

25/05/2000

Farrel eyes top three finish

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NEW Zealand strongman Stephen Farrel flew into Langkawi yesterday bent on securing one of the top three places in the inaugural Ironman Malaysia Triathlon on Sunday.

Farrel, 38, who finished seventh in the New Zealand Triathlon and has already qualified for the world meet in Kona, Hawaii, said he will drop out of the Hawaiian event if he does not finish among the top three in Langkawi.

He is aware of the strong challenge from Australian professionals like Matt Koorey and Andre La Gerce, Lino Burton of Italy as well as the Japanese, Koreans and Malaysians.

Farrel's professional ironman career nearly came to an end due to artery complications in the leg. He underwent an operation in late 1988 and resumed training last year.

"But I will forgo Hawaii if I do not finish among the top three here as it will be a fruitless effort especially with the strong competition," he said.

He competed in the Saipan Tagaman (an island near Guam) Triathlon last weekend and finished third.

However, he predicts the humidity and heat of Langkawi would take its toll on the Caucasians.

"Anyone of the 130 competitors who finished within eight-and-a-half hours here will do well," he said.

Kaoru Matsuda, a professional, is among the 20 Japanese entries while Joo Jeong Kyuoo is leading the Korean challenge. Malaysian strongman Sofian Ismail, who has been to Hawaii thrice, is tipped to take advantage of the climate to upstage the foreigners.

Organised by the franchise holder, Langkawi Ironman Endurance Marathon Sdn Bhd, the event being held for the first time in South East Asia, is one of the 11 qualification circuits from which initially 15 will qualify for the finale in Hawaii.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be the guest of honour at the 'Carbo Loading' dinner on Friday. The Carbo nite is traditionally the occasion two nights before the event for the participants to fill up.

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