

Numbers doubles up for high-stakes clash

TENNIS

By Edward Passos

NATIONAL coach Chris Numbers will have his work cut out for him when he takes on a dual role in today's Asia/Oceania Zone, Group II Davis Cup clash against Kazakhstan at Victoria Park.

The stakes are high for both Hong Kong and a young and inexperienced Kazakhstan in the best-of-five series as the losing nation will be relegated to Group III next year.

"It will be a very interesting match and should be good," said Numbers after the draw was held yesterday to determine the order of play over the next three days.

As well as being Hong Kong's coach, Numbers will also team up with SAR number one Melvin Tong in the doubles tomorrow against Kazakhstan's number one Alexie Kedryuk and Pavel Baranov.

In today's singles matches, Tong takes on Baranov while his compatriot Wayne Wong faces Kedryuk.

Numbers, who took up the coaching position three years ago, felt the chance to represent Hong Kong in the Davis

Cup will enable him to encourage his players to lift their game.

"As national coach, I have the opportunity to play and I'm excited and looking forward to it. My presence in the squad should make it more competitive.

"I am just trying to be a good role model and lead by example and if I can do so, then being the coach and player will fit right into one," he said.

On Hong Kong's chances against Kazakhstan, Numbers admitted it would be tough.

"Their number one (Kedryuk) is very strong," he said.

Kedryuk, 20, is considered a veteran by his nation's standards after debuting in 1995 at age 15.

"Tennis is very small in Kazakhstan and is not a popular sport," Kedryuk said.

He comes to the SAR with some knowledge of the standards here, having partnered Wong in junior doubles and winning three tournaments in Portugal two years ago.

Kedryuk's partner, Baranov, 19, is a relative newcomer, with two years of Davis Cup under his belt.

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