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Ong looks unchallenged for another clear shot

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THE stage is set for Ong Beng Hee to end a brilliant year with a bang as he is unlikely to be challenged in the Mulpha-Gosen Malaysian Open squash championships at Jalan Duta courts on Dec 10-15.

Ong became the first Malaysian to win the tournament last year but his title-defence is expected to be smooth-sailing this time.

The SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) director of coaching Mej (Rtd) S. Maniam said that an upset over Ong looks almost impossible.

"Ong has improved so much in the last one year and I don't see anyone capable of beating him for the title. It should be his for the taking," said Maniam in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

"However, it will be interesting to see if Azlan Iskandar can advance to the last eight with his tough draw.

"It will be a good tournament for the local crowd as their wish of seeing Ong in action has come true, thanks to the organisers who have made a great effort to revive the tournament."

The Malaysian Open was almost cancelled this year after last year's sponsors OSK Securities withdrew two months ago but Mulpha Sports stepped in to give Ong a chance to win his second international title this year.

Despite the uncertainty, the tournament has still managed to attract three top professionals, second seed Olli Touminen of Finland, third seed Omar Elborolossy of Egypt and the up-and-coming Anthony Ricketts of Australia and last year's finalist John Williams of Australia in the tournament.

Ong's first test is expected to be the semifinals where he is likely to meet Borolossy while his final opponent is expected to be Touminen.

However, Touminen faces a scare in the semifinals where he is likely to meet Ricketts and the Australian could deny him a place in the final.

Azlan stares at defeat in the first round as he will meet Shahid Zaman of Pakistan while Kenneth Low will have a tough time in the qualifying rounds.

Mulpha International director Denis Low said that they are ready to sponsor the Malaysian Women's Open next year, which has been cancelled due to lack of funds this year, and also become the main sponsors of the Asia Cup mixed team events.

"We are keen to sponsor the Asian Cup as long as it is held in Malaysia," said Low during a Press conference to announce Mulpha's pledge to SRAM in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

The Asia Cup, a mixed team event, was the brainchild of former Asian Squash Federation (ASF) president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir, and Mulpha were the main sponsors in the inaugural Asia Cup last year where hosts Malaysia became the champions.

Mulpha has also pledged their support to SRAM's plans to start a regional Academy in Penang which will cater for the under-15 players from Penang, Kedah and Perlis.

Local players Allan Soyza, Aaron Soyza and Khoo Teng Hin will be in charge of the Academy which will be based in Penang International Squash Centre in Bukit Dumbar next year.

The Academy is likely to cost SRAM close to RM250,000 and it is understood that Mulpha are likely to come up with RM150,000 to support the pioneer project.

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