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HOCKEY

Kumar: Aussies were just too good

By R. Loheswar

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KUALA LUMPUR — Daunted by the higher standard of play and a lack of fitness were reasons Malaysia had a forgettable outing at the just-concluded Australian Hockey League (AHL).

This was the assessment of veteran goalkeeper S. Kumar who has kept goal for Malaysia since 1999.

"It was our first time in the AHL," said Kumar.

"The quality of the Aussie players, their basic skills, higher fitness

level and strong physical presence were evident from the start," he said.

In the Malaysians' defence, Kumar said they did not have enough training before the trip.

Most players were busy with the Malaysian Hockey League, while some were also involved in the TNB Cup final on Sept 25. AHL was from Sept 29 to Oct 9.

The Malaysians drew the first game 1-1 with New Zealand Futures.

After that, they lost 5-2 to the Queensland Blades, which boast veteran Aussie players Jake Whetton and

Daniel Beale.

"Lack of cohesion put paid to our chances in the first two games," lamented Kumar.

"We were surprised at the level of hockey and it took us a couple of games before we won our first match," he said.

That was against NT Stingers whom the Malaysians beat 3-1.

This was followed by a 5-2 loss to NSW Waratahs and a 4-1 thrashing by Victorian Vikings.

The Waratahs had three national players — Tom Graig, Matthew Dawson and Flynn Ogiivlie.

Victorian Vikings boast up and coming internationals like Andrew Philpott and Chris Ciriello.

"What I observed in Perth is they have a good development programme," said Kumar.

Despite the dismal results, the Malaysians did come back with two

wins — the other was a 3-0 victory against Canberra Lakers.

The experience should hold them in good stead for the 10-day Asian Champions Trophy (ACT) in Kuantan from Oct 20.

"We will be better as we have improved our game. The seven games we played there have given us valuable insights into our shortcomings," claimed Kumar.

"The positives were we never gave up. Guys like Najib Abu Hassan and Najmi Farizal gave their all. I believe we can do well at the ACT and achieve our target of making the final," he said.

With 248 caps and at a ripe age of 36, Kumar is as motivated as ever to represent the country.

"I love to don national colours. As long as I am able to play and the team need me, I will answer the call," he said.

Malaysia play Pakistan in the ACT opener on Thursday at 6pm.



Kumar (right) admitted the national side came up short in the AHL. — Picture by Bernama