

Sevens breathes easier after new sponsor signs on

SOCCER

Unus Aladin

A Hong Kong-based international property company has bucked the global trend and thrown its financial muscle behind a sporting event – the Soccer Sevens.

IP Global was yesterday unveiled as the new title sponsor of the annual event, providing a massive relief for organisers who had feared the worst with the world reeling from the economic crisis. The three-day extravaganza is scheduled at Hong Kong Football Club from May 29-31.

The tournament, which was first

The tournament is an excellent platform for enhancing our role in the Hong Kong community

IP Global founder Tim Murphy on why he is supporting the Soccer Sevens



held in 1999 and backed by Philips Lighting for eight years, showcases future stars.

IP Global managing director and founder Tim Murphy has agreed to back the 2009 tournament with an option for a multi-year extension.

Organising committee chairman Tony Bratsanos said: "It's been remarkable. We had spoken to all the companies you can think of and it was easy for them to say no. Then we met Tim Murphy and we knew he was passionate about the game. The key thing is he is putting up his own

money. He loves football and he believes we will run a good tournament. He just wants to take it to the next level because all our money is spent bringing over the teams. We rely very much on our title sponsorship to market the event."

Organisers were tight-lipped about the overall costs, but it is believed to run into the millions, taking into account the teams' travelling expenses and accommodation.

"It is no secret that in the current economic climate sports events are struggling to attract or retain investment, which makes IP Global's commitment to the Sevens even more valued and appreciated," added Bratsanos.

Murphy said he was willing to spend his own money because he was passionate about soccer.

"We are fully committed to working with Tony [Bratsanos] and his team to help the Sevens grow, both on and off the pitch. The tournament provides an excellent platform for raising our profile, interacting with our clients and enhancing our role in the Hong Kong community," said Murphy.

English Premier League side Aston Villa will be returning to defend their crown as they go for three titles in a row and their fifth in total.

They will be joined by West Ham United and Scottish giants Celtic and Rangers, plus the Australian under-18 team. The masters competition will feature a squad of former Premier League players with the Polish All-Stars making their Hong Kong debut.

"We are still negotiating with two other professional sides, one from the Bundesliga and another from the mainland. We hope to get that buttoned up in the next couple of weeks," said Bratsanos.

A total of 32 teams will take part in the Sevens, 16 in the main competition and 16 in the masters.

Each competition will feature a pool round, followed by knockout games for the Cup, Shield and Plate (main competition) and Cup and Plate (masters).