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THE Terengganu Hockey Team (THT), who powered their way to a historic Treble of titles last season, are expecting a tougher time this season, especially after losing two key players to their strongest rivals.

Terengganu Hockey Association president Mohd Fikri Harun said the two THT national players – Mohamad Akhimullah Anuar Esook and Syarman Mat Tee – have joined Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB).

While admitting that it was a huge blow, THT are doing every-

thing possible to emulate the feat they achieved last year, including beginning preparations as early as the end of last year.

"This year is going to be very challenging, especially from our strongest rivals, TNB, who have snapped up our two key players. I was even told that they (TNB) have at least 15 national players in their lineup.

"But we'll take it as a challenge and continue to get our team into shape. With the capabilities of the players we have, I am confident we can overcome

the challenges, starting with the season-opener Charity Shield against TNB on April 11," he said when contacted.

For the record, THT achieved a historic treble last season, securing all three major titles: the Charity Shield, the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) and the TNB Cup. So, it will be interesting to see how THT will fare under coach Mohd Harfizi Baharom, who has retained 90% of the players who featured last year, in addition to recruiting several new faces from India and South

Africa to strengthen the team.

THT will also be banking on the return of true-blue Terengganu stalwart Firhan Ashari, a former national forward.

"For now, our focus is on the Charity Shield, which will be held at the Batu Buruk Hockey Stadium in Kuala Terengganu.

"We need to be realistic when setting a target based on what we achieved last year. We will take it one step at a time and see how we do before setting our sights on the next target (title)," he said. – Bernama