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SRAM targets only one gold

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SQUASH is one of the few sports in the Commonwealth Games which attracts a world class field and the SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) has only targeted one medal in Manchester.

The fact that eight of the top 10 players in the men's professional circuit are from Commonwealth nations and the women's circuit has nine top 10 players, explains the uphill task faced by Malaysia's medal prospects Ong Beng Hee and Nicol David.

SRAM acting president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir said that they are relying on Ong and Nicol to win a medal in the mixed doubles.

"Squash is probably the one event where the world champions, not to mention the majority of the professionals, are from Commonwealth countries," said Mokhzani at the Jalan Duta courts yesterday.

"As such, our main hope is in the mixed doubles through Ong and Nicol as they have won bronze in the World Invitational this year," said Mokhzani.

"There is an outside chance of Beng Hee winning a medal in the singles but he will need to cause a few upsets and will need a favourable draw to achieve it."

Ong and Nicol clinched the bronze in the World Invitational in London in April beating top seeds Stewart Boswell-Sarah Fitz-Gerald of Australia. A medal is within their grasp if they can maintain their form.

Competition rules allow a country to field only four players in the singles and this could help Ong in his medal quest.

World No 5 Thierry Lincou of France and Scotsman John White, ranked sixth, will not be competing in Manchester and this pushes eighth-ranked Ong to sixth in the seedings.

Ong's chances of a medal will depend on the draw where he will have to avoid meeting the top two - World No 1 Peter Nicol of England and Canada's World No 2 Jonathon Power - until the semifinals. The duo are the only two top 10 players Ong has yet to beat.

Nicol, ranked 16th, is likely to be seeded 11th, and based on her record against the top players, a place in the quarterfinals will be a fine achievement.

However, she could make an early exit if she meets any of the top four players - Sarah Fitz-Gerald of Australia, New Zealand's Carol Owens, Cassie Jackman of England and Leilani Joyce of New Zealand - as they will be too strong for the two-time world junior champion.

Besides Ong and Nicol, Malaysia have named Kenneth Low, Azlan Iskandar and Sharow Wee in the squad.

Azlan and Sharon will play in the singles with Ong and Nicol while Low-Sharon will compete in the mixed doubles.