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HOCKEY

Jiwa aims to raise a fallen power

PENANG were double champions once, in 1996, but their Junior Hockey League (JHL) fortunes have since gone downhill. And today they are languishing at the basement.

In about 20 years, from a thriving force that used to produce national players, Penang have turned into punching bags — losing five and drawing one so far. Coach Jiwa Mohan's team have also scored only four goals, and let in a staggering 35.

Jiwa has seen better days as a player — like when he featured for Electrical Switchgear Automation (ESA), who were double champions in 1996 and also league champions the next year.

"We had great parental, as well as coaches' support, at the grassroots level back then. But when the sports schools came into the picture, Penang and other states, started slowing down their grassroots development, and we can see the consequences inside 20 years," said Jiwa.

Together with his brother, Jivan, as well as siblings K. Logan Raj and Keevan Raj, Jiwa and ESA became junior stars, and all four went on to don national colours.

So, what's Jiwa doing about it?

"Giving back to the sport I love most. We managed to regain the support of grassroots coaches, as well as dedicated parents. Every weekend, more than 100 young hopefuls train at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) grounds.

"I believe we will be great again in a few years' time. This JHL team made it to the top division and are actually having a bit of a culture shock, but this experience will benefit them as they are all still eligible to play in the JHL next season," said Jiwa.

Last year, there were 30 teams: 10 in Division One and 20 in Division Two; and Penang and Malacca Warriors qualified from Division Two for the Overall quarter-finals, where they lost 5-0 to Pahang Thunderbolts and Anderson Thunderbolts respectively.

This year, Penang have played only BJSS Thunderbolts, losing 5-1. The other three Thunderbolts — SSTMI, Anderson and Pahang — are still on their fixtures.

Despite more whipping in store for Penang, hopefully Jiwa's long-term plans will see better results inside five years.