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# Young and fearless

Up-and-coming players not daunted by experienced stars

By AFTAR SINGH

**KUALA LUMPUR:** There were bouquets for some youngsters and only brickbats for a few senior national players after the just concluded Premier Division of the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL).

Young talents such as Mohamad Akimullah Anuar Esook, Syarman Mat Tee and Shello Silverius (Tenaga Nasional), Muhammad Hafizuddin Zaidi (KL Hockey Club) and Muhammad Fahmi Zakaria (TNB-Thunderbolt) came to the fore and showed they were not intimidated by the experienced stars.

Akimullah is only 18 but showed he has the qualities to be a top national striker.

Apart from his potential, he showcased his speed and power which helped him to score five brilliant goals.

Sabahan Shello, 19, also caught the eye with his impressive displays where he contributed three goals for Tenaga.

Goalkeeper Fahmi deserves a special mention for making some outstanding saves for Thunderbolt.

National chief coach Stephen van Huizen said these young players held their own against the seniors in the Premier Division.

"They stood tall against the experienced foreign players.

"This augurs well for the future of

hockey in the country," said Stephen.

"These players will be attached with the development squad," added Stephen.

As for the under-performing national players, Van Huizen chose not to name any of them but said he understood their predicaments.

"Some of the national trainees are playing for their respective clubs and some of them were not given enough time to play on the field. Clubs have their own structure and strategies," he said.

"Teams gave more time to foreign players as they've invested a lot of money in them," said Stephen.

He added that the teams also relied more on their foreign stars than local players to take penalty corners.

"Terengganu banked on Gonzalo Peillat (Argentina). KL Hockey Club had Jang Jong-hyun (South Korea) and UniKL (Universiti Kuala Lumpur) depended on Jeroen Hertzberger of Holland," said Stephen.

Peillat was the top scorer in the Premier Division with 16 goals.

Meanwhile, Stephen said all 28 national players, except for goalkeeper S. Kumar and defender Mohd Izad Hakimi Jamaluddin, would report for duty tomorrow.

The 38-year-old Kumar is serving a provisional two-year ban for a



**Speedy Gonzales:** At just 18, Mohamad Akimullah Anuar Esook (left) is fast on his feet and scored five goals for Tenaga in the Malaysia Hockey League. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI / The Star

doping offence while Izad suffered an ankle injury during the league campaign.

The team are preparing for the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in Ipoh from March 3-10.