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NSC to fund nine for foreign stints

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THE SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) can now look forward to having more professional players as the National Sports Council (NSC) has agreed to fund nine players to compete fulltime on the international circuit.

NSC has been funding World No 8 Ong Beng Hee since 1998. He was later joined by Azlan Iskandar, Nicol David and Sharon Wee. The additional nine players are currently part of SRAM's elite squad.

They are Kelvin Ho, Timothy Arnold, Shahril Shahidan, Nafzahizam Adnan, Fabian Faurillo, Tricia Chuah, Delia Arnold, Lim Yoke Wah and Sally Looi.

SRAM president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir said that NSC's support will enable elite players to gain more exposure.

"NSC has agreed to sponsor the elite players fulltime and this will help them become quality professionals," said Mokhzani after launching the World Squash Day celebrations at the Jalan Duta courts yesterday.

"Four of the national players have been under NSC's funding and the additional funding is a great boost for us.

"I hope the players take this opportunity to work harder. The players who show marked improvement will be considered for overseas training stints in September."

NSC's current annual funding for Ong, Azlan, Nicol and Sharon is about RM350,000 while the additional funding for the other players is likely to be about RM150,000.

Besides this, SRAM has also received an annual funding worth RM300,000 from Country View in January. The money will be used to send players to professional tournaments.

If the five men's elite players manage to break into the world's top 100 by August, they will be sent to Amsterdam for a six-month training and playing stint.

They will be based at several clubs in the Dutch professional league and will be training and competing in satellite tournaments around Europe.

Training and tournament arrangements will be made by SRAM's sparring professional Mike Corren of Australia.

If the players do not achieve the target set by SRAM, they will have to forget about NSC's funding after September and will have to be on their own.