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Sports-Triathlon (Preview)

HEAD TO HEAD RACE IN LANGKAWI IRONMAN 2003

By: Zulhilmi Supaat

LANGKAWI, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- The Langkawi Malaysia Ironman Triathlon 2003 on Sunday will see stiff competition especially in the men's and women's professional categories.

In a race where each of the competitors has to swim over 3.8km, cycle for 180.2km and run a 42.2km marathon within 17 hours, the spotlight is on world number one Luc Van Lierde and defending champion Bryan Rhodes.

As Belgian Van Lierde attempts to make an impact in his debut in the Langkawi Ironman race, Rhodes of New Zealand will try to win the competition for the third consecutive times.

The 33-year-old Van Lierde set the world record in 1999 by clocking seven hours, 50 minutes and 27 seconds while Rhodes' personal best was 8'10:35s.

The other triathletes who can upset the script are South Africa's Glen Gore and Germany's Seigi Ferstle who finished fourth and fifth respectively in the 2002 Langkawi Ironman race.

The women's event has three previous Ironman Langkawi champions battling for the title.

Last year's winner Danielle Florens of Mauritius, 2001 champion Belinda Cheney from Australia and compatriot Susan Peters, the 2000 winner, will be involved in a three-way tussle for the women's triathlon title.

Cheney gave the race a miss last year due to a back injury but she is ready this year. In 2002, Florens clocked 10'29:36s but failed to break Cheney's record of 9'42:32s.

The other women triathletes who can create a few surprises are Australian Susan Peters who was third in 2001 on 10'26:53s and Chiharu Chiba of Japan who was second last year on 10'34:52s.

Meanwhile, three Malaysian triathletes will shoulder the men's "Jalur Gemilang" challenge in this year's race.

Last year's best Malaysian finishers were Mohd Razani Hussain of Kelantan who clocked 9'55:02s, commandoes Kohing bin Antak (11'25:56s) and Abdul Khalid Zakaria (11'24:15s).

The only Malaysian woman who shone in the 2002 Langkawi Ironman challenge is Dr Fiona Lim Tze Ling from Sabah. Last year she secured third place in the 30-34 age group on 12'56:24s.

As for the handicapped triathletes, wheelchair-bound Randy Cadell of the United States and Mahathir Ejin Dinting of Sarawak are those to be watched.

The Langkawi Malaysia Ironman Triathlon 2003 will be using new routes for the cycling and marathon disciplines in a move to avoid traffic congestion at Kuah town apart from giving participants a closer view of Langkawi's beauty.

A total of 412 triathletes will be taking part in the event.

-- BERNAMA

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