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Young and restless

Akhimullah yearns to play in Sultan Azlan Shah

By T. AVINESHWARAN

PETALING JAYA: Akhimullah Anuar Esook is hoping to be the youngest player to represent Malaysia at this year's Sultan Azlan Shah Cup from March 23-30 in Ipoh.

The 18-year-old has been called up for the national training camp after playing an instrumental role in the recent Malaysian Hockey League (MHL), where he belied his age to score 10 goals for Tenaga Nasional where they finished second in the league.

He was also the top scorer in the Youth Olympics Games in Buenos Aires with 22 goals.

The youngster is looking forward to brushing shoulders with the senior stars in the national squad and earn the trust of head coach Roelant Oltmans.

"As one of the young players in the squad, I've to do my best to prove my credentials. I was surprised with the call-up by coach Roelant but I will do my best," said Akhimullah.

"It feels daunting to be part of the senior squad because I am only 18, but I believe it will not take much time for me to adapt and get along with the seniors.

"Even at Tenaga, I was mingling with the seniors, and we had no problems communicating. It will be a good experience for me."

Akhimullah, together with Arif Syafie Ishak, Noor Firdaus Rosdi and Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal were called up for a special training camp to prepare for the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup and FIH Men's Final Series from April 26-May 4 in Kuala Lumpur.

"The training camp will surely benefit me as a player. I've to absorb as much knowledge as possible from the seniors and coaches," said Akhimullah.

"It will be great to play in my



Too close for comfort: Akhimullah Anuar Esook (blue jersey) in action against UniKL during the semi-final of the TNB Cup on Jan 4.

first-ever Sultan Azlan Shah Cup tournament. I've watched the competition on television many times.

"Whenever Malaysia play, I look forward to seeing Faizal Saari.

"He's one of the best strikers in the nation, and I would love to learn

from him during the training camp."

This year's Sultan Azlan Shah Cup will see Malaysia playing teams like India, Canada, Japan and South Korea.

South Africa pulled out due to

financial reasons and will be replaced by Poland.

In last year's edition, Malaysia finished fourth after Argentina beat them 3-1 in the third-fourth placing match. Australia were the champions last year.