

Headline	'FREAK' ACCIDENT MAY COST TNB		
MediaTitle	New Straits Times		
Date	07 Mar 2024	Language	English
Circulation	36,278	Readership	108,834
Section	Sport	Page No	38
ArticleSize	484 cm ²	Journalist	Aftar Singh
PR Value	RM 49,860		



HOCKEY

'FREAK' ACCIDENT MAY COST TNB

Top scorer Azrai's ankle injury could hamper their hopes of a treble

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TENAGA'S top scorer Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal suffered a freak injury during a match that may affect his team's chances of achieving a treble.

Azrai's left ankle was struck by the ball, causing him pain. However, the injury was not inflicted by their opponents during Tuesday's game.

Azrai's potential absence in the tournament is a setback for Tenaga, given that he has scored 30 goals for them.

The incident occurred during a media interview on the sidelines after Tenaga's 3-1 victory over UiTM in the semi-final first leg of the TNB Cup at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

Azrai was being interviewed by journalists when players from Maybank and Terengganu were warming up on the pitch for the second semi-final.

While both teams were preparing, a loose ball sailed between the legs of journalists and struck Azrai.

It is not a good sign for Tenaga, who hope to achieve a treble this year after victories in the Charity Shield and Malaysia Hockey League (MHL).

"My dream is to become the top scorer for the second consecutive season and help Tenaga win a treble, but now it may not happen," said Azrai.

"I am feeling some pain because I had suffered an ankle injury in the past.

"I hope it is only a minor injury, and I will be able to play in the semi-final return leg tomorrow (today).

"A serious injury will be a blow, as I want it to be Tenaga's most memorable season.

"Furthermore, I want to earn a place in the national team," added Azrai, who scored 40 goals in the MHL last year.

Azrai pointed out that the two-goal cushion against UiTM is not good enough ahead of the return leg. "We must be on our toes and score more goals to secure a place in the final."

Meanwhile, UiTM coach Nor Aqmal Gaffar praised his players for their brave performance against a star-studded Tenaga.

"Although we lost, the players produced a great performance. I think anything is possible in the return leg."

Maybank's hopes of reaching the final after 25 years may not materialise following a 3-0 defeat to defending champions Terengganu in the other semi-final first-leg match.

Maybank team manager Zam Zam Ali admitted the pressure will be on them to respond positively in the return leg.

"The goal margin could have been smaller if we had taken our chances, including from 10 penalty corner opportunities. I hope our drag flicker Razie Rahim will be sharper in the return leg," said Zam.

Terengganu coach Harfizi Baharom warned his players against taking Maybank lightly in the return leg. "We must be disciplined and avoid conceding goals," said Harfizi.

RESULTS — S-FINALS (1ST LEGS): Tenaga 3 UiTM 1, Terengganu 3 Maybank 0.

Vivian May Soars Cup: Malaysian University 4 Negri Sembilan 1, Liaoning 3 Blue Warriors 0.

FIXTURES — TODAY, S-FINALS (2ND LEGS)

TNB Cup: Maybank v Terengganu (6pm), UiTM v Tenaga (8pm).

Vivian May Soars Cup: Negri v Malaysian University (Seremban Two Stadium, 6pm), Blue Warriors v Liaoning (6pm)

* Matches at National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil unless stated



UiTM's Hafiz Zainol (right) and Tenaga's Amirul Hamizan Azahar vie for the ball during Tuesday's TNB Cup semi-final first leg at National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil. PIC BY EIZAIRI SHAMSUDIN