

LEICESTERSHIRE TABLE TENNIS <https://www.topspin-ldttl.co.uk/>

The Paralympics begin this week with table tennis having a much greater representation than the main games recently in Paris with eleven players across several categories taking part, many with a great chance of medals.

Table tennis does a great deal for those less able not least of all many local clubs including Knighton Park in Leicester who are very fortunate in having David Morley who has been running his weekly Special Olympics group since the club moved to larger premises about 13 years ago.

Cue Brighton Table Tennis Club, one of the most efficient and well organised clubs who have built up a very strong relationship with Paralympians in the 17 years of their existence as they grow ever bigger. In Paris this week all eyes will be on 14-year-old Bly Twomey who has cerebral palsy and has had a meteoric rise since being taken in by the club three years ago.

When Will Bayley walked into the club two years ago with his Paralympic Silver Medal from the previous year Bly immediately challenged him to a game and, two years later, they will partner each other in the mixed doubles with a wonderful chance of success.

Twomey made her international debut in 2023, taking bronze in the Polish Open and had a fantastic six days earlier this year. She won both singles and doubles titles for GB in the Italian Open in Lignano before jetting off to the Singapore Smash where she lost 3-2 in an epic final to World number one, Kelly Von Zon who, at 36, is almost three times older, and more experienced.

Bly has currently risen to number four in the world in Category 7 but is still improving. Such is club support that Brighton are taking 120 spectators to cheer her and all the other Great Britain players on.

Those players include Billy Shilton and Paul Karabardock who will be taking part in the Class 14 doubles having taken gold in the Spanish Open in their first event together during 2022, coming on in leaps and bounds since.

Considering they live, respectively, in Sheffield and Wales, they do very well in a partnership very much relying on maintaining contact by other means than training together all the time although, naturally, they have come together more often lately in preparation.

They are a left-right combo which even in the best circumstances can be quite an asset as the Rowe twins showed all those years ago, but with Paralympians being able to move sideways instead of revolving can be a massive advantage. Shilton is also taking part in the singles so should have a busy time.

The support all these Paralympians receive, in fact all those taking up the sport who are less able, is absolutely phenomenal and the sport does lend itself ideally in this way.

John Bowness.