



## Davies leads British charge

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Paralympic champion Rob Davies booked his semi-final place and fellow Rio gold medallist Will Bayley also began his bid to add the European crown to his world and Paralympic titles with a win in his first group match on a good first day for the British team at the European Para Table Tennis Championships in Lasko, Slovenia.

Medical student Kim Daybell put up the performance of the day in securing a first win over the former world champion and world No 1 Jose Ruiz Reyes from Spain and all 16 British athletes are still in contention for a place in the knockout stages of the singles events which conclude on Saturday.

### Men's class 1

Rob Davies began the defence of his European title with a 3-0 win against Dmitry Lavrov from Russia but then had to show all his fighting qualities against Federico Falco, the young Italian who beat him in the German Open in June. Falco led 2-1 but the Welshman fought back to level at 2-2 and then held his nerve to clinch a tense final set 11-9 and the match 3-2.

The result meant that Davies finished top of the group and receives a bye into Saturday's semi-finals.

"I knew it would be a battle with Falco," he said. "We have had some tough games of late and to beat him 3-2 again is pretty satisfying. Obviously I'd like to do it a bit easier but I'll try that next time I play him. I've just got to keep battling – that is the main thing at the moment.

"I'm not quite at my best but I'm hoping I can get there for later on in the tournament. I'm just really happy with the result: two from two – you can't get better than that. I'm definitely going to battle for as long as I can."

Paul Davies rekindled memories of his Paralympic bronze medal in London with two great performances. The 50-year-old from North Cornelly had not lost to Janos Kaiser from Hungary since 1999 and that record never looked in danger as he dropped only eight points in a 3-0 win. He then played superbly to beat the Italian Andrea Borgato 3-0 and plays his final group match today against Alan Papirer from France.

"Did that really happen?" said an elated Davies. "I just couldn't do anything wrong today – the old tiger is back. It didn't matter what Borgato did, I reached everything and it just all came together. I'm in shock. The World team medal was good but this could be the icing on the cake. I haven't played like this for years."

Tom Matthews had a walkover in his first match when Endre Major from Hungary withdrew from the event. Matthews plays his final group match against Sylvio Keller from Switzerland.

#### **Men's class 5**

Jack Hunter-Spivey defeated Milan Zelen from Serbia 3-0 in his first match and plays his final two group matches today against his friend and regular team partner Tommy Urhaug, the former Paralympic champion and world No 1 from Norway, and Gerardus Van Grunsven from The Netherlands.

"I played okay today," said Hunter-Spivey. "I was a bit nervous as it was the first match at the Europeans but I played good in patches and played well when I needed to. There are always things I can improve on – it wasn't my best level but I did enough to win and that is the main thing."

#### **Men's class 6**

Martin Perry had a tough start against Peter Rosenmeier, the Paralympic and European champion, but acquitted himself well despite a 3-0 loss and he can still progress to the knockout stages with a win against Valentin Kneuss from Switzerland.

"In the first set I put myself in a really good position by going up early on," said Perry, "and I showed signs that I'm playing quite well but then I was unable in the closer points to put the ball away. He showed real class in the second set and I had really good chances to take the third set so I can take positive points going forward."

Dave Wetherill started with a 3-0 win against Tim Laue from Germany and clinched his place in the last 16 with a 3-0 win against the Italian Raimondo Alecci.

"I guess that what matters is the scoreline at the end of the match," said Wetherill. "I think I did really well today although I lost a bit of concentration in the last match but the win is what matters so I'm pleased."

Paul Karabardak had to show all his fighting qualities in his first match against Asaf Gofer from Israel, coming back from 2-1 down to win 11-8 in the fifth. In his second match he came up against an in-form Bobi Simion and the Romanian took the match 3-0 but the 31-year-old Swansea player can go through to the last 16 if he beats Marios Chatzikriakos from Greece.

"I had a difficult match this morning," said Karabardak, "against a player who was playing really well and pushed me but I felt mentally strong and I played clever and tactically well to see him off in the end. So I was pleased with that. I played well against Bobi but he was playing really well and I ran out of ideas in the end. I still feel I'm playing well and I'm still quite confident."

#### **Men's class 7**

Will Bayley played his first match against Thomas Rosenast from Switzerland and was happy to come through in three sets having lost two of his four previous matches to the Swiss player.

"I was actually really happy with the way that I played," said Bayley, "because he is a different style and an awkward style that we don't practice against much. The first match is always difficult so it was a good win for me."

"Trying to win all three titles would be amazing and I am playing really well but you've got to do it in the tournament. It doesn't matter how well you are training and how well the preparation has gone, if you don't do it in the tournament it doesn't count for anything. I want to prove to myself more than anything that I can keep winning major titles."

Bayley plays his final group match today against Nicklas Westerberg from Sweden.

