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Four Malaysians qualify

Zakri Baharudin

FOUR out of five Malaysian karters have qualified for today's Rotax World Finals after they emerged top-34 at the end of the qualifying rounds at the Morac International Karting Circuit in Langkawi yesterday.

Led by Rodney Magness, who ended a respectable 10th overall, Mahathir Bob Ngaau and Ferhan Fauzy also booked their places in 21st and 27th places respectively at the end of the heats.

In the second-chance race - the last avenue for karters to book a ticket to the Finals - it was Raja Razman Idris who managed to secure the last six places in the Finals field.

Placed 56th at the end of the heats and despite suffering from a painful rib cage, Raja Razman, starting in 27th position, checked in sixth at the end of 15-lap race to make it four Malaysians altogether.

As Norwegian Bjorn Georg Gravdahl showcased consistent speed to top the qualifying list yesterday, Magness had set the local standard with his top-10 overall result.

"I felt good after the morning timed sessions and knew that today will be my day after I did well in my first heat," said Magness, who ended seventh, 13th and sixth in the heats.

"Though there are some really good drivers here, I realised then that the competition wasn't too hard to beat. But I'm still not happy with my kart and my mechanics will be working all night to make it like new for tomorrow (today). And now that I qualified 10th, I suppose I can't aim for anything less than a top-five result."

Mahathir Bob, the fastest local karter in Friday's official tests sessions, secured 21st position for today's 25-lap Finals while 25-year-old Ferhan, winner of the Malaysian Max Challenge, made the grid in 27th position.

Malaysia's over-35-year-old representative Martin Druhan missed the cut as he ended 62nd out of a pool of 75 drivers.

Though pole position for today's Final belongs to Gravdahl, the 26-year-old Norwegian should face stiff competition from Briton Martin Pierce and Australians Scott Auld and Darren Smith, who will start in the first two rows.

Winner of two heats with a best lap time of 1:01.846 minutes, Gravdahl would also be watching out for Friday's fastest man Matthew Hamilton from New Zealand.

Though ranked 13th at the end of the qualifiers, Hamilton also claimed two wins in the heats, while the other favourites include South Africans Claudio Piazza Musso and Mark Cronje, Jason Bowles from the United States, and Hollands Hugo van der Ham.

All 34 qualifiers will compete in the pre-Final at 10-30am today, while the main 25-lap Final race, to be witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will be telecast live on TV3 beginning 2pm.
k@nstp.com.my

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