would prove too much for Shilton. But the young GB player is an exciting talent and he came back from 10-8 down to win the second 12-10 and then took the third 11-3. Liao levelled the match at 2-2 but in the final set it was Shilton who proved the stronger and he deserved the net-cord at 10-8 that gave him the match and took GB into the final against Ukraine.

Shilton started well against Maksym Nikolenko and had chances to win both the first and third sets but the world No 1 took the match 3-0. Bayley was 2-0 up against Mykhaylo Popov but the European champion came back to level at 2-2 and the 27 year old from Tunbridge Wells had to dig deep to take the fifth set 11-8 and the match 3-2.

Doubles is so often decisive in team events and the GB pair is still a new partnership which just gave the edge to Ukraine in a five-set win. Bayley then played another great match to beat Nikolenko 11-7 in the fifth which meant that the gold medal rested on the final match between Shilton and Popov. Although he tried hard the 16 year old could not quite repeat his heroics of the semi-final and the experience of the world No 3 was decisive in a 3-0 win to take the gold for Ukraine.

"China was a massive match," admitted Bayley. "I didn't feel I was in my best form but we managed to come through as a team. We played really well in the doubles and for Billy to win that key match was an amazing win. I don't think we've beaten China for a long time so I'm pleased with that.

"I don't think I've ever beaten both Popov and Nikolenko in a team event before so I always think it is going to be difficult against Ukraine but I had a bit of extra motivation today having overcome China.

"Overall I think we can be very happy with our progress in two tournaments – we're already very close to being the best team in the world. We had massive chances against Ukraine today and we've beaten every other top country so we've got huge potential and I'm really pleased to have Billy as a team-mate.

"At 2-2 in the final set against Liao I was very nervous," said Shilton, "but I knew I had a good chance as I'd taken him to five sets in the singles and if I played my best table tennis I could win and luckily I did.

"I've learnt a lot from playing against China because we don't see them very often and to play so well and win the doubles was really good. Against Nikolenko I was leading him in two sets and if I had taken those it could have been a bit different and we were really close to winning the doubles so I think we will have a good chance against them next time we play."

Ashley Facey Thompson and Aaron McKibbin also faced China in the semi-final of the men's class 9 team event and they put up a very promising performance against the team of Lin Ma, the Paralympic and World Champion and world No 1, and Yi Qing Zhao, the world No 8 and bronze medallist from last year's World Championships.

In the opening singles McKibbin played well against Ma in a 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 12-10) loss and Facey Thompson also had his chances against Zhao and lost 14-12 in the third. In the doubles the young GB pair played superbly, holding their nerve after losing a very tight fourth set 13-15 and taking the fifth 11-6 and the match 3-2. The performance clearly inspired Facey Thompson who played really well in his singles against Ma, taking the third set 11-4 and pushing the world No 1 all the way in a 1-3 loss. So China took the tie 3-1 and went through to the final but the GB pair took a well-deserved bronze medal.

"I'm proud of the doubles win with Aaron," said Facey Thompson. "We found out the things that worked and won us points and it gave me confidence going into the singles against Ma.

"Just because he is the number one in the world it doesn't mean I can't believe I can beat him. I took a set and next time you never know.

"The Chinese style of play and level is high but it is not as high as you think it is going to be and you just need to believe and focus on yourself. I'm happy to win another medal and I'll go away and work on my return of serve, forehand and confidence."

McKibbin was also proud of his performance in the team event.

"I'm really happy," he said. "My singles match was very close – 9 and two deuces – I feel that if I hadn't made a few silly mistakes I could have taken a few sets and really pushed it so I'm happy with how it went.

"Our doubles performance was really good we've got better with each match and to beat Holland yesterday was also a good win so it's definitely a positive. Confidence-wise it is great to beat China in the doubles because that proves to us that we are not too far away – they are definitely two of the best players in the world and we really matched them toe-to-toe. It's always nice to come away with a medal and this is my third with Ash this season.

"This is one of the strongest competitions of the year and almost like a Paralympics – there are only a couple of nations missing – so definitely a positive to take into the training hall and work towards the Europeans."

In the round-robin women's class 4 team event Sue Gilroy and Megan Shackleton were disappointed to lose 3-1 to Germany in the morning but they played with great credit in their final match against world champions China.

After Shackleton had taken a set off double Paralympic champion Ying Zhou, Gilroy led World champion Miao Zhang 2-0 but the Chinese player came back to win the next three for a 3-2 win. The GB pair had chances in the first two sets of the doubles but the combined experience of Zhou and Zhang clinched the match 3-0 and the tie 3-0. So China took the gold but Gilroy and Shackleton picked up the bronze after earlier wins against India and South Africa.

"I'm bitterly disappointed with the day, really," said Gilroy. "I didn't play well against Germany and then played so well against Zhang but just threw it away. I have this thing when I get in front I then start counting the points although I try not to do it. I try not to alter my game but obviously I am doing. That is the closest I've been to Zhang but I'm so gutted that I couldn't convert from 2-0 up."

"I feel like I've learnt a lot from the match against China," said Shackleton, "and I didn't let my nerves get the better of me. I upped my game to compete with them and I feel I did put them under pressure and hopefully soon I'll be winning those games."

"I think me and Sue are really strong in doubles because we always work together and we don't give up so I think we will start winning our doubles soon."

Francesca Bullock
June 1, 2015

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