



## It's perfect for 10 quarter-finalists in Slovenia

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Paralympic champions Will Bayley and Rob Davies led the way for the British team at the Slovenia Open with Bayley among 10 players through to quarter-finals and Davies already assured of a medal with a bye into the semi-finals.

There were some great performances and notable wins for young Megan Shackleton in women's class 4-5 and Aaron McKibbin and Ross Wilson in men's class 8.

Bayley was made to work hard by young Nicklas Westerberg from Sweden in an opening 3-1 win and followed that with a more comfortable 3-0 defeat of Viktor Karp from Ukraine. He assured his place in the quarter-finals as group winner with a 3-0 win against Temitope Ogunsanya from Nigeria but knows that there will be tougher matches to come today as he attempts to retain his men's class 7 title.

"It was nice to get my first match out of the way," said Bayley, "and I played okay because the Swedish boy has really improved so I was pleased to win that and I feel that I am playing my way into the tournament with those two wins.

"I feel comfortable in this hall and I'm used to the environment but there are lots of good players here who want to win so there are some big matches to come. I'm very motivated to do as well as I can and every match will be difficult now."

Davies came through two tough matches against Dmitry Lavrov from Russia and the Argentinian Fernando Eberhardt 3-1 and then secured top position in his group and a bye to the semi-finals with a 3-0 win against Nikolaos Kaplanis from Greece.

"Really happy to have won all my matches," said the Welshman. "I wasn't all that confident coming in to be honest so to come out and win three matches gives me a bit of a boost. I've got to perform on Sunday and lift my game so hopefully I can do that."

All three British players in men's class 8 progressed from their groups. McKibbin started with a comfortable 3-0

win against Roy Van Der Burg from The Netherlands and then came back from 2-1 down against old rival Richard Csejtey from Slovakia to beat the former World champion 11-5 in the fifth.

He dropped the first set against Aleksei Saunin from Russia but secured top place in his group with a 3-1 win and went through to the quarter-finals with a 3-0 win against the Italian Francesco Lorenzini in the last 16.

"Slovenia is always one of the strongest competitions," said McKibbin, "and I think this is the most players I have seen in class 8 at a factor 40 so it is not easy. I had a good win against Csejtey – my record against him is bad and my previous two wins against him have been in the team event so he is always awkward.

"But I think I played smart today and played the key points well and that was the difference. I'm thinking my way through matches a lot more and in my matches today I feel that I chose the right option more than the wrong one and it gives me confidence going into every game."

Wilson dropped the first set against Alejandro Perez but then took control against the Argentinian to win the next three and the match for the loss of only eight points. After taking a tight first set against Marcin Skrzynecki 12-10 he won the next two for a 3-0 win to avenge a defeat by the Polish former European champion in Rio.

Wilson topped his group after a 3-0 win against Nathan Pellissier from Australia and was unlucky to draw Emil Andersson, the former World No 1 who had also beaten him in Rio, in the last 16. At 2-0 the Swede looked to be in control but Wilson fought back superbly to take the match 11-4 in the fifth.

"Emil is a great player and we always have 50-50 matches and they normally go to five sets," said the 21 year old. "He beat me in Rio in the fifth and it was another great match today and I really respect him as a player.

"Every time I play someone like that I enjoy it and enjoy the occasion. I started slowly and I don't think I got my tactics right at the beginning but then I stuck in there and even when I was 2-0 down I don't think it was going massively wrong – I just needed to tweak things a bit.

"In the end I managed to do that and it paid off. It was nice to get a bit of revenge for Rio but I'm sure we'll have plenty of battles in the future and hopefully I can keep improving."

Billy Shilton recovered from losing the first set to beat the 20-year-old Russian Nikita Perevozchikov 3-1 before finding the experience of Emil Andersson just too much in a 3-0 loss. He needed to beat Parinya Keereerut from Thailand to go through to the knockout stages and fought back well from 2-1 down to win the match 11-6 in the fifth.

In the last 16 he faced Mathieu Loicq from Belgium and the former World, Paralympic and European champion was in good form and took the match 3-0.

"He (Loicq) was in good form today but I'm really disappointed that I couldn't win," said Shilton. "But I've got to keep my head up for the team event now and I'll look forward to that. I'm progressing slowly but surely and I'll get back to the training hall after the World Teams and really knuckle down."

Women's class 4 is combined with class 5 here and Megan Shackleton had a tough first match against the very experienced Khetam Abuawad from Jordan. She played well in a 3-1 defeat to the class 5 World silver medallist and former World No 1 and a 3-1 win against Kristina Arancic from Serbia took her through to the last 16.

The 18-year-old then produced a great performance to beat the World No 8 Nergiz Altintas 3-2, holding her nerve to win 12-10 in the fifth after the Turkish player levelled at 2-2.

"I've been trying for so long to get that top 10 win," said Shackleton, "and I've had a lot of close fifth sets which have been heart-breaking. But I stuck at what I know and everything I have worked on in training has paid off. It is a big relief that it is a milestone out of the way for me and I just hope I can do that more consistently now."

