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Men's open to go ahead as planned

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THE Malaysian men's open squash championships will be held as planned after all as the SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) is almost sure of securing funds to host the event. Thanks to the efforts of SRAM Project 2006 chairman Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir who was instrumental in securing the sponsors to host the tournament which offer US\$30,000 (RM114,00) in total prize money, Malaysian squash enthusiasts can look forward to seeing their favourite player Ong Beng Hee to defend the title on Dec 9-16.

SRAM executive director Kol (Rtd) Wong Ah Jit said that there will be a final meeting with Mokhzani today and is looking forward to a favourable outcome.

"We will be having a meeting with Mokhzani tomorrow (today) and it looks good that the tournament will be staged after all and Ong will definitely defend his title," said Wong in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"The Malaysian Open is the only major tournament where squash enthusiasts can see Ong in action and he has already confirmed his participation in the event.

"Besides Ong, we will have several top squash players in the event which will once again be a crowdpuller."

The initial sponsors of the event, OSK Securities, withdrew their sponsorship deal last month and SRAM were on the verge of calling it off.

However, SRAM's appeal to save the tournament was answered by former Asian Squash Federation (ASF) president Mokhzani due to his sound corporate links.

The tournament is very crucial for Ong as he will be able to break into the top eight if he can secure the title again.

Ong, ranked 10th at the moment, could see his world ranking drop if the tournament is scrapped, as he will lose the points earned through his win last year and eventually finish the year below the top 10.

However, Ong will face a tough time this year as he is likely to be challenged by world number five Thierry Lincou France for the title.

Ong defeated Australian John Williams last year to become the first Malaysian to win the three-star tournament.

The Malaysian women's open will be scrapped due to poor funds and the fact that top player Nicol David will be in Amsterdam to attend the Liz Irving training camp.

(END)