



## Davies digs deep to retain European title

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Rob Davies overcame a heavy cold and the world No 1 Jean-Francois Ducay from France to retain his men's class one title at the ITTF PTT European Championships in Vejle, Denmark.

Will Bayley was thwarted in his attempt to regain the European title by an inspired display from Jean-Paul Montanus of the Netherlands who took the men's class 7 final 3-1 but Bayley took silver and there were bronze medals for Tom Matthews (men's class 1), Paul Karabardak, David Wetherill (both men's class 6) and Billy Shilton (men's class 7).

Davies had reached the final after overcoming stern resistance in the semi-final from his Russian opponent Dmitry Lavrov before taking the match 11-4 in the fifth.

Ducay ended Davies's London 2012 medal dreams with a 3-2 win in the group stages but since then the Welshman had won eight of their nine meetings although the Frenchman led their overall head-to-head 16-8.

A close first set was won by Davies 11-9 and he took the second 11-4 to establish a 2-0 lead. But Ducay is a tough competitor and came back strongly to level at 2-2 and looked to have the momentum going into the fifth and final set. However, Davies was not to be denied and he dug deep to take the final set 11-6 and win the gold.

"I didn't know how it was going to go at the start of the fifth," admitted Davies. "I just knew I had to start playing more positive again and luckily I managed to dig deep and keep going, playing positively and it worked.

Won the European title again!! Yay!!! Listen to this crazy lot after the last point! [@GBParaTT @ParalympicsGB pic.twitter.com/5Mo2tJoJs6](https://twitter.com/5Mo2tJoJs6)

– Robert Davies (@robbie\_tt) [October 14, 2015](https://twitter.com/robbie_tt/status/651111111111111111)

"It was a good call by Greg (Baker – GB head coach) to call time out at 7-6. I knew what he was going to say – keep positive – it is just putting it into place when you are on the table. It's harder than it looks sometimes.

"I didn't really think about retaining my title but I'm over the moon. I've really struggled over the past two years trying to keep on top of injuries and I came here with a massive cold and felt like rubbish this morning so I can't be happier, to be honest.

"There are so many people to thank – Neil Robinson especially as he is doing the hard work down with us in

Cardiff every day. I'm just really happy that I could do it for all the coaches and my fellow athletes in the squad.

"It's been a hard time with a few ups and downs through this tournament so I'm just happy to have won the gold again."

Davies will now bid to retain his European team title with Tom Matthews and admitted that his win today was partly for his team-mate and great friend Paul Davies, who partnered him to the European team title in 2013 and is still recovering from injury.

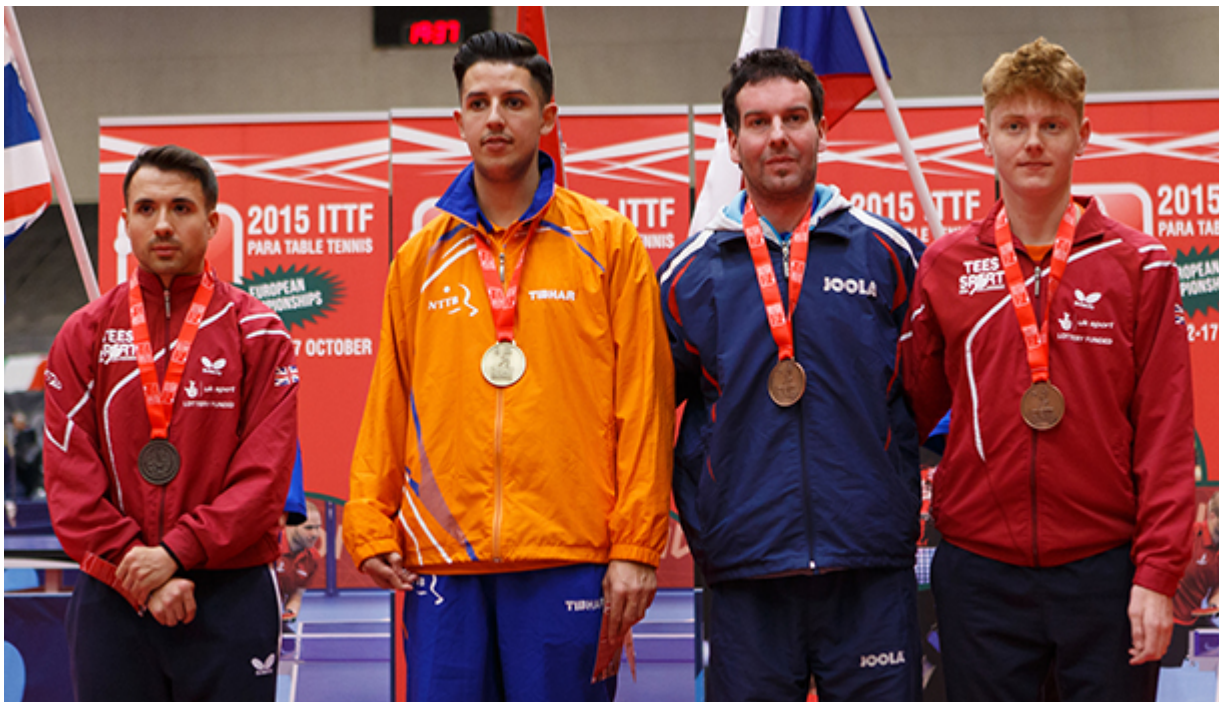
"I've got full confidence in Tom," said Davies, "he is playing really well and I just need to keep going, dig deep again and get myself playing well for the team event now."

