



Shackleton double silver as GB scoop five medals

Author: Paul Stimpson

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A young GB squad has picked up five medals at the PTT Czech Open in Ostrava, with 16-year-old Megan Shackleton winning two silver medals and Billy Shilton, also 16, taking bronze in the singles and combining with 21 year old Martin Perry to take bronze in the men's class 6-7 team. Daniel Bullen, 17, added another bronze in the men's class 5 team.

Shackleton, from Todmorden, reached the semi-finals of the women's class 4-5 singles with a 3-1 win over the world No 17 Aleksandra Vasileva from Russia and a 3-0 win against the Czech Beata Mentznerova. A 3-1 win over the Austrian Helke Koller earned her a place in the final and she was not disgraced in losing to the class 5 world No 10 Caroline Habib from Israel in three close sets.

Shackleton teamed up with the class 3 world No 6 Michela Brunelli in the round-robin women's class 4-5 team competition and the partnership were 3-0 winners over the Czech Republic and were presented with a walkover by the withdrawal of the Israeli/Austrian combination of Tabib and Koller.

A 3-1 win against Serbia assured Shackleton and her Italian partner of a medal and they needed to win their final match against the class 3 world No 5 Alena Kanova of Slovakia and Vasileva to take gold. With the tie level at 2-2 it came down to the deciding singles between Shackleton and Vasileva which the Russian took 3-1 to clinch the gold.

"I think I have had a reasonably okay tournament," said Shackleton. "I've had a few ups and downs and some things I didn't achieve in my matches but overall there are things I can take experience from and work on in training."

"It's helped me a lot in my preparation for the European Championships – I've lost in both finals but I'm really hungry to make sure my performances are 100% what I want them to be. I'm looking forward to training in Slovakia next week and working on the things that didn't go so well here."

Shilton, from Stonehouse but now based in Sheffield, topped his group in the men's class 7 singles with a fine 3-1 win over the Belgian world No 16 Ben Despineux and a 3-0 win over the Norwegian Markus Koteng. A 3-1 win over the experienced Samuel Shur from Israel in the quarter-final took him through to face Michal Deigsler from Poland who had upset the Spanish world No 4 Jordi Morales in their quarter-final. Deigsler had just too much experience in the semi-final in a 3-1 win over Shilton and went on to take the gold.

In the team competition men's classes 6 and 7 were combined and the GB partnership of Shilton and Perry reached the semi-finals with a 3-1 win over Shur and the Chilean Cristian Dettoni and a 3-2 win over Deigsler and Dominic Perbey from Germany in which Shilton avenged his earlier singles defeat by the in-form Polish player.

In the semi-final against a combined Czech/Belgian team Shilton beat both Despineux and Daniel Horut in his singles but the doubles proved decisive and a 3-2 win for Despineux and Horut took them through to the final.

"I think this was the best competition I've ever had really," said Shilton. "Although I lost to Deigsler in the semi-finals I beat Despineux and Shur twice and my level was very consistent. I played tactically better against Deigsler in the team – I spoke to Greg (coach) beforehand about what I didn't do in the first match and what I needed to do in the second and I managed to hold my nerve and win the match 14-12 in the fifth.

"Beating top players has given me a lot of confidence going into the Europeans next month and I think if I can play at the same level as I did here I can do quite well."

Although pleased with his medal Perry was frustrated with his lack of consistency.

"I played really well in patches," said the Paisley player. "I won a lot of first sets by going out and being dominant but then I was thinking too much about how my opponents were going to change their game instead of focusing on my own game. I just lack a bit of savvy into how to finish matches off – the experienced players know how to do that.

"I need to work on that mental edge. I'm looking forward to learning how to harness that focus and energy in the right way because that is the only way I'm going to grow as a player and that is what we all want to do."

Bullen found his group of Paralympic champion and world No 1 Tommy Urhaug and the Israeli Alaxey Eremenko too strong in the singles but reached the knockout stages of the men's class 5 team competition with the Belgian Bart Brands after wins over the Czech Republic and a Russian/Greek combination.

Although no match for Serbia in the semi-finals in a 3-0 loss Bullen can take some confidence from his two earlier wins against the Russian Alexander Abolmasov (3-0) and Petr Svatos of the Czech Republic (3-1).

"On the first day I let my nerves get the better of me," he admitted. "I was up against some of the hardest players and didn't play my game so the singles was pretty poor from me really.

"I played much better in the team – I was taking my game to the players and I can take a lot of positives and work on things before the Belgium Open in a few weeks' time."

Twenty-year-old Lucie Bouron was unlucky to be drawn in a group with three top-20 players in women's class 3 singles but will have found the experience of playing against such experienced players as the world number four Andela Muzinic from Croatia invaluable.

Craig Allen (class 9) and Lawrence John (class 10) also came up against tough competition but are learning all the time and benefiting from every experience of international competition.

"Overall it was a mixed competition," said GB head coach Greg Baker. "In terms of the players we have focused on over the last two years they have shown great promise for the future and both Billy and Megan can go into the European Championships next month with confidence which is a big positive.

“Martin has also shown that he can compete against good players and is not far away while the other players we brought here need to learn from the experience and take those lessons into their training.”

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