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# 'Boy' is back and ready to get busy in front of the goal

**PETALING JAYA:** Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal is happy to be back as a striker and promises to deliver the field goals.

The 24-year-old Azrai is one the 18 players named for the FIH Olympic Qualifiers in Muscat, Oman, from Jan 15-21.

Over the months, coach A. Arulselvaraj has played him in the middle of the park thanks to his work rate and vision, but the player fondly known as "Boy" has been given the task to be more active in the D-box.

Last year in the Malaysian Hockey League (MHL), the Perak-born player scored a whopping 40 goals for Tenaga Nasional, with many seeing him as the man to spearhead the Speedy Tigers' attack for many years to come.

Azrai also did well internationally, when he scored a total of 10 goals last year, six in the Hangzhou Asian Games and four in the Asian Champions Trophy.

## THE SQUAD

**Men**  
**Goalkeeper:** Hafizuddin Othman, Mohd Zaimi Mat Deris.  
**Defenders:** Marhan Mohd Jalil, Razie Abd Rahim, Zulpidaus Mizun, Syafiq Hassan, Amirul Hamizan Azahar, Ramadan Rosli.  
**Midfield:** Faiz Helmi Jali, Meor Mohd Azuan Hassan, Nik Mohd Aiman Nik Rozemi, Shello Silverius, Mohd Fitri Saari.  
**Forward:** Firhan Ashari, Ashran Hamsani, Norsyafiq Sumantri, Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal, Shahril Saabah.  
**Women**  
**Goalkeeper:** Siti Zalia Nasir, Nur Hazlinda Zainal Abidin.  
**Defenders:** Juliana Mohamad Din, Anith Humaira Baharudin, Nur Nabila Alia Yussalini, Nurul Fatin Fatiha Azman, Fatin Shafika Mahd Sukri.  
**Midfield:** Nurmalizatul Hanim Syafi Shiek Fuad, Nur Insyirah Effarizal, Siti Nur Irdina Mohd Nor, Dayang Nuramirah Abang Mahadani, Kirandeep Kaur Gurdip Singh, Raja Norsharina Raja Shabuddin.  
**Forward:** Nuramirah Shakirah Zukifli, Siti Nur Arifah Mohd Nor, Nur Afeqah Syahzani Azhar, Nur Shamine Azureen Mohammed Badusha, Azmyra Sofea Azhairy.

What sets him out from the rest is his awareness in the D-box, as he sniffs field goal chances pretty well, which is an area Malaysia need to work on especially during the Olympic qualifiers.

"My aim is to help Malaysia get to

the Olympics. I have to be really busy in the D to get goals in the qualifiers," said Azrai.

"We could not achieve it at the Hangzhou Asian Games, but we hope to get it right in Oman."

Malaysia must finish in the top three to secure their spot in the Paris Olympics in August. The Tigers are in Group B with Britain, Pakistan and China while Group A consists of Germany, New Zealand, Canada and Chile.

Meanwhile, Arulselvaraj said there was a reason why he decided to change the positions of most of the players in the squad as he wanted versatility from every single player in the team.

With the tournament being held in a short duration, he wants everyone to be prepared for any eventuality, including injuries and suspensions, as teams are only allowed to have 18 players in the squad.

"I changed the positions of the

players a lot because I wanted to create a squad where players are versatile," said Arulselvaraj after a press conference to announce the player line-up.

"I want my boys to play a total game, and be adaptable to any system or positions. This is the best team that we have at the moment."

He said he also chose players with a burning desire to win and able to perform at the highest level both mentally and physically on and off the pitch.

"Eventually, it is the players who will do all the hard work to ensure victory. Their desire and attitude must be in sync. Everything has been taken care of for them, so the responsibility is on them," he said.

Meanwhile, the national women's hockey team, nicknamed Malaysian Tigress, are in Group B of the Olympic Qualifiers and will face Spain on Jan 13, Canada on Jan 14 and Britain on Jan 16.