



## Bayley aims to regain title as he leads GB

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World champion Will Bayley and European champion Rob Davies head a team of 15 athletes that will represent GB in the ITTF PTT European Championships, which are taking place in Vejle, Denmark from October 12-17. This will be the final major championship before the 2016 Paralympic Games and will provide an opportunity for athletes to qualify directly for Rio.

Bayley, the men's class 7 world No 1, will be looking to regain the title he won in 2011, having taken silver in 2013. He faces strong opposition from among others Mykhaylo Popov, who beat Bayley in the European final in 2013, fellow Ukrainian Maksym Nikolenko, who Bayley beat to win the World title in China last year, and double Paralympic champion Jochem Wollmert from Germany.

"Preparations are going great," said Bayley. "I'm training hard and feel ready. I've been very successful in the last few major competitions which gives me great confidence. I just need to make sure I'm taking it point by point and game by game. It would be very special to regain the European title – it's always a massive one to win."

Davies has been plagued by an ongoing back injury since winning two gold medals at the last European Championships in 2013 but is confident that with the help of his coaches and strength and conditioning team he can now put that behind him.

"It's about managing my body and how much I train at the moment," said the 31-year-old former rugby player, "and I think we have it under control now so I'm happy. The last few weeks have been really positive and I'm playing some good table tennis."

The world No 3 and World Championship silver medallist admits that defending a title is always hard but says: "I'm not really feeling the pressure at the moment – I'm excited to be playing and looking forward to the challenge. I always want to win every competition and as I've won it before I believe I can do it again."

Davies is also defending his European team title but with fellow Welshman Paul Davies still recovering from injury he will have a new team partner in another Welshman Tom Matthews, 23, who will be competing in his first major championship.

"Tom has less experience than Paul," said Davies, "but he's a good young player coming through and we can have some good results if it all goes to plan so we'll just take one match at a time. I'm looking forward to playing with him and seeing what we can do."

The GB team also includes World championship silver medallist Sue Gilroy, London 2012 Paralympic bronze medallists Jane Campbell, Sara Head, Ross Wilson and Aaron McKibbin and talented teenagers Megan Shackleton and Billy Shilton, who will also be making their major championship debuts.

Shilton, 16, will play with Bayley in the men's class 7 team event in Denmark. The partnership has already proved successful – beating world champions Spain to win gold in Slovenia earlier this year and defeating China on the way to a silver medal in Germany.

"Playing team with Will in a major will be an amazing experience for me," said Shilton, "as he always performs his best at major competitions. The way he fights for every point and never gives up on what he needs to do is something that I could bring into my game. He always does everything he can to support me in matches so it's a really good confidence booster when you have a player like Will in your corner."

Sixteen-year-old Shackleton will also have an experienced team partner in Denmark in Gilroy and acknowledges that playing with the veteran of four Paralympic Games is giving her invaluable experience.

"Playing team event with Sue has been a great learning curve for me so far," she said. "I feel we get on well as a team, as we are both perfectionists and will fight hard until the very end of our matches. From the beginning she always told me that composure is key during high pressure situations, and that for me has been the most useful advice she has given by far."

GB Performance Director Gorazd Vecko has ensured that his team is well prepared for the challenge ahead with training camps in Slovenia and Slovakia.

"The European Championships is the last major test for our athletes before the 2016 Paralympic Games," he said, "and with many of the world's best players coming from Europe it will be a very tough competition."

"This is also our qualification year for Rio and good results in Denmark will be important for all the athletes, particularly those on the borderline of qualification. Rio is inevitably in the back of all the athletes' minds but the European Championships are a major competition and that is all we are focusing on at the moment."

The full GB squad for Denmark is: Will Bayley – Tunbridge Wells/Sheffield (class 7); Jane Campbell – London (class 3); Rob Davies – Brecon (class 1); Kim Daybell – Sheffield/Leeds (class 10); Ashey Facey Thompson – London (class 9); Sue Gilroy – Barnsley (class 4); Sara Head – Beddau (class 3); Jack Hunter-Spivey – Liverpool/Sheffield (class 5); Paul Karabardak – Swansea (class 6); Tom Matthews – Aberdare (class 1); Aaron McKibbin – London/Sheffield (class 8); Megan Shackleton – Todmorden (class 4); Billy Shilton – Stonehouse/Sheffield (class 7); David Wetherill – Torpoint (class 6); Ross Wilson – Minster/Sheffield (class 8).

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