

22 AUG 2002

Sports-Squash (Women)

OWENS LEADS TOP PLAYERS FOR MALAYSIAN WOMEN'S OPEN

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- World number two Carol Owens of New Zealand leads a strong-field of eight top-20 players in the world for the Malaysian Women's Open squash championship here next week.

The 31-year-old Owens, who was a regular competitor in the tournament since 1991, has been given top billing in the US\$20,000 (RM76,000) event, which will be held again after a five-year lapse.

Seeded number two for the event, to be held at the National Sports Council (NSC) Squash Centre in Jalan Duta from Aug 26 to 31, will be the world number seven Vanessa Atkinson of the Netherlands.

Two former world junior champions Tania Bailey of England and Rachael Grinham of Australia have been seeded third and fourth respectively.

However, two-time world junior champion Nicol David of Malaysia has skipped the tournament due to a back injury that she suffered while competing in the recent Manchester Commonwealth Games.

Owens last competed here when she defeated Nicol in the final of the YTL Open two years ago. The 2000 World Open champion also bagged two other titles at Jalan Duta -- Kuala Lumpur Open and YTL Open, both in 1999.

In the Malaysian Open, she was the quarterfinalist in 1991, 1995 and 1997 and lost in the first round in 1992, 1994 and 1996.

Squash Rackets Association of Malaysia (SRAM) acting president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir while announcing the title sponsors here today said that after a busy schedule leading to the 1998 Commonwealth Games and the economic slowdown, the association had finally managed to stage back the tournament.

"We should thank the sponsors Mulpha International Sdn Bhd which supports us all this while to organise big events like the Men's Open and the recent Asian Championships," he told reporters here today.

SRAM had planned to hold the Women's Open from Nov 29 to Dec 2 last year but due to financial constraint, they just organised the Men's Open.

In the absence of Nicol, Malaysia's challenge in the tournament will be led by national number two Sharon Wee, ranked 27th in the world and 47th-ranked Tricia Chuah.

Sharon, Tricia and two others Lim Yoke Wah and Delia Arnold will be taking part in the qualifying round on Monday and Tuesday.

Sharon will face Gloria Williams of Nigeria in the first round of the qualifying, Tricia takes on Hong Kong's Christina Mak, Yoke Wah plays Eman El Amir of Egypt and Delia has a tough opponent in Maha Zein of Egypt.

-- BERNAMA

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