

Danny grabs first-round lead despite being sick

By LIM TEIK HUAT

PETALING JAYA: Golfer Danny Chia has been down with flu the last few days but he did not let it bug him as he rose from his sick bed to lead the first round of the weather-hit Worldwide Selangor Masters at the Seri Selangor Golf Club yesterday.

The 37-year-old Danny finished with a superb seven-under 64 for a one-stroke lead over Asian Tour rookie Kiradech Aphibarnrat of Thailand in the RM1mil (US\$300,000) event.

Danny's compatriot Iain Steel ensured a strong Malaysian presence on the leaderboard, shooting a bogey-free six-under 66 for joint third place with South Africa's James Kamte and last week's Brunei Open champion Darren Beck of Australia.

Tied for fifth, one stroke behind, is another local stalwart Shaaban Hussin, South Africa's Jbe Kruger, India's Anirban Lahiri and South Korea's Noh Seung-yul – all on 67.

Defending champion Ben Leong opened with an even-71.

Despite being under the weather, Danny charged to the top of the leaderboard, thanks to an eagle on the par-five 13th hole and six birdies against a lone bogey.

"I was not feeling well the whole day ... so maybe that made it easier for me to concentrate," said Danny, who was the first Malaysian winner on the Asian Tour following his triumph at the 2002 Taiwan Open.

"I took some medicine and it made me drowsy and tired. Over the last few holes, I could not even get a proper grip.

"I will be happy if I can make it to the tee box tomorrow (today)."

The burly Kiradech, a former world junior amateur champion, had taken the early first round lead after sinking eight birdies against two bogeys.

"I am happy with my game today. I came back from Japan last week and wasn't doing too good.

"But this week, everything is good as I feel at home in Malaysia because the course is almost similar to the ones back in Thailand," said Kiradech.

"It is only the first day but I hope to maintain my form."

Steel, chasing a maiden Asian Tour title, shot five birdies for a flawless first round card, thanks to a new putter in his bag.

He is also determined to bury last year's disappointment when he finished third in the Selangor Masters.

"I have not been playing well the past few weeks and putting a score like that on this course, I'm quite happy," said Steel. "The course was a little softer after the rain (in the morning). I changed my putter yesterday and I made a few putts from off the green."

The first-round play yesterday was suspended for more than an hour in the morning due to a lightning storm.

A total of 21 players will return today to the course at 7.45am to resume their first round.