



Jack, Ross and Sue take top titles

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Posted On: April 10, 2017

Ross Wilson and Jack Hunter-Spivey have won the Open singles titles in the standing and wheelchair categories respectively at the 2017 British Para Table Tennis Championships in Grantham.

Sue Gilroy claimed her 22nd National title in the Ladies' Open wheelchair class and Paralympic champion Will Bayley combined with 18-year-old Billy Shilton to take the Open standing doubles.

Sheffield-based Wilson also took the class 8 singles title, beating Shilton in the semi-final and his GB team partner Aaron McKibbin in the final. In the final of the Open singles he beat the class 10 singles champion Kim Daybell 3-1 to claim the National title for the second time in his career.

"It is really nice to see the standard going up in the Nationals each year," said the 21-year-old from Minster. "I played both Billy in the semi and Aaron in the final and they are both great players and I love the fact that we are improving together as a team.

"Kim beat me in the final last year so we've had a few jokes in training but it is all good fun and I'm really happy to be champion. I'm training more on the table now and it is good for me to know that I am doing the right things in training and that is helping me get the results."

Hunter-Spivey completed a hat-trick of titles with the class 5 singles and the wheelchair doubles.

"It is a great feeling," said the 21 year old from Liverpool. "I've been on top for five years now and it gets tougher every year. The junior players are getting a lot better and it's been strong competition this year. I'm really proud to be British champion and I don't take it for granted – it is nice to be the best in Britain but everyone else is fighting for it as well so I've got to be on my game all the time."

Hunter-Spivey was partnered in the doubles by Pathway athlete Dan Bullen who was also runner-up in the class 5 singles.

"It was a pleasure to play with Jack in the doubles," said Bullen. "It is the first time we've played together and we

worked really well so hopefully we can look forward to playing together more in the future.”

Gilroy has dominated the women’s wheelchair events at the Nationals for more than two decades and also won the class 4 singles as well as taking silver in the Open wheelchair singles, losing in the final to Hunter-Spivey.

“There is still work to be done but I played really well this weekend,” said the Barnsley schoolteacher. “To win 22 National titles is something I’m really proud of and I don’t think that is something anyone else will ever do.”

Martin Perry celebrated his promotion last week to the British Performance Squad by taking the class 6 singles title, beating the European bronze medallist and three-time Paralympian David Wetherill 3-2 in a thrilling final.

“To beat someone like Dave who is top five in the world is a fantastic result for me,” said Perry, who also received the Player of the Tournament Award. “It was a really good match and we both played really good table tennis. It means an awful lot to me to be National champion. I’ve been Scottish champion a few times and that means a lot to me but to say that I am British champion as well is a fantastic feeling.”

Bayley came through the men’s class 7 singles without dropping a set but was more delighted to win the Open doubles. He and Shilton beat Daybell and class 9 singles champion Ashley Facey Thompson in the semi-finals and then came from 2-0 against Wilson and McKibbin to take the match 11-7 in the fifth.

“It was one of the best wins I’ve had really because it was unexpected,” said Bayley. “We had a really difficult draw so I thought we were up against it and we did really well to win it. To come from 2-0 down against players as good as Ross and Aaron was an amazing win for us.”

“I lost my focus a bit at the start of the match,” admitted Shilton, “but we changed tactics a bit and played the perfect game in the last three sets. Will is such a top player and you’ve got to step up your game when you play with him so I’m really happy we won.”

Paralympic champion Rob Davies retained his class 1-2 singles title but was pushed all the way by his GB team-mate Tom Matthews in the decisive match in the round-robin event. Davies eventually took the match against his fellow Welshman 13-11 in the fifth.

“It’s nice to be British champion again and good to keep Tom down just for one more year,” said a relieved Davies. “It is always nice to win but it was more of a learning experience for me to see what I need to work on ready for the Slovenia Open next month. I’m reasonably pleased with the way I’m playing – I’ve got three weeks of training to go yet so I’ve got to keep improving now.”

Also among the winners were Kevin Plowman (Class 3), Adam Thompson (Class 11), Fliss Pickard (Ladies Open Standing), Lochlan O’Higgins (Junior Wheelchair and Wheelchair Open B), Jack Stockdale (Junior Standing), Euan McLaughlin (Standing Open B), Dylan Tynan (Standing Open C) and Harry Fairchild (Downs Syndrome Class). Junior Player of the Tournament went to Shae Thakker.

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