## **Men's class 8**

Billy Shilton looked sharp in his opening match against Rubinco Risteski from Macedonia and was a comfortable 3-0 winner. He played well against the world champion and world No 1 Viktor Didukh but the Ukrainian had just too much experience for the 18-year-old, who reached the last 16 when his final opponent Gyula Zborai from Hungary withdrew from the tournament.

"I'm really pleased with the first day," said Shilton. "It was a good first match for me and it helped me to get a feeling for the hall and the tournament so I was very happy. Against Didukh I played a lot better than I did in Germany – I was in the rallies a lot more and competing so I'm really happy and looking forward to tomorrow."

Ross Wilson came through his first match against Samuel De Chiara from Italy 3-0 but was very disappointed to lose in three close sets to the Polish former European champion Marcin Skrzynski. The 22-year-old from Minster needs to beat Pablo Jacobsen from Norway to ensure his progress to the last 16.

"It is not how I wanted it to go so I've just got to move on," said Wilson. "Competitions are full of ups and downs and I've just got to try and improve for the rest of the competition."

Aaron McKibbin began with a comfortable 3-0 win against Fredrik Johansen from Norway and had his chances against Emil Andersson but the former world No 1 from Sweden used all his experience in a 3-1 win. McKibbin can also reach the last 16 if he beats Joshua Wagner from Germany.

"He (Andersson) is a good opponent and I haven't played him for some time," said McKibbin. "He's been world team champion this year and was team silver medallist in Rio and I was really looking forward to the match. I went in with a game plan and looking back I maybe overplayed the game plan and wasn't free enough. In the first couple of sets I was really tentative and struggling to get used to him."

## **Men's class 9**

Ashley Facey Thompson had a tough start against the former world No 2 Iurii Nozdrunov and the tall Russian, who was European silver medallist in 2015, was a 3-0 winner. The 22-year-old Londoner then dropped the first set against Pawel Jablonski but came back in style to win the next three – 1, 2 and 6. He plays his final group match today against Tonnie Heijnen from The Netherlands.

"All credit to Nozdrunov he is a great player and he played really well" said Facey Thompson. "He was on form and played tactically the best against me I have seen him play. I was a bit disappointed because I am in full-time training now and although I wasn't expecting to win I thought I could have pushed myself a bit harder. In the first set against Jablonski I was thinking about everything and was just a bit nervous but then I settled down and played my game and I was really happy with the outcome."

## **Men's class 10**

Kim Daybell started with a potentially difficult match against an unfamiliar opponent Gustav Wiesenhofer, the Austrian who won gold in this year's Hungarian Open, but the 25-year-old from Sheffield was always in control in a 3-0 win.

He had come close to beating Jose Ruiz Reyes in the Slovenia Open in May but was still looking for his first win against the former world and European champion in 16 matches. He made a great start by taking the first two sets and recovered from the disappointment of losing a tight third set 14-12 to take the fourth 11-9 and the match 3-1 with some superb play – turning spectacular defence into blistering attack.

"He has always been a really tough opponent," said Daybell, "and that is the first time I've managed to beat him so I'm really pleased that I was able to hold it together at the end and it was a good performance."

"I was quite disheartened at the end of the third set as I've been in a winning position against him before and he has come back. He is a very clever player and makes it very difficult but losing in the past has helped me to know what to do right this time and luckily I was able to do that."

Daybell plays his final group match today against Lorenzo Cordua from Italy.

#### **Women's class 4**

Megan Shackleton recovered from a nervous start to defeat Jelena Sisic from Croatia 3-0 in her first match and plays her final group matches today against Nada Matic from Serbia and Helke Koller from Austria.

"I think I was a little bit shaky going in to my first match," said Shackleton. "I've been working really hard and I think I maybe put a little bit of pressure on myself to show what I can do and maybe that came out a little bit in the first few points but I think I managed it well in the end and came out with the win so I'm really happy."

Sue Gilroy also started with a 3-0 win against the Serbian Biljana Ubovic and was happy with her form after a restricted preparation due to surgery on her elbow.

"I'm really pleased with how I played," she said, "because it has been a bit up and down training wise because of my surgery and obviously the nerves were setting in a little bit regarding where I was in relation to everyone else. But everything went really well so it was a good start to my Europeans."

Gilroy completes her group matches today against Caroline Tabib from Israel and Barbara Meglic from Slovenia.

#### **Women's class 6**

Fliss Pickard had a difficult start against the bronze medallist from Rio Maryna Lytovchenko but she put up a great performance against the Ukrainian world No 2 despite a 3-1 loss, levelling at 1-1 after losing the first set 14-12. The 23-year-old can still progress to the knockout stages if she beats Gabriela Constantin from Romania in her second group match.

"I'm really pleased with the way I played," said Pickard. "I had big chances and the biggest thing was I could see the improvements I've made over the summer and I was just trying to put them in place."

"Obviously there is frustration that I couldn't consistently do it to win the game but looking back to the last time I played her it is an unbelievable difference so I've just got to keep going."

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