



## Progress for Para GB stars at Slovenia Open

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On the first day of the ITTF PTT Slovenia Open in Lasko 12 out of 16 GB players progressed from their groups to the knockout stages of the singles, including world champion Will Bayley and European champion Rob Davies.

There were great wins for Kim Daybell against the Chinese world No 3 and former World and Paralympic champion Ge Yang, Ross Wilson against former European champion Emil Andersson, 17-year-old Billy Shilton against European silver medalist Gyula Zborai and a winning return to competitive action for London 2012 bronze medallist Paul Davies after two years out through injury.

Bayley was involved in a tough first set against Chalermpong Punpoo from Thailand and did well to win it 16-14 before taking the next two sets 11-8 for a 3-0 win. He looked much sharper against Katsuyoshi Yagi and beat the Japanese player 3-0 to ensure that he topped his group and received a bye into tomorrow's quarter-finals.

"It was a tough first match," admitted the 28-year-old world No 1. "I've trained really hard for this competition and I think it was a bit of anticipation and trying to get that first win under my belt.

"I'm starting to feel that I'm into the tournament now and I'm a bit more relaxed. I think I played really well in the second match because he is a tricky opponent and has had some good wins. I knew I had to be playing a lot better than I did in the first match which I think helped me mentally going into that one, knowing that I had to up my game, so it was a much better performance."

Rob Davies recovered from 7-4 down in the first game against the Croatian Daniel Lazov to win 3-0 and then faced his old rival Endre Major from Hungary. The pair have had some great matches in the past but although Major rallied in the third game it was Davies who took it 14-12 to take the match 3-0.

"Really happy with the way I played and I quite surprised myself," said the world No 1 from Brecon. "I'm playing with freedom and enjoying it. I played really well against Major although the last game was a bit dodgy but I was glad to get through it 3-0 – you can't ask for any more than that, so really happy. I like the hall and the conditions here. I'm playing my game so I'll try and keep it going."

In his first competition for two years, Paul Davies showed all his old fighting spirit to come back from 2-1 down against the talented Federico Falco to beat the Italian 3-2 and followed that with another battling 3-2 win against Aloisio Lima Junior from Brazil. A 3-0 win in his final match against Sung Joo Park from Korea ensured that he progressed to the knockout stages as group winner – a great performance after such a long absence.

“It’s brilliant to be back,” said the 47-year-old from North Cornelly. “It was a bit of a weird day for me as I didn’t really expect to get as far as I did. I’m glad I had the wins but they were some very tight matches.

“You can’t underestimate these new guys I haven’t seen for two years – they have developed more in that time. After only six weeks of training it’s not a bad result. It’s the old dog in Paul Davies – the experience, keeping my mind focused. It’s never over ‘til it’s over as they say.”

Daybell, 23, has taken a year off from his medical studies at Leeds University to prepare for Rio and he showed the benefit of training full time with an impressive 3-0 win against the in-form European bronze medalist Filip Radovic, the talented teenager from Montenegro who won the Italian Open in February. In his second match against Ge he showed great determination and tactical awareness to come from 2-1 down and win the match 11-7 in the fifth.

“That would have to go down as the best win of my career,” said Daybell. “Matt (coach Matt Kenny) got it tactically spot on and was able to pick out his weaknesses – we had a game plan going in and I was happy that I was able to execute it.

“I lost to Radovic 3-0 in Italy so to come through that 3-0 was really big mentally for me. He’s a young guy and gets in your face and it is always difficult to play against those sort of players so I was pleased to win that 3-0 and I’ll do my best to carry it on.”

Ross Wilson began with a comfortable 3-0 win over Barak Mizrachi from Australia and then faced Andersson from Sweden, who had beaten him twice in Italy in February. At 1-2 and 4-2 down in the fourth a timeout from coach Greg Baker worked wonders and Wilson took the game 11-5 to level at 2-2 and went on to take the fifth 11-6 and the match 3-2. He completed his day’s work with a 3-0 win against Parinya Chuaigate Keereerut from Thailand to go through to the knockout stages as group winner.

“Coming in to this competition I knew I needed a top-10 win,” said the 20-year-old, “because I haven’t really been feeling that I am there yet but after today I think I have showed that I can play at that level and proved it to myself as well.

“So I’m going in positive for the rest of the competition and it’s a great feeling. Emil and I have had a lot of good matches and he’s a great player so it really did go well for me today and I’m really happy that I managed to get the result.”

Billy Shilton lost his first match 3-0 to the world No 4 Zhao Shuai from China and then received a walkover against Panupong Santaya from Thailand. At 0-1 and 2-6 he looked to be heading for defeat against Zborai from Hungary but came back superbly to win the second 11-9 and went on to win the match 11-9 in the fifth.

“There was definitely a lack of self-belief at the start of that match,” said Shilton, “but my coach Shaun (Marples) really picked me up and motivated me and from then I was really confident that I could do the job and I did so I’m really happy. Obviously I haven’t been playing in class 8 for very long so to get a win like that is great for my confidence and hopefully I can push on now in the knockout stages.”

Also through to the knockout stages are Aaron McKibbin (men’s class 8), Jack Hunter-Spivey (men’s class 5), Paul Karabardak (men’s class 6), David Wetherill (men’s class 6), Ashley Facey Thompson (men’s class 9) and Sara Head (women’s class 3).

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