



Karabardak gold leads Italian medal haul

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Welshman Paul Karabardak won gold in the men's class 6 singles at the Lignano Masters Open in Italy today and there were further medals for the British Para Table Tennis Team as Tom Matthews (men's class 1), Sue Gilroy (women's class 4-5), Martin Perry (men's class 6) and David Wetherill (men's class 6) all took bronze in their respective classes.

Karabardak won his opening match against the Australian Trevor Hirth 3-0 but progressed from his group as runner-up after losing his second to Vjekoslav Gregorovic from Croatia 3-1.

A 3-0 quarter-final win against Georgios Mouchthis from Greece and a 3-1 semi-final win over his GB team-mate Wetherill set up a second encounter with Gregorovic in the final.

The 31-year-old three-time Paralympian from Swansea avenged his earlier defeat by the Croatian former World No 1 in a 3-1 win and was delighted to start the season with his first singles gold since the Slovenia Open in 2015.

"It's a really good start to the season," he said. "It was difficult in the group games – I was feeling a bit under the weather and I was nervous which I always am in the first competition of the season but I managed to fight and get out of the group and then I started playing my best table tennis.

"I knew the final was going to be tough because I'd already lost to him but I managed to play my best and win the game. I think I played with a bit more energy and kept the momentum when I was in a winning position because he is a great player and if I had let him back in it would have made life hard for me and thankfully I won in the end.

"I've played well here but I also think I can play better so hopefully there'll be better things to come this year."

Wetherill topped his group with 3-1 wins over the German Tim Laue and Michael Azulay from Sweden and came through a tough quarter-final match against Pavao Jozic from Croatia 3-2 before losing to Karabardak in the semi-final.

"I'm very satisfied with how it has gone," said the 27-year-old from Torpoint. "We're all at different points in our training pre-season and in a way there wasn't a lot of pressure this week and if I was going to lose to anyone it was a pleasure to lose to Paul because results between us don't matter so much.

"It would have been great if Martin had won his semi and played Paul in the final but I'm really pleased for him because he's played really well. For all three of us to medal was really good so it's been a good tournament."

Perry was seeded only third in his group but came through in first place after 3-2 wins against the World No 9 Pavao Jozic from Croatia, the Italian Matteo Parenzan and Valentin Kneuss from Switzerland.

A 3-1 win against the former World No 1 from France, Bastien Grundeler, took him into the semi-finals where he lost to Gregorovic 3-0.

"It was a good test for the start of the season to see how everyone is playing," said the 22-year-old from Paisley. "I think I played well and got some good wins and I'm quite happy with my level.

"I wasn't seeded to get out of my group so to win it and beat two really good players was great. I was a bit disappointed that I couldn't meet Paul in the final and secure a 1-2-3 for GB but it's been a very good experience and I've got the team event with Paul to look forward to now."

Gilroy began with a 3-0 win against the German Lisa Hentig and after a 3-1 loss to her old rival Borislava Peric-Rankovic, the World No 2 from Serbia, she progressed to the knockout stages with a 3-2 win against Aleksandra Vasileva from Russia. The schoolteacher from Barnsley had to settle for the bronze after losing her semi-final 3-1 to the talented young German Sandra Mikolaschek.

"For the first tournament of the season I was quite pleased because we haven't been back in training long," said Gilroy. "I can go away now and I know what I need to work on in training and sharpen up for the rest of the season.

"Today was disappointing because I was playing well and I felt that I could have beaten her (Mikolaschek) but the umpire kept calling me on my serves and it put me off my game. But that is how it goes."

After a close opening game Matthews was a comfortable 3-0 winner against the Romanian Alexandru Imbuzan and secured first place in the group with another 3-0 win against the Russian Dmitry Lavrov.

The 24-year-old from Aberdare came through his quarter-final against Daniel Lazov from Croatia 3-1 but found the experienced Endre Major on his best form in the semi-final, the Hungarian Rio semi-finalist recording a 3-0 win.

"I could have played better," admitted Matthews, "but fair play to Major he bought his A-game and played really well to win that match.

"After my win in Vegas last year I put a lot of expectation on myself and I did well to get to the semi-finals. Major is a great player and went on to win the gold so I have to congratulate him. We're playing in the team event together and I'm looking forward to that."

All three GB players in men's class 8 reached the knockout stages but Aaron McKibbin, having beaten his teammate Billy Shilton in the last 16, was beaten by the Ukrainian World No 1 Viktor Didukh in the quarter-finals and Ross Wilson, after coming through his group unbeaten, lost his last-16 match to the 18-year-old Frenchman Elias Debeyssac 3-1.

Ashley Facey Thompson was impressive in winning all three of his men's class 9 group matches 3-0, defeating Ali Alsanea from Kuwait, Koyo Iwabuchi from Japan and the Russian Vladislav Balobanov, but the 22-year-old Londoner had to withdraw from his quarter-final with a back injury.

Swansea teenager Lawrence John had a tough opening match in men's class 10 against Mateo Boheas and lost 3-0 to the World No 4 from France. A 3-0 win against Takumi Tsujimura from Japan kept him in contention but a 3-0 loss in his final match to the Brazilian Claudio Massad left him in third place in the group and he did not progress to the knockout stages.

In women's class 6 Felicity Pickard began with an impressive 3-0 win over the World No 2 Raisa Chebanika from Russia but 3-1 losses to Emelie Endre from Sweden and the Ukrainian Maryna Lytovchenko put her out of the competition.

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