



## Four golds for Para GB in Belgium

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Gold for Paul Karabardak (men's class 6 singles), Lucie Bouron (women's class 1-3 singles), Martin Perry and Conor McAdam (men's class 6 team) and teenagers Billy Shilton and Joshua Stacey (men's class 9 team) were the highlights of a successful PTT Belgian Open for the British Para Table Tennis Team from a total of 14 medals won during the three-day competition.

Nine medals in the singles events included silver for Sue Gilroy (women's class 4-5), Paul Davies (men's class 1) and Perry (men's class 6) and bronze medals for Megan Shackleton (women's class 4-5), Fliss Pickard (women's class 6-7), Shilton (men's class 8) and 17-year-old Stacey (men's class 9) on his international debut.

In the team events Gilroy, Shackleton and Bouron took silver in women's class 1-5, Marc Bonnar took silver in men's class 1-2 with the Mexican Victor Reyes Turcio and Pickard picked up bronze in women's class 6-10 with her partner Aneth Araya Alvarez from Costa Rica.

### Singles

Karabardak and Perry both topped their groups in men's class 6 after winning their three matches 3-0 and won their quarter-finals against Georgios Mouchthis from Greece (3-1) and the talented young German Benedikt Muller (3-0) respectively.

Karabardak then won his semi-final 3-0 against Tim Laue from Germany and Perry put up a great performance to beat the European bronze medallist Bobi Simion from Romania 3-2 to produce an all-British final which Karabardak won 3-1.

"I'm really pleased," said the 32 year old from Swansea. "I felt in good form and I needed to be at my best to beat Martin who was playing brilliantly – the best I've seen him play. It was close and nervy but we both went for it and played well but thankfully I had a little bit more on the day to win."

"Topping my group filled me with confidence," said 23 year old Perry. "Simion is just off the back of a good Europeans so I knew he was playing well but I believed in my ability and I played some great table tennis and showed how much I've raised my game recently. The final against PK was an absolute battle and we really brought the best out of each other because we had some amazing rallies."

Bouron won her first two matches in the round-robin women's class 1-3 singles 3-0 against Eun Hee Kim from Korea and Mayumi Ozawa from Japan and then played top seed Femke Cobben from The Netherlands in the final match which was to decide the gold. The 22-year-old from Bracknell played a great match to win 3-0 and secure her first international gold medal.

"It has given me real confidence to get my first international gold medal," said Bouron, "as it shows that my training is being transferred into match play. It also shows that I am progressing towards being able to compete with the top players in my class."

In the round-robin men's class 1 event Davies was a 3-0 winner against the Italian Antonio Piva, the American Michael Godfey and Sylvio Keller from Switzerland but a narrow 3-2 loss to Hyeon Uk Kim proved decisive and the Korean took the gold and Davies the silver.

"I really enjoyed this tournament," said the Welshman. "I played some good table tennis and it is nice to finish the year in the top seven of the World rankings. I'll reflect on my results from this season and I'm looking forward to the World Championships next year."

Gilroy topped her group with 3-0 wins against the German Lisa Hentig and Tamara Leonelli from Chile before reaching the final with a 3-1 win against her team partner Shackleton. She found world No 4 Sandra Mikolascheck from Germany too strong in the final and had to be content with silver.

"I played well yesterday," said Gilroy, "but I hurt my shoulder on the bus to the venue today and I didn't think that it would be possible to get through to the final. It is always hard to play against your team partner – Megan is playing really well at the moment and I couldn't get my game together in the first set but thankfully started to play better in the next three. I didn't manage to focus as well as I needed to against Sandra, which was disappointing."

After a 3-1 loss to Mikolaschek in her first group match Shackleton secured her semi-final place with a 3-0 win against Sabine Femtehjel from Norway.

"I've played well so far in this tournament," said the 18-year-old from Todmorden, "and to come away with a bronze medal in the singles gives me confidence. Playing Sue was a great experience as I've never had to play a team mate in an international before and I feel that I really challenged her."

Pickard started with a 3-0 win against Kimberley Schaetsaert from Belgium and after a narrow 3-2 loss to world No 5 Stephanie Grebe the 23 year old from Burnley progressed to the semi-finals with a hard-fought 3-2 win against the German Bente Harenberg. In her semi-final she played well to level at 1-1 against Katarzyna Marszal from Poland but the World number six went on to take the match 13-11 in the fourth.

"I feel that it has been a tough singles event," said Pickard, "and I don't think I have played my best table tennis but this happens sometimes and you have to fight to get through. I thought I showed good resilience to get the bronze and this will only make me stronger in my journey to become a world class athlete."

