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Nicol misses Open to recover from injury

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TOP Malaysian player Nicol David has withdrawn from the Head Malaysian Women's Open squash championships at the Jalan Duta courts, beginning on Wednesday, to recover from a back injury to retain her gold medal in the Busan Asian Games.

It is believed that Nicol suffered the injury during the Commonwealth Games Manchester three weeks ago but SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) acting president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir is confident that she will be ready to deliver gold in Busan.

"I am confident that Nicol will be ready for the Asian Games as I don't see the back injury affecting her chances to win in Busan," said Mokhzani in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"Nicol is only 19 and has a long way to go before she fulfills her true potential.

"We see a future world champion in her and do not want to push her to the breaking point. Let her maturity and performance go hand in hand."

Nicol was expected to reach at least the quarter-finals.

The joint fifth seeded Malaysian even had an outside chance of reaching the semi-finals as she was earlier drawn to meet second seed Vanessa Atkinson of Holland. Nicol had beaten Vanessa in their only meeting in the Milo Open in Kuala Lumpur two years ago.

However, Nicol had not been training since her return from Manchester and withdrawal could be the best option as she can avoid aggravating the injury.

The challenge will now rest on the shoulders of Sharon Wee, Tricia Chuah, Delia Arnold and Lim Yoke Wah in the US\$20,000 (RM76,000) tournament.

They will be competing in the qualifying rounds and only Sharon is likely to reach the main draw.

World number two Carol Owens of New Zealand is the favourite to win the title and third seed Tania Bailey of England is the only player capable of causing an upset.

The tournament will also be an avenue for national coach Raymond Arnold to gauge the performance of Rebecca Chiu of Hong Kong, who is capable of giving Nicol a run for her money in the Asian Games.

Nicol defeated Rebecca in the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok and a repeat final is expected in Busan.

Nicol's only defeat to Rebecca in the last four years occurred during the 2000 Asian championships in Hong Kong during the team events.

However, the Malaysian has beaten Rebecca twice in the the Asian championships in Kuala Lumpur in May.

Mokhzani also confirmed that Nicol will join the centralised training in Kuala Lumpur beginning on Sept 15 and has been given permission to train in Penang until then.