

Wildcard Ivan happy to avoid the qualifiers

By KNG ZHENG GUAN

PETALING JAYA: Two-time Asian Junior champion Ivan Yuen is on cloud nine after earning a wildcard entry into the CIMB Nicol David KL Open squash tournament from March 26-31.

The 21-year-old Ivan, who is seen as the heir apparent to Mohd Azlan Iskandar and Ong Beng Hee, was ranked as low as No. 119 in the world last year.

This was partly because Ivan is pursuing a degree in business administration at UPM and unable to compete in as many tournaments as he would like to.

Still, the talented Ivan, who has one Professional Squash Association (PSA) title to his name, managed several good results by reaching the main draw of the Australian and Hong Kong Opens for the first

So glad: Ivan Yuen will play in the CIMB Nicol David KL Open squash championship as a wildcard entrant.

time via the qualifying rounds.

That boosted his placing and Ivan is now ranked a career high 65 following his run to the final of the Hibiscus Gardens Open last month in Brisbane before losing to national No. 3 Mohd Nafiizwan Adnan.

The Selangor lad is now eager to make an impression in the KL Open with a view to breaking into the top 40 by the end of the year.

"It feels really good to get the wildcard for the first time as I've always been overlooked in the past," said Ivan.

"This will put me straight into

the main draw and I'm hoping to do well and climb up the rankings.

"I'm aware that I haven't been progressing as fast as people expected since my junior days but I have the momentum now and, hopefully, with more time and tournaments, I'll improve even faster," said Ivan, who is currently the sixth ranked Malaysian behind Mohd Nafiizwan (No. 34), Kamran Khan (No. 60) and Mohd Asyraf Azan (No. 62).

But Ivan will not have an easy time in the Open as he has been drawn to meet experienced fourth

seed Adrian Grant of England in the first round.

If he manages to upset the 31-year-old world No. 17, Ivan is likely to face Hong Kong's Max Lee in the quarter-finals.

"I've not played Adrian before but I've seen him play and he's a really good player," said Ivan.

Besides Ivan, the other Malaysians in the main draw are Azlan, Beng Hee and Nafiizwan.

Second seed Azlan will face Nafiizwan in the first round, with the winner likely to be up against Beng Hee in the quarter-finals.

