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Passion counts most as Malaysia opens hockey opportunities widely

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PETALING JAYA: Sports school backgrounds are not a requirement to make the national hockey team, with junior head coach Nor Saiful Zaini stressing that passion and raw ability matter more than where a player comes from.

Saiful said the youth set-up is open to all players as long as they show the right attitude, physical attributes and understanding of

the game, regardless of their development pathway.

"If a player has the willingness, the right physique and a good understanding of the game, they can come from anywhere and still play for the country," he said.

He added that players are often only truly shaped at senior age, with the national system stepping in to refine their development

once they are over 18.

Saiful added that the national set-up have the coaching capabilities to hone aspiring players to be ready for international-level competitions.

"We have the system in place to develop players. We have coaches who can share their knowledge," he said.

"If we see that a player has the

ability to improve, we'll give them a try for a while.

"But if they're not at the level yet, we would send them back with advice to train harder and try again.

"This is because we can only keep about 25 to 28 players in the system at one time."

Meanwhile, in a bid to broaden exposure, four 18-year-olds will

be sent to train and compete with Australia's Territory Stingrays in the Australian Under-21 Championship in Canberra.

The group – Mohd Irsyad Zul Aswade, Shelston Silverius, Aqhinatul Safiyah Hashmi and Myxandra De Angel C Mashrinu – will train in Darwin before competing in Canberra from April 23 to 30.