



## Silver and bronze for GB at Euros

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The British team won two medals in the team events at the European Para Table Tennis Championships in Lasko, Slovenia with Kim Daybell and Ashley Facey Thompson winning a superb silver medal in men's class 10 and Aaron McKibbin, Ross Wilson and Billy Shilton taking bronze in men's class 8.

Paul Karabardak, David Wetherill and Martin Perry, already assured of a medal, came through their semi-final and will play Croatia for gold in the final of men's class 6 on Wednesday.

Leeds University medical student Daybell and 22-year-old Facey Thompson reached the final of men's class 10 with a magnificent performance against the Rio Paralympic silver medallists Spain in the semi-final, getting off to a perfect start with an impressive 3-0 win in the doubles.

Class 9 Facey Thompson then played one of the matches of his life to push the class 10 former world and European champion Jose Ruiz Reyes to five sets, saving two match points in the fourth to level at 2-2 before the experienced Spaniard closed out the match 11-6 in the fifth.

Just as he did in the quarter-final, 25-year-old Daybell needed to win the deciding singles and at 2-0 up seemed to be in control of the match against Jorge Cardona. When the Spaniard came back to level at 2-2 the momentum appeared to have shifted but Daybell has showed an indomitable fighting spirit to match his talent at these championships and he proved the stronger in the closing stages, taking the set 11-6 and the match 3-2 to take his side into the final.

Against world champions Poland in the final they started well, taking the first set in the doubles before the world No 1 Patryk Chojnowski and Igor Misztal came back to take the match 3-1. Facey Thompson again fought hard against Misztal in the first singles but the 20-year-old Polish class 10 player was just too strong and took the match 3-1 and secured the gold for Poland.

Daybell said:

We played really good doubles against Spain. They are such a strong team and have been world and European champions in the past. We have never beaten them before so to go out and do that in our first ever semi-final as a pair was really something special.

I've been involved in so many close matches and at 2-2 against Cardona I just used the experience that I have had and I was able to come through it. It is what I've been doing for the whole tournament – just grinding out matches and doing it the hard way but it has worked out well.

It would have been quite easy for us to sit back after winning the quarter-finals and feel that we had done it after medalling and I was so pleased that we could go a step further. It really did mean a lot to win silver, and to win it with Ash and share that experience – it is something we have both been working for a long, long time so it is good.

I think Ash is playing great now and I am hopefully going to be able to improve my level a bit more and if we can keep going with that there is no reason we can't become one of the best teams in the world.

Facey Thompson agreed:

We could easily have been happy with the bronze, but we pushed on and beat a quality team and I'm really happy with that. Our doubles was good and in my match against Ruiz I played my hardest and believed in myself – it was a really good match. His quality took over in the fifth set but I'm really happy with how I played.

Class 10 is not my class but I feel that I am in the mix and playing strong against them – they are having to battle against me and that is giving me more belief to go and perform like that against the players in my class.

Wilson and McKibbin came through a tough quarter-final match against world team bronze medallists France in the morning, losing the doubles 3-2 after failing to convert two match points in the fourth set. Wilson levelled the tie with a determined 3-2 win against world No 5 Thomas Bouvais, holding his nerve to take the fifth 11-7 after the Frenchman had levelled by taking a close fourth set 11-9. McKibbin then secured a place in the semi-finals for his team with a 3-0 win against Elias Debeyssac.

In their semi-final they faced world silver medallists Ukraine and although they fought back well to take the first set of the doubles they lost the match 3-1 and the tie 2-0 when Wilson was beaten 3-1 by world champion and world No 1 Viktor Didukh.

McKibbin said:

Obviously our doubles performance against France was much better than against Poland in the group and that is what we were trying to do – bring our level to where it should be and I think we did that. It was tough to lose the match but I had a lot of faith in Ross that he could win against Bouvais.

The experience of Rio helped me in the last match against Debeyssac and I had full belief in myself that I was going to cross the line. It was a team effort – Billy (Shilton's) support was amazing and Greg (coach) on the bench and I think that also made the difference in the end.

Ukraine won gold and silver in the singles here so they are obviously a really strong team but we know that there are things we can improve and the positive is that we are competing with them.

I think this major has been one of the hardest for me as I've had a few niggling injuries coming in so it has been a bit of a mental battle but I'm really happy to come away with a medal.

Wilson added:

The France match was really difficult. That is the first time we have played them so it was nice to play a new

team. We had a great game in the doubles and I had a great game against Bouvais and then Aaron came through really well in the third singles so there were a lot of positives this morning and it was great to get through it.

It is nice to know that I am competing with the top guys but I really do so badly want to start beating them and that is what I'll be working towards next year.

For 18-year-old Shilton the experience of being on the bench in the high-pressure environment of a major championship will be a great benefit for the future.

He said:

It is massive for me to learn from Aaron and Ross. They are such a great team and have done it before in major competitions and have done it again here. I'm really pleased with another major medal.

In their men's class 6 semi-final Wetherill and Karabardak recovered from dropping the first set to win the doubles against Israel 3-1 and Wetherill fought hard against an in-form Danny Bobrov but the Israeli eventually took the match 11-5 in the fifth to level the tie at 1-1.

Karabardak then had to win the deciding singles against Asaf Gofer and after getting the better of a titanic battle in the second set 19-17 the Welshman was able to celebrate his 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday with a 3-0 win to take his team into Wednesday's final where they will play world silver medallists Croatia.



David Wetherill and Paul Karabardak in doubles action (ITTF photo)

Karabardak said:

The second set was really intense. It was crucial in the game because I think it broke his confidence a little bit and took away maybe how much he thought he could win and I think I knew after that I had a great chance to



go on and win.

Not that it wasn't difficult because he still had some resilience in the third set but it made it a little bit easier which I'm very thankful for. It's a very nice way to celebrate my birthday – I couldn't ask for more.

Wetherill has come through some long matches in these championships and although he dug deep he was unable to find a way past Bobrov.

Wetherill admitted:

I've always struggled against him for some reason. I haven't played him that many times and today I was trying to find my reserves and I tried my hardest. I had every confidence in Paul in the third singles and it is really good that either Paul or Martin or any of us can win if the other one loses a match.

Perry said:

Watching Paul's second set I am just glad that I don't have my hair already because it would have been gone. That was such a tense set and I can only praise these guys' performance. It was such an electric bench – the energy on the bench was just feeding off these guys on the table. They were putting so much into it and myself and Andrew (coach) felt we were in the match.

After taking bronze in the World Team Championships earlier this year Sue Gilroy and Megan Shackleton have not found their best form here and they lost their third match in the round-robin women's class 4-5 team event to Germany. They fought hard to win the first set of the doubles 13-11 from 8-4 down but Sandra Mikolaschek and Lisa Hentig came back to take the match 3-1. Shackleton then showed glimpses of her potential against Mikolaschek, particularly in a deuce third set but the world No 4 took the match 3-0 to secure the tie for Germany 2-0.

Gilroy said:

They certainly played a lot better than us, we need to do a lot more work on our doubles. It is coming – we had some really good rallies particularly in the first couple of games so that is a real positive and we just need to build on that now.

Shackleton said:

It is disappointing regardless of how good the player is. With how hard I work in training and the things that I am capable of, it is disappointing, but I think with experience eventually these things will hopefully turn round for me and in the last set I do think I showed promise of what I can bring out in the future.

Gilroy and Shackleton play their final match against world champions Serbia today.

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