In the men's class 7 semi-final Bayley knew that he needed a good start against 17-year-old Shilton, who had played superbly the previous day to defeat the reigning European champion and world No 3 Mykhaylo Popov.

The 27-year-old from Tunbridge Wells edged a tight first set 11-8 and did not allow his young opponent to get back into the match, taking the next two sets for a 3-0 win to reach his third consecutive European final and his fifth consecutive major final.

His opponent in the final was the very talented Montanus, the European bronze medallist in 2013 and world bronze medallist last year who had put out the world No 2 Maksym Nikolenko in the quarter-finals. The 22-year-old's world ranking of 11 owes more to his inconsistency than his ability and he produced his best form yesterday – hitting the ball with great power and accuracy.

As always Bayley kept fighting and at 2-0 down fought back from 5-3 down to take the third 11-9. But Montanus was using his power effectively and raced into a 10-3 lead in the fourth. Although Bayley saved four match points he could not save the fifth and Montanus took the match 3-1 and the gold medal.



Will Bayley (left) and Billy Shilton (right) on the podium

"He started really well and got on top of me a bit," admitted Bayley. "He deserved to win today for sure. He played better than me. I think I could have mixed it up a little bit more. I had a really slow start and I thought it was pretty close after the first two sets but he deserved to win.

"I've got to be pleased with getting to another major final. If someone had told me that I would reach five consecutive major finals I would have said it was impossible five years ago so I'm really proud of that achievement. I just want to push on now for Rio and I look forward to that."

Bayley can also look forward to the team event with Shilton.

"It was tough playing Billy today," he said. "It's always tough playing your team-mate, especially Billy as he's such a good boy and such a good player, but hopefully we can stick together in the team event and I think we can do really well."

Shilton admitted that he had not found it easy to focus on his first major semi-final less than 24 hours after the best win of his short career.

"To beat someone like Popov who was European champion and then to come into a match against the best in the world Will was quite difficult," he said.

"I think I did quite well but Will played really well. I've obviously never played him in a competition before so it was a bit strange but he beat me fair and square. At 8-8 in the first set I thought Will was quite nervous but after that he controlled me quite well and played to my weaknesses.

"I've learnt so much here and I'm really looking forward to the team event with Will and playing some more matches – it should be a great experience."

Matthews made a great start in his men's class 1 semi-final, taking the first set against Ducay, but the Frenchman's greater experience was decisive in the end and he recovered to take the match 3-1. However, Matthews, 23, has matured as a player here and to take a medal in his first major championship was a great performance.

"I had a great start," said the former mountain bike rider from Aberdare. "I went in there with confidence and I'm pretty gutted at the moment.

"He's the world No 1 and very experienced and I'm still new on the scene. But I think I scared him a bit so I'm happy with that really.

"There are a few little mistakes that I know I have to work on but I handled my nerves well so overall I'm happy. I'm really looking forward to the team competition with Rob now."

There were hopes of an all-GB final in men's class 6 as both Karabardak and Wetherill have been in good form here. Karabardak found himself taking on the reigning European and former world and Paralympic champion Peter Rosenmeier from Denmark, supported by an enthusiastic home crowd and, after losing the first two sets, he fought back bravely to level the match at 2-2. The final set was nip and tuck all the way to 9-9 when the Danish world No 2, to the delight of the crowd, clinched the set 11-9 and the match 3-2.

An understandably disappointed Karabardak was nevertheless proud of his performance.





Paul Karabardak (second right) and David Wetherill (right) with their medals

"I played about as good as I could play and credit to him he also played very well," said the 30-year-old from Swansea. "I don't think there deserved to be a winner or a loser – it is easy to say that when I've just lost but he had his home support which maybe made the difference at the end.

"I'm disappointed at the moment because it was a match I could have won. But I can take a lot of positives out of the match. My aim was a medal which I've got so although I'm disappointed at the moment I'm sure when I've reflected I'll be happy with my performance and my efforts."

Wetherill also faced a formidable opponent in Alvaro Valera, the reigning world champion and world No 1 from Spain. The 25-year-old from Torpoint lost the first two sets and although he battled his way back into the third set Valera used all his experience to close out the set 11-9 and the match 3-0.

Wetherill has the consolation of a first medal at a major championship and can also take plenty of positives from his performance in the singles here.

"I got everything right in terms of preparation," he said. "I felt really good and went into the game quite confident as I was playing quite well. But Valera is a player I haven't played that much and he is quite an awkward style and I think there is a certain way to play him.

"He is very experienced and he is the kind of player who makes you think that you are not playing so well even though I am obviously playing quite well at the moment. I didn't really do myself justice and although I'm still happy with a medal I didn't want to fall into the trap of being satisfied with that so I'm a bit disappointed, to be honest."

Karabardak and Wetherill also have great prospects of a medal in the team event.

"We've got a good chance to win the team as we're No 1 seeds," said Karabardak, "but it's going to be tough and we'll have to play well."

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