

02 APR, 2024

## Hope in new blood

The Star, Malaysia



Page 1 of 2



**Newbies:** (From left) Former Junior World Cupper Adam Ashraf Johari, Faris Harizan and Alfarico Lance Liau Jr have been included in new coach Sarjit Singh's national hockey squad of 30 players. — MHC

# Hope in new blood

### Coach Sarjit unveils young and bold squad to give hockey a fresh start

By K.M. BOOPATHY

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Adam Ashraf Johari is the youngest player named as a move to rebuild the national hockey team.

Yesterday, national head coach Sarjit Singh underlined his intent to form a young solid team when he listed nine uncapped players, including the 18-year-old Adam, in the Speedy Tigers squad of 30.

Adam played in the Junior World Cup last year while former captain Marhan Jalil will be the oldest in the side at 34.

The other players who will be starting fresh with the national team are goalkeeper Che Shahrul Che Saupi; defenders Arif Syafie Ishak, Luqman Nul Hakim Ahmad Shukran, Kamarulzaman Kamaruddin; midfielders Syawal Abdul Razak, T. Naaveennash; and strikers Nur Rahull Hrsikesa Thaitchana Muruthi and Azimuddin Syakir Kamaruddin.

Besides Adam, Azimuddin (19) and Naaveennash (19) are the Under-21 players in the squad while Sarjit has also selected a total of 15 players who are aged between 22 and 25.

Three other Junior World Cup members Faris Harizan, Mughni Mohd Kamal and Alfarico Lance Liau Jr can also be considered on the senior scene as their international caps were only earned by playing in the Cambodia SEA Games last year.

Sarjit has also given a second chance to former players Syed Mohd Syafiq Syed Cholan, Akhimullah Anuar Esook, Syarman Mat Tee

and Tengku Nasrul Ikmal Tengku Rahim to make a comeback.

He also has kept his promise by limiting players aged above 30 by only keeping Faizal Saari (33), Fitri Saari (31) and goalkeeper Hafizuddin Othman (32) to join Marhan in the squad.

Sarjit said most of the players will be playing in an international tournament for the first time at the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in Ipoh from May 4-11.

The Tigers will also be involved in the Nations Cup in Poland from May 31 to June 9 and the Asian Champions Trophy (ACT) in Mongolia from Sept 8-17.

"Sultan Azlan Shah Cup next month will be the first international senior tournament not just for three Under-21 players but also most of the squad members," said Sarjit yesterday.

"We will make three to five changes to the squad of 18 that will play in the Azlan Shah Cup before going to the Nations Cup. We will give more players a chance to play in the ACT.

"They will get more chances to play and we need to assess them in 25-30 matches before gauging their level.

"The junior players in the team are committed, talented and we should give them the opportunity early.

"These players have the potential to go to the next level and it is our job to help them achieve that.

"We have a long term plan and we will rotate the players so that they can play suffi-

cient matches."

Sarjit is also hopeful that the seniors in the team like Hafizuddin, Marhan, Faizal, Fitri and Syed Syafiq will play their role to guide their younger teammates.

"The seniors have to play the role of leaders to guide the others as we relatively have a young team," added Sarjit.

"I also expect Syed Syafiq and Akhimullah to use their experience to guide the young players."

Meanwhile, Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC) national team management committee chairman Datuk Ahmad Najmi Abdul Razak also urged the 16 players who were dropped after trials from March 19-30 to keep working hard.

"It's not the end of the road for them as there will always be an opportunity to make the squad as they can be called in case of injuries to current national players. They have to continue working hard," said Najmi who has also been appointed as the national team manager.

"In fact, we have identified two of them as back-up and will reveal their names when they are required by the team."

The new national squad didn't waste time as they started their training session yesterday night.

Faizal and Fitri, who are playing for Mohameddan Club in the Bangladesh Premier League, are expected to join the national training by April 19.

### THE SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:**

Hafizuddin Othman (Ter), Zaimi Mat Deris (Maybank), Adrian Andy Albert (UiTM), Che Sharul Azmi Che Saupi (Nurinsafi).

**Defenders:**

Marhan Jalil (Tenaga Nasional), Faris Harizan (Ter), Syarman Mat Tee (Ter), Arif Syafie Ishak (Ter), Luqman Nul Hakim Ahmad Shukran (Ter), Syed Mohd Syafiq Syed Cholan (Tenaga), Najib Hassan (Tenaga), Amirul Hamizan Azahar (Tenaga), Kamarulzaman Kamaruddin (Maybank), Syafiq Hassan (Tenaga).

**Midfielders:**

Fitri Saari (Ter), Mughni Kamal (Tenaga), Nik Aiman Nik Rozemi (Tenaga), Alfarico Lance Liau Jr (Maybank), Syawal Abdul Razak (Maybank), Adam Ashraf Johari (Junior World Cup), Shello Silverius (Tenaga), T. Naaveennash (Thunderbolts).

**Strikers:**

Faizal Saari (Ter), Akhimullah Anuar Esook (Ter), Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal (Tenaga), Norsyafiq Sumantri (Tenaga), Muhajir Abdu Rauf (Maybank), Nur Rahull Hrsikesa Thaitchana Muruthi (Nurinsafi), Azimuddin Syakir Kamaruddin (Thunderbolts), Tengku Nasrul Ikmal Tengku Rahim (Young Elephants).