Sue Gilroy began with a 3-0 win against the Croatian Jelena Sisic and followed that with a 3-1 defeat of Altintas. She topped the group and received a bye into the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win against Lisa Hentig from

Germany.

"I played quite well today," said Gilroy, "although there were some patches I switched off for a few seconds. But overall my service was working well and I was spinning the ball well so I'm looking forward to playing tomorrow now."

In his first match in men's class 5 Jack Hunter-Spivey defeated Elias Romero from Argentina in three tight sets – coming back from 7-1 down in the third to take it 12-10. He then came agonisingly close to a first win in 10 matches against Ali Ozturk but the World No 6 from Turkey came back from 2-0 down to win the match 11-6 in the fifth. Hunter-Spivey then secured his place in the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win against Kentaro Doi from Japan.

"I played okay," said Hunter-Spivey. "My level has been up and down all day but I managed to grind out two wins so that is good for me at the moment. It is all about progression to the Europeans for me. I've come a long way since Rio and it is all positive so we'll see what the draw is like in the quarter-finals and crack on."

In men's class 6 David Wetherill started slowly in his first match against Matias Pino Lorca from Chile but recovered to win 3-1 and he fought back well against Bobi Simion to beat the Romanian 3-2. A 3-0 win against Bogdan Omelchuk from Ukraine took him through to the quarter-finals.

"These tournaments are all about grinding out the results," said Wetherill, "so I'm quite pleased I managed to do that today. I'm hitting the ball as nice as ever so it is quite encouraging."

"I'm not where I want to be at this stage of the season and it was a little bit more of a fight than maybe I would have liked but in a perverse kind of way I enjoy winning those kind of matches more than when I'm playing amazingly and winning 3-0. So it is really satisfying and I'm actually really pleased with today."

Martin Perry took the first set against Alvaro Valera but the World champion and World No 1 from Spain showed all his experience and class to take the match 3-1. Danny Bobrov from Israel is always a tough opponent and he was just too strong in a 3-1 win that put Perry out of the competition.

"It is a learning curve for me at the moment," admitted the 22-year-old. "It was a very tough group but to take sets off both players was a good experience and I know that I can do it. It was frustrating to not perform at my best but they are two very strong opponents who have a lot more experience than me especially at these big competitions."

"I thought they both played very well but I still pushed them so I can take positives from that although obviously disappointed to not get out of my group."

In men's class 9 Ashley Facey Thompson began with a 3-0 win against Takuya Nakajima from Japan and then lost a tight match against Aviv Gordon from Israel 3-2. A 3-0 win against the Russian Vladislav Balobanov took him through to a last 16 match against the Mexican Miguel Vasquez Can and he reached the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win.

"Today has been hard because I know I can play better but I did what I had to do," said Facey Thompson. "I lost to someone I maybe should have beaten but he played well. I had to bounce back and I'm happy that I did that and hopefully I can take that into my next game."

Kim Daybell has resumed his medical studies at Leeds University and had to fight hard in his first match in men's class 10 against Serhii Boiko – winning the fifth 11-7 after the Ukrainian had come back from 2-0 down to level at 2-2. He led the former World champion Jose Ruiz Reyes 2-1 before the Spaniard fought back to take the match 11-7 in the fifth but Daybell went through to the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win in his final match against Bunpot Sillapakong from Thailand.

"Overall I didn't play too badly," he said, "some good things and a few mistakes here and there but my game as a whole is still there and I'm playing at a high level so I can take positives from that."

"Gone are the days when the draw is important because everyone you play at this level is so good. Hopefully I will be able to play my best table tennis tomorrow."

In men's class 1 Paul Davies began with a 3-0 loss to the very experienced Sylvio Keller from Switzerland but came roaring back to beat Andrea Borgato from Italy 12-10 in the fifth. He then looked to have secured his quarter-final place with a 3-1 win against the French No 1 Alan Papirer but lost out on countback with Borgato and Keller both having registered two wins as well.

"Today was my first match since Rio," said Davies, "so it was tough all round but in the second match I was thinking more positively. Borgato gave me a hell of a fight and I was glad to win that and my last match."

Fellow Welshman Tom Matthews beat Daniel Lazov from Croatia 3-0 in his first match and started well against the Rio semi-finalist Endre Major but the Hungarian came back to win a pivotal second set 13-11 and went on to take the match 3-1. Matthews never gave up against the improving Federico Falco but lost the match to the Italian 14-12 in the third.

"I think that second set against Major was the turning point to be honest," admitted Matthews. "I think I was just too nervous in trying to finish off the set. It is all about experience and a lot of these guys have got a lot more experience than me. I feel that I am playing well so it is on to the team event now."

Fliss Pickard had beaten Raisa Chebanika in Italy earlier this season but the Russian women's class 6 World No 2 was in no mood for a repeat and stamped her authority with a 3-0 win. Pickard played well in her second match against Antonina Khodzynskaya from Ukraine despite losing in three close sets to the World No 6 and is progressing all the time.

"I feel that if I go in confident and believe that I can beat them I play a lot better," she said. "I'll learn from that and come back in the team event and try to start as I finished."

The singles competition concludes on Sunday.

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