



Rio heroes headline Para Nationals

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Paralympic champions Will Bayley and Rob Davies head the entries for this year's British Para Table Tennis National Championships which take place at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre this weekend.

The championships provide an opportunity for young players to test themselves against the stars of the British Para Table Tennis Performance Squad, many of whom are among the best in the world in their class.

Bayley's celebration after winning gold in Rio made headlines around the world and the 29-year-old world No 1 from Tunbridge Wells has been in good form already this season, completing a clean sweep in the class 7 singles, open standing singles and open standing doubles in the Draycott Para Open at the beginning of March.

"I really enjoy the Nationals," said Bayley. "It is a good challenge for me playing against my GB team-mates, especially in the Open class. It is different playing against team-mates as we know each other's games so well but I am looking forward to it."

Davies, who heads the world rankings in men's class 1, will have tough competition in his class from US Open champion Tom Matthews.

"It will be a good measure of how I am playing," said the 32-year-old Welshman. "Playing against Tom will be a good indication of what sort of shape we are in."

"It is a big boost having him and Paul (Davies) in the squad as they keep pushing me and that is what I want to do. I want to get even better than I was in Rio and I think I can and those boys are only going to help me do that."

"Training has been going well – it is a slow process getting back into things and you can't rush it but I feel that I am playing well and getting towards where I want to be. I really want to go to the Nationals and do well."

Aaron McKibbin and Ross Wilson, who won Paralympic team bronze in London and Rio with Bayley, will face strong competition in men's class 8 from 18 year old Billy Shilton. In men's class 6, although Paul Karabardak will be missing due to injury, fellow three-time Paralympian and European medallist David Wetherill will be

challenged by US Open champion Martin Perry, while five-time Paralympian Sue Gilroy's opposition in women's class 4 will include her 18-year-old GB team partner Megan Shackleton.

"It is brilliant to have such strong competition within the squad," said Wilson. "The standard is rising all the time and I hope we can keep pushing each other to get better results internationally. To have three players in the same class competing at the top level internationally can only be a good thing."

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