

10/12/2000

## Super Ong makes history

K.M. Boopathy

ONG BENG Hee is on a roll. Yesterday, at the Jalanm Duta courts in Kuala Lumpur, he added the OSK Malaysian Open squash championships to become the first Malaysian to win this title.

The Asian champion bounced back in style from a game down to beat Australian John Williams 16-17, 15-6, 15-8, 15-10 in 88 minutes to win his third Professional Squash Association (PSA) title of the year.

In the Malaysian Open, Ong will now be among some of the greatest squash players such as 10-time British Open winner Jahangir Khan of Pakistan, the indomitable Jansher Khan, with an astonishing collection of eight world open titles, their compatriot Qamar Zaman, Australian world champion Rodney Martin and his countryman Chris Dittmar.

It was a pity that the venue, with a 250 seating capacity, could not accomodate a partisan crowd of about 450 who were cheering in unison for Ong who repaid their faith with a winning performance.

Olympic Council of Malaysia president, Tunku Imran Tuanku Jaafar, the former SRA of Malaysia president, and Asian Squash Federation supremo Mokhzani Mahathir were among those who had witnessed Malaysian squash history taking place.

The first game was a close affair as Williams and Ong had a similiar style of play and there was very little to separate the two.

Williams's began at a fast pace to trap the Malaysian with tight front court drops. Ong responded by slowing down the game and kept the pressure on Williams with accurate shots.

The Australian managed to win the crucial first game 17-16 after Ong's claim for a let was turned down by referee Azan Yaakob who instead awarded a stroke and the game to Williams after a 45-minute battle.

The decision failed to rattle Ong who came in strongly to race to 8-1 lead and concede five more points to draw level.

The heat was beginning to take its toll on Williams and despite his efforts, Ong needed only 15 minutes to take the third game. Ong began the fourth confidently and went ahead at 3-1 but began to lose focus.

He made four unforced errors, allowing Williams back in the game, and bringing a new twist and tension-filled atmosphere to the packed arena.

Williams took the initiative and went up to 10-8 but Ong recovered from the momentary slump and reeled of seven points to clinch the winner's purse of US\$2850 (RM10,850) for his efforts.

"The crowd helped me a lot and Williams did not play to his form and looked to be affected by the heat," said Ong.

"It feels great to win this tournament although it was not my best of performances.

"After losing the first, I was not so confident and quite lucky to recover in the fourth. I was really tired.

"I thought the match was heading to the fifth as I felt tired."

Ong wants to finish the year with the Asia Cup mixed team title at the same venue next week before taking a well deserved break.

Williams was disappointed but acknowledged the improvement of his opponent lately.

"I am disappointed but I had to admit that Beng Hee is on a different level now," said Williams.

"My game plan was to play at a fast pace but it backfired and my unforced errors killed my chances."

Ong, ranked 22nd, is expected to break into the top 20 in January and aims to improve his ranking to the top 12 by December next year.

(END)