



Shilton relishes Rio opportunity

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From the School Games in Loughborough to the Paralympics in Rio – that is the week's itinerary for Billy Shilton.

The Gloucestershire teenager was selected to be part of the British Paralympic Association's Paralympic Inspiration Programme.

The scheme, which first ran at London 2012, provides athletes and coaches with several days at a Paralympics to help fuel their development and ambition for future Games.

Shilton, who narrowly missed out on qualifying for the Paralympics, will be one of 28 athletes and coaches from 13 sports to travel to Rio. He will be there from September 6 to 12 after being nominated for a place by his governing body, the BTAD.

"I found out about two weeks ago and I was really excited," said Shilton, 17. "I had literally no idea that they had applied for me to have a place and I was called into the office and Gorazd (Vecko, Performance Director) let me know the news.

"I was a bit disappointed not to qualify, so it was good to have this instead.

"I will get that experience to see what it's like hopefully for future Games, Tokyo 2020 and beyond.

"We'll get to go to the opening ceremony, the food hall, to the venues and get a feel for it and I'll get two days at the table tennis, so I'll get to watch all the guys.

"Everyone is playing really well at the moment, so hopefully they can do the business and get the medals."

Paralympic GB athletes Jack Hunter-Spivey and Ashley Facey Thompson were both part of the programme at London and Shilton added: "I've spoken to them about it. They've both qualified this time, so hopefully I'll follow the same path."

First, Shilton had a date at Loughborough University for the School Games, where he helped the South West team to a bronze medal, despite the team having only two members, meaning they defaulted every wheelchair match.

He will compete in the individual standing disability event on Sunday.

He said: "When I first went to the School Games in 2012 it was a little bit like a Paralympics – I'd never experienced anything like it. To experience that on a much bigger scale is going to be a bit daunting, I guess, but exciting."

See our website from Monday for more previews of the Paralympic table tennis.

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