Shilton was impressive in winning his three group matches 3-0 which gave him a bye in the quarter-finals in which he was a comfortable 3-0 winner against Curtis Caron from Canada. That took him through to a semi-final against Mathieu Loicq and the Belgian former world and Paralympic champion edged a close match 11-9 in the fifth.

"I felt that I played a good level," said 19-year-old Shilton. "All the things I've been working on in training are coming together but it is a slow process. I'm happy to win a medal but I'm disappointed to have lost so narrowly in the semi-final."

Stacey made an immediate impact on his international debut with a 3-0 win against Pawel Konstantyn from

Poland and topped his group with 3-0 wins against Daniel Dinca from Romania and the German Tom Terkuhlen. A 3-0 win in the quarter-final against Pawel Jablonski from Poland earned him a semi-final against the Paralympic champion and world No 1 Laurens Devos and although the Belgian was understandably too good in a 3-0 win it was a very promising debut by the young Welshman from St Mellons.

Craig Allen also progressed from his group in men's class 9 with a 3-0 win against the Belgian Erwin De Cort but lost in the quarter-final to Devos 3-0.

McAdam reached the quarter-finals of men's class 6 with a 3-1 win against Petrus Du Plooy from South Africa but found the experienced Laue just too strong in a 3-1 loss.

Marc Bonnar (class 2), Dan Bullen (class 5), Cellan Hall (class 5), Alex Bland (class 7), Ryan Henry (class 8), Tamlan Eastwood (class 9), Jack Stockdale (class 10) and Shae Thakker (class 10) all went out of their respective events at the group stage.

## Team events

Perry and McAdam topped their group in men's class 6 with two wins from two and then came through a great battle in the semi-final against Germany, fighting back well from 2-0 down to take the doubles 3-2. Laue levelled for Germany by beating McAdam 3-0 but Perry recovered from losing the first set to Muller to win the deciding singles 3-1.

In the final against the Romanian/Greek combination of Simion and Mouchthis they took the doubles 3-2 and Perry clinched the gold by taking the first singles match 3-1 against Mouchthis.

"It's a great feeling to win gold," said Perry. "Playing with Conor was fun. It's something we've not done for a while and I think that showed at the beginning as our doubles play wasn't so strong but in the final we played some good, clever table tennis and Conor was vital in that. His service in the final doubles match could not have been better and at times put us on the front foot when we needed a point. I'm really pleased we won the team event together."

"It was a tough singles event for me, losing in the quarters," said 20-year-old McAdam from Dundonald, "but I took the positives from it and implemented that into my game for the team event. I feel that I played well and that was shown by the gold medal – it was great to win gold with Martin and hopefully there will be more to come."

The new teenage combination of Shilton and Stacey combined well in the doubles and reached the semi-finals with 2-0 wins against Germany and Belgium/Korea. A 2-1 win against Japan took them through to the final against the Romanian/French partnership of Daniel Dinca and Lucas Didier and after winning the doubles 3-1, Shilton won the gold for his team with a 3-0 win in the singles against Didier.

"I'm really pleased to come away with the gold in the team event with Josh," said Shilton, "as we haven't played together before. Our doubles was very good and that gave us confidence for the singles matches."

"I feel that I've played very well considering it was my first time experiencing international Para table tennis," said Stacey. "Winning a medal in singles and gold in team gives me a lot of confidence for other tournaments going forwards and I hope to continue performing well and pushing myself to improve in each performance."

Bonnar and Reyes Turcio won their first match in the round robin men's class 1-2 event against Germany/The Netherlands 2-0 and followed that with a 2-1 win against Korea/USA. Their final match against France was to decide the gold and World number one Lamirault and his partner Benoit Besset were too strong in a 2-0 win.

"I had a disappointing singles competition," said the 28-year-old from Ingleby, "although having the chance to play the World number one showed me the level I need to be at in the future. I played a lot better in the team event and I'm happy with silver after some tough doubles matches. I'll look forward to developing my game more and hopefully improving my form in singles."

After 2-0 wins against Chile/Netherlands and Norway/Japan in the round robin women's class 1-5 team event Gilroy, Shackleton and Bouron played Germany in the final match to decide the gold medal but had to be content with silver after a 2-0 loss to Mikolaschek and Hentig.

Pickard and Araya Alvarez progressed from their group in women's class 6-10 with a 2-0 win against Poland/Belgium and took the bronze after losing a tough semi-final against two class 10 players from Japan.

In men's class 8 Ryan Henry and Alex Bland narrowly failed to progress to the quarter-finals, losing their second group match to Slovakia/Czech Republic 2-1. Dan Bullen and Cellan Hall also narrowly failed to register a win in men's class 4-5; Craig Allen and Tamlan Eastwood went out of men's class 9 at the group stage and Jack Stockdale and Shae Thakker lost their three round robin matches in men's class 10.

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