



Walker ready to build on brilliant year

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Sam Walker has some big goals for the new year and beyond as he looks to add to a list of amazing achievements in 2016.

The World Championships bronze medal, an Olympic appearance, nominations for the ITTF Star Awards and a first PG Mutual National Championships men's singles final made 2016 a breakthrough year for the Worksop athlete.

Not that those accolades took him completely by surprise. The 21-year-old said:

"I always believed I could do the unpredictable and I always believed in myself to do the things that perhaps other people didn't believe I could do. And I work hard to do it.

"So if I'd been talking to someone at the start of 2016 and they said I would win a world medal, get to the Olympics, be nominated in the ITTF Star Awards, get to my first senior Nationals final – well, I'd certainly have taken that, but I wouldn't have said they were crazy."

Such self-belief is a big part of Walker's armoury and helped him to record his two biggest career victories at his two biggest tournaments in 2016 – beating world No 20 Yuya Oshima at the Worlds and No 17 Simon Gauzy in Rio, where GB defeated France 3-2 to reach the team quarter-finals.

He said:

"I do have self-belief, plus I don't think too much about the occasion and that helps me a lot.

"This year, the chances I got against the top players happened to be at the two biggest tournaments, and I

believe I can beat anybody on the day and when I get my chances I take them more often than not.”

Victories such as those lifted Walker to within sight of the world’s top 100, although he dropped back to 131 at the end of the year.

Breaking into that elite is something that will surely happen sooner rather than later, but Walker has other more immediate concerns – and is also planning further ahead to the Commonwealth Games in the spring of 2018, where he hopes to have the chance to add to his team silver from Glasgow 2014.

He said:

“The top 100 is a target but I’m trying not to look at that too often. I’m just trying to improve my game in the Bundesliga.

“I’ve not had the best season so far and not won too many matches. I’ve had a couple of disappointing tournaments in Austria and Sweden as well, so it’s about trying to get back on track and working as hard as possible in the training hall.

“The Nationals and individual Worlds in 2017 are big but the biggest is the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

“It’s a year and a few months away and at that stage, if I keep working hard and stay fit, I feel I can be one of the top players in that competition. It’s a big goal.

“It’s every four years whereas the Europeans and Worlds are big tournaments but are every year, so that’s one reason it’s a big focus. I definitely believe we can win medals and put on a good performance.”

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