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Boost or blow?

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MHC cut MHL foreign players' quota, Nurinsafi boss questions move

By S. SAKTESH

PETALING JAYA: Will reducing the number of foreign players in this year's Malaysian Hockey League (MHL) prove a bane or a boon?

The national body have made a bold move by cutting the foreign player quota from eight to three in a bid to encourage more teams to sign national players for the league, which is expected to start in April.

The foreign recruits must also have represented their junior or senior national teams, ensuring quality participation.

Local teams can register any number of national players, but they will only be allowed to field a combined total of eight foreign and national players on the pitch – up from six last year.

Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC) chief executive officer V. Jayananthan said the revised foreign quota was to give local players bigger opportunity to play and it was decided based on the feedback from the teams after the last season ended.

"We have reduced the foreign quota drastically from eight to three and they must have at least played for their national team," said Jayananthan.

"We don't want clubs to bring in foreigners without experi-



Back off: Terengganu's Faizal Saari (centre) trying to get past Territory Stingers players in a Malaysian Hockey League match last year. – Hokita

ence or have never even played high-level hockey.

"Instead of bringing in lower-quality foreign players, it is better for a team to include locals. That will benefit us in the long run.

"We want clubs to hire more national players because at the end of the day, the main purpose of running the domestic league is to benefit the national team."

Jayanathan said that although they have reduced the number of imported players, competing against foreign players would help the locals.

"The league will be competitive, and it will benefit our players as they get to play alongside good quality foreign players, that's for sure," he said.

"We've increased the number of combined foreign and nation-

al players on the pitch from six to eight, so things are balanced.

However, that decision did not go well with Nurinsafi owner and manager S. Thaichana Muruthi, who alleged the move to be inconsistent.

"Why do we keep changing these numbers every year? Are the competition committee making these changes to please certain teams and individuals?" asked Thaichana.

"For example, last year, eight foreign players were allowed. This benefited Matador team. And this year it is reduced to three, it could give advantage to Tenaga Nasional."

Many national players are employees of Tenaga.

"If the number of foreign players is reduced, then the number of national players should also be reduced," said Thaichana.

With this move, it will then give non-national local players the chance to play.

"We need a balanced player distribution and evenly matched game and not a one-sided tournament where a team with the most national players hold the advantage," he added.

Thaichana has sent an official letter to MHC early this month to express his displeasure over the change in rules.

Terengganu won the league title last year.