



Team gold crowns GB's German campaign

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The British Para Table Tennis Team finished the German Open on a high when Rob Davies, Tom Matthews and Paul Davies beat world champions Italy to win gold in the men's class 1 team event.

Aaron McKibbin and Ross Wilson took silver in men's class 8 and 18-year-old Megan Shackleton and her Russian team partner Aleksandra Vasileva took silver in women's class 4-5 and there were bronze medals for Paul Karabardak, Martin Perry and David Wetherill in men's class 6, Will Bayley and Billy Shilton in men's class 8 and Ashley Facey Thompson and his German partner Yannick Ruddenklau in men's class 9.

The Welsh trio of Davies, Davies and Matthews won their first three matches in the round-robin men's class 1 event and their final match against Italy, who were also unbeaten, was to decide the gold.

After a marathon doubles which the Italians eventually clinched 3-2 Matthews levelled the tie with a 3-1 win against Federico Falco and Rob Davies secured the gold with 3-0 win against Andrea Borgato, who had beaten him in the final of the Slovenia Open last month.

"It has been a real rollercoaster of emotions for me," said Rob Davies. "Having played the worst singles event for many years it was a real challenge to pick myself back up for the team event. The boys played great throughout and it was a real team performance.

"Tom and I won all the doubles except the last against Italy which we lost in the fifth but it was a great match. Tom pulled a top class win out of the bag beating Falco for me to have a chance to play against Borgato. It was just redemption for me having that chance and I loved the opportunity. I played some of my best table tennis to beat him 3-0 to finish off a great team event for all three of us with gold."

"The singles was a strange competition for me," said Paul Davies. "I won my group but then lost to Park in the quarter-finals but he went on to win the tournament. The team event was justice at last with Rob, Tom and I beating the Italian team to take the gold so happy days."

"It was a tough start to the tournament," said Matthews. "Losing 3-1 to Park and 11-9 in the fifth to Borgato was

pretty gutting but it just wasn't my day. It was great to play alongside Rob and Paul again – we played some great table tennis and we know what we need to do to strengthen our performances but to beat the world champions Italy was a great feeling."

McKibbin and Wilson followed their 2-0 quarter-final win against Slovakia with a 2-0 win against Belgium but lost the final to Ukraine 2-0. After another very close doubles that Ukraine took 3-2 Wilson lost out in three close sets 10, 9 and 10 to the world No 1 Viktor Didukh.

"I was happy to get another medal with Ross," said McKibbin. "We lost a very close doubles against Ukraine and that is the closest we have got to beating them so we can take confidence into the Europeans that we are on a similar level to them. I can also take confidence from my singles as I lost 12-10 in the fifth to Didukh and played really well so I'm feeling good and know what I need to work on going into the next block of training."

"I'm really happy to get another medal with Aaron," said Wilson, who won gold in the singles. "Overall the competition has been encouraging and I can't wait to put the work in now before the Europeans and hope I can do everyone proud there."

Shackleton and Vasileva came through their group and reached the final with a 2-0 win against Germany, combining really well to win the doubles 3-2 before Vasileva beat Sandra Mikolaschek 3-1. In the final they fought hard but lost the doubles 12-10 in the fifth to the Korean Young A Jung and Pui Yi Wong from Hong Kong and class 4 Shackleton was beaten 3-0 by the class 5 world No 4 Jung.

"The start of the tournament was very frustrating for me," said Shackleton, "as I struggled to find my best form. As the tournament went on though I feel that I dug deep and managed to pull out some better performances. To win silver with Aleksandra has given me confidence that I can be resilient when I don't feel at my best."

Bayley and Shilton had a great win over London 2012 champions Poland in the quarter-finals but found Ukraine too strong in the semi-finals. Karabardak and Perry lost their semi-final to European champions Denmark and Facey Thompson and Ruddenklau were beaten 2-0 in their semi-final by Italy.

"I'm very happy with my performance here," said Bayley, "although I have 30% more to improve and it was not perfect. I have to do better in a lot of areas and I'm looking forward to working on those things in the coming months."

"I was really pleased to get another medal in the team event," said Shilton. "I brought my form across from singles into team and was really pleased with how everything went especially the doubles. The highlight for me was the win against Poland and to beat them so convincingly was really good. It was great to play with Will again as I learn so much from him every time we play and he's a great role model."

"I feel I've had a really good competition," said Perry. "I had a great run getting to the semi-final in the singles and losing so narrowly, 17-15 in the fifth. I feel that I'm playing some really good table tennis and it was great to get another team medal with Paul and Dave."

"We're proving that we are a really strong team and can play any order of the three of us. It's a great team to be a part of; having such strength and depth gives us an edge and it's a great team spirit amongst us. I'm looking forward to the rest of the season now."

"I felt that I played really well to win my singles group," said Karabardak, "although I didn't play quite to the standard I want in the quarter-final but lost out to a great player who is in the form of his life. I'm really pleased with team bronze; Martin and I had some fantastic wins in the doubles and maybe deserved a bit more but on the whole it was a good team performance."

"This was my first competition since finishing my degree," said Facey Thompson, "so it was good just to be able to focus on table tennis. It was an OK performance overall – I lost a very tight match to the bronze medallist in Rio 3-2 and had chances as well."

"I have a lot of things to work on in training and although there were ups and downs I was happy with bronze in the team event."

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