



Para players target success on home ground

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Posted On: March 02, 2016

World champion Will Bayley and double European champion Rob Davies will be among the competitors at this year's Butterfly Michael Hawkesworth Championships (BTTAD National Championships) held on March 5-6 at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre.

They will be joined by other members of the GB Para Table Tennis Team hoping to compete at this year's Paralympic Games in Rio, including London 2012 medallists Aaron McKibbin, Ross Wilson, Sara Head and Jane Campbell.

The Championships provide an opportunity for young up-and-coming players to take on the members of the GB team, many of whom are ranked in the top 10 in the world in their class.

Welshman Davies, who successfully defended his European title in 2015, is the men's class 1 world No 1 and is looking forward to starting his season in Grantham.

"The Nationals are really important," he said. "I didn't go to Italy so it will be my first competition of the year and the first opportunity for me to see what level I am playing at the moment. I've got strong competition within the GB squad from Tom (Matthews) so it will be good competition and a lot to play for.

"It's good to have people pushing you all the time – you've got to up your game and be at your best all the time. Since January I've been really chuffed with the way things are going again – I've had good consistency in training which is something I haven't been able to get, through injury and other things.

"I've still got a way to go but I'm excited about the future now. It's the first time I've played the National Championships for a while so I'm looking forward to it."

Bayley also holds the world No 1 ranking in his class and will be bidding to win the Men's Open Standing title as well as Men's class 7.

"It's a great tournament," said the 28-year-old Paralympic silver medallist, "and so competitive now with so

many good young players coming through and good older players.

"The National title is obviously something I'd love to win and it would be nice to win the Open title – I've lost to Kim (Men's class 10 athlete Kim Daybell) about six times I think in the final but it's not easy to get to the quarter-finals now let alone the final. I'll just try my best and we'll see how it goes."

Among those who will be defending their title is Ladies' Wheelchair Open champion Sara Head, who won a memorable bronze medal in London 2012 in the women's class 1-3 team event with Jane Campbell.

"The Nationals are really important to me," she said. "It's a home event and great practice – it gets very competitive and you know if you manage to win back what you won last year it is a fantastic achievement.

"But it is all about preparation for everything this year so I am looking to build on that with every match I play. Matches against Jane are always the hardest matches for us. I don't like playing any of my team-mates, to be honest, because as much as I want to win I also want to see them do well. It's very difficult because I want the best of both worlds really."

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