



Gold for Bayley and Davies in Slovenia

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The GB Para Table Tennis team's two world No 1s, Will Bayley (men's class 7) and Rob Davies (men's class 1), both took gold today in the singles at the ITTF PTT Slovenia Open to lay down a significant marker ahead of the Paralympic Games in September.

London 2012 bronze medallist Paul Davies completed a stunning comeback after two years out through injury to take silver in men's class 1 and Kim Daybell took bronze in men's class 10.

Sheffield-based Bayley played superbly to beat the world No 2 Maksym Nikolenko in the final 3-1, having earlier avenged his defeat by Jordi Morales in February's Italian Open, beating the Spaniard 3-2 in a tense quarter-final, and then defeated the world No 4 Mykhaylo Popov in the semi-finals.

"I'm massively thrilled because it has been a lot of hard work," said the 28-year-old from Tunbridge Wells. "There were definitely times that maybe people doubted me but I stuck to what I know best and have worked as hard as I can and it's starting to pay off. But it's not done yet I still need to push on now and improve even more but it's a good marker at the moment to where I am.

"Morales is a very clever player and makes it really difficult for me to play my natural game so it's mentally tough to play him as well. I felt that once I got through that game I could win the tournament.

"I had a gameplan against Nikolenko – he's so strong and hits the ball so hard. I had to find a way to stop him doing that and I found it today and I felt pretty much on top of him throughout the match so it was one of my best performances against him for sure."

Rob Davies came through his quarter-final against Silvio Keller from Switzerland 3-1 and played a great match to beat the Paralympic champion Holger Nikelis 3-0 in the semi-finals. In a repeat of the all-GB European Championships final in 2013 he survived a spirited fightback by his fellow Welshman Paul Davies to win the match 3-1 and take the gold.

"I am really happy," said the 31-year-old from Brecon. "At the start of the competition I really wanted to get to

the final and I did that and when I saw that Paul was in the final as well it was a bit surreal. I was so pleased for him after he has been away for two years and to come back and play like that and get to the final is unbelievable.

"I'm really chuffed with the way I played against Holger in the semi-final. I've got a lot of respect for him – he is the Paralympic champion and the guy I wanted to emulate when I first started playing table tennis. So I was chuffed to beat him and to beat him 3-0 puts down a marker and I want to do the same in Slovakia next week if I can. It's a big boost – I can play better than I have here, I know that, but I guess Rio is the time to do it."

It was a remarkable performance by Paul Davies – beating the world No 2 Jean-Francois Ducay 3-1 to reach the final after such a long absence.

"I'm over the moon – it's like a fairytale," said the 49-year-old from North Cornwall. "I didn't think I would get out of my group so I'm overwhelmed."

"I tried to stop him (Rob Davies) but he is another class act – he is on top of his game and the best of luck to him. I've got another four months to train before Rio so you never know but he deserves it – he was the better player on the day and he's world No 1 for a reason."

"But for me to beat the world No 2 and play the world No 1 in the final after 22 months away is not a bad achievement for an old guy."

Leeds University medical student Daybell looked to be heading for the final of men's class 10 when he took a deserved 2-0 lead against the world No 7 Lian Hao but the Chinese player worked his way back into the match and eventually clinched it 11-8 in the fifth.

"From 2-0 up I was in a strong position and then he changed the way he played," said a clearly disappointed Daybell afterwards. "It's exactly the same as what happened in London against the same player – I was 2-0 up and he changed his tactics and to be fair he played well to come back."

"I think overall I've played a good singles competition – it's a shame I couldn't have won that match but by having a good win in my group (against Chinese world No 3 Ge Yang) I've shown that I'm definitely competing with the best players in the world and it's a good stepping stone towards Rio."

In men's class 8 Ross Wilson and Aaron McKibbin both went out at the quarter-final stage – Wilson beaten 3-0 by Ukrainian world No 1 Viktor Didukh and McKibbin beaten 3-1 by Emil Andersson from Sweden – while Billy Shilton played well in defeat by the former world champion Richard Csejtey from Slovakia in the last 16.

Jack Hunter-Spivey pushed the men's class 5 world No 2 Cao Ningning all the way in a 3-1 quarter-final loss; Sara Head lost 3-0 to world No 4 Xue Juan from China in the women's class 3 quarter-finals and in men's class 6 David Wetherill lost his quarter-final to the Danish world No 2 Peter Rosenmeier from Denmark 3-0 while Paul Karabardak lost his last 16 match to Pavao Jozic from Croatia 3-2.

Ashley Facey Thompson also went out of men's class 9 at the last 16 stage after losing to the world No 5 from Spain Juan Bautista Perez Gonzalez.

"With nearly all the world's top players competing here, to take four medals in the singles including two gold medals shows that we are on track for Rio," said GB Performance Director Gorazd Vecko.

The competition continues with the team event, which concludes on Saturday.

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