Tenaga teams’ progress is not a bolt out of the blue

By S. RAMAGURU

KUALA LUMPUR: Six years they waited. And finally, thanks to four-goal hero Arif Sabron, the Bukit Jali Sports School-Thunderbolt have wrested the Malaysian Junior Hockey League (MJHL) overall title from Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI)-Thunderbolt.

SSTMI have reigned supreme for the last six years. So, could the 4-3 defeat on Sunday mark the end of SSTMI’s dominance in the MJHL?

BJSS coach K. Rajan certainly thinks so.

“I’d like to think that BJSS have finally got it right ... we have the players to stay at the top,” he said.

“More than that, this (win over SSTMI) will give the other teams the belief that they too can match the SSTMI side.

“SSTMI have totally dominated the MJHL since 2010 ... credit to them for that.

“But, for the MJHL to be relevant, it’s time the others take up the fight. This may see the beginning of a new era.”

There is no doubt that this year’s MJHL has been a big success.

If there’s any complaint, if you can call it that, is Tenaga Nasional’s rising influence – through their Thunderbolt programme – on the MJHL.

Under the programme, Tenaga provide teams with technical assistance – through their former national players – and sometimes with financial aid as well.

It’s a noble effort and one that has proven successful, as can been seen by the semi-final appearance of all four Thunderbolt teams – SSTMI, Pahang Sports School (SSP)-MSP, Anderson and BJSS.

SSTMI won the MJHL Division One title; BJSS the MJHL overall crown; and Anderson the Division Two title.

Some, however, feel that the domination of Thunderbolt-linked teams could be unhealthy and turn the MJHL into a “family affair”.

They know that they do not have the financial clout to match teams under the Thunderbolt programme.

Well, they may be right.

After all, SSTMI became champions after joining the Thunderbolt programme. Anderson are on the rise and BJSS are back as champions. The Pahang Sports School are also making their presence felt.

So, is the Thunderbolt programme really bad for the game? The jury is out, for now.