



Champ Bayley back on international stage

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Paralympic champions Will Bayley and Rob Davies head a 15-strong British squad that will compete in the PTT Slovenia Open in Lasko from May 6-9.

The factor 40 tournament is always one of the strongest and many of the world's top players are due to compete including another six Paralympic champions from Rio 2016.

The tournament will be Bayley's first international since winning Paralympic gold in the men's class 7 singles in Rio last September but the 29-year-old world No 1 from Tunbridge Wells has been in good form at home and recently won the Open Standing Doubles title at the National Championships with 18-year-old Billy Shilton.

"I don't feel any more pressure as Paralympic champion," said Bayley. "I feel like I am playing okay – not my best but I have made a lot of changes in the last few months and I feel that I am starting to get into my rhythm and my game. I am where I thought I would be at this stage of the season – maybe a little bit ahead – and I'm looking forward to the challenge of Slovenia."

World No 1 Davies is also making his first international appearance since becoming men's class 1 Paralympic champion and, like Bayley, the Welshman is focused on the European Championships later this year.

"I had a long break after Rio," he said, "and this will be my first international tournament since then. Training has been going well and I'm reasonably happy with how I'm playing at this stage of the season.

"The Slovenia Open is always a strong competition so I know that it will be tough. My main goal for this year is the European Championships in September and that is what I am working towards so Slovenia will give me an indication of where I am and the areas I need to improve over the next few months."

Also competing in Slovenia are Rio team medallists Aaron McKibbin and Ross Wilson, London 2012 medallist Paul Davies, five-time Paralympian Sue Gilroy and 2015 European medallists David Wetherill, Billy Shilton, Tom Matthews and Megan Shackleton.

The full squad is:

Will Bayley MBE (class 7) – Tunbridge Wells/Sheffield

Paul Davies (class 1) – North Cornelly

Rob Davies MBE (class 1) – Brecon

Kim Daybell (class 10) – Sheffield/Leeds

Ashley Facey Thompson (class 9) – London

Sue Gilroy MBE (class 4) – Barnsley

Jack Hunter-Spivey (class 5) – Liverpool/Sheffield

Tom Matthews (class 1) – Aberdare

Aaron McKibbin (class 8) – London/Sheffield

Martin Perry (class 6) – Paisley/Sheffield

Fliss Pickard (class 6) – Burnley

Megan Shackleton (class 4) – Todmorden

Billy Shilton (class 8) – Stonehouse/Sheffield

David Wetherill (class 6) – Torpoint

Ross Wilson (class 8) – Minster/Sheffield

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