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TNB's hard work reaping dividends

Team puts success in hockey down to great determination and belief

AS THE adage goes, "there is no substitute for hard work", and Tenaga Nasional Bhd are now reaping the benefits of a well-laid out hockey development programme which they are determined to see succeed.

What's more fascinating, maybe even intriguing, is that they have done it all using only local talent.

Over the years, TNB has maintained an admirable policy of keeping a well-balanced pool of local players in its development squad, who have come to be known as the TNB Thunderbolt and the senior TNB Team. Unlike most other teams in the league, they have opted not to sign on any foreign players.

A proud move that is starting to pay good dividends.

TNB has progressed out of sight this year and against the odds, qualified for the final of the inaugural Tan Sri P. Alagendra Cup.

However, the squad, coached by former international Muhamad Amin Rahim, went down 1-2 against Sapura Hockey Club in the title match at the Tun Razak Hockey Stadium.

The route to the final was treacherous and slippery, to say the least, but it all turned out well as TNB moved up a gear to edge Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) 3-2 in a thrilling quarter-final. They followed up with another excellent display to knock Terengganu Hockey Team (THT) out at the semi-final stage.

The Tan Sri P. Alagendra Cup is a knock-out tournament recently introduced by the Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC).

Though pinned to the bottom of the Premier League table standings, TNB's excellent performance in the tournament has not only been a soothing balm for fans and the team's management but they now also have something great to look forward to.

"Overall, we played well as a team (throughout the season) but more often than not, we were unlucky with our finishing. We eventually lost by the narrowest of



The victorious TNB Thunderbolt squad celebrating their domination in Division One of the league.

margins to Sapura Hockey Club," said a slightly-disappointment Muhamad Amin.

The coach said his team improved with every match throughout the season and all he had to do was fine-tune certain areas and get his men to play according to his strategy.

"With the average age being 21, my players were up against more matured and experienced players, but we matched the opposition in every department.

"If this team stays together, I am confident TNB can dominate Malaysian hockey in two years' time," said Muhamad Amin.

In the TNBMHL Premier League, TNB started as underdogs but to their credit, sprang surprises to hold triple champions THT, Kuala Lumpur Hockey Club (KLHC) and Maybank.

TNB capped off the season by recording an upset 2-1 win over KLHC, thus ruining their opponent's hopes of battling for the league title.

All this would never have been possible without a well thought-off and laid out development programme, and to prove this point,

TNB's development squad a.k.a TNB Thunderbolt dominated the TNBMHL Division One League 2016 and, not surprisingly, emerged champions to defend the President's Cup.

Hockey development in Malaysia has always been associated with TNB and their longevity in the hockey scene is ample proof that their development programmes work.

With regular coaching clinics across the length and breadth of the country, sports school affiliations and being the main sponsor of the National Junior League, TNB is arguably the main groomer of young hockey talents in Malaysia.

The TNB Thunderbolt Programme comprises "less skilful but committed players" selected from Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI), Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS), Pahang Sports School (SSP-MSP) and Ipoh-based SMK Anderson.

The players were nurtured and groomed by a panel of coaches.

Thunderbolt went on to pulverise SSTMI 7-2 in a one-sided Presidents Cup final to pocket a winning purse of RM30,000.

But more importantly, the TNB Thunderbolt Programme has also unearthed several talented players like Mohamad Akhimullah Anuar Esook, Muhammad Idris Samad and Shello Silverius, who were all outstanding against SSTMI.

Akhimullah was also drafted into Wallace Tan's National Development squad which are currently competing in the Australian Hockey League.

Thunderbolt head coach Nor Saiful Zaini was thrilled with the performance of his players to have accomplished their main objective in the league.

Nor Saiful said, "This is a positive beginning towards preparing for our Project 2020 development squad. We can identify several players who will represent the national junior and senior teams."

The former national player added, "I am glad that the decision to play these youngsters in Division One turned out well.

"It was a learning curve for them and the experience they gained was well worth it. It is important to start them young and TNB's Thunderbolt

Programme has been fruitful. "Hopefully, we will continue unearthing more local talent in the years to come."

The Thunderbolt boys will now take time off to focus on their studies as the majority of them will be taking the SPM examinations.

They will return to prepare for the TNB Malaysia Junior Hockey League (MJHL) early next year with their respective schools.

Muhamad Amin is also very satisfied with the success of the Thunderbolt programmes.

"Players from the programme who show a fighting spirit are promoted to the National Junior squad and then play with the seniors.

"Some are also snapped up by several top clubs.

"Forwards Faizal Saari and Fitri Saari are playing for THT while Faiz Helmi and Firhan Ashari represent Sapura Hockey Club," he concluded.

TNB's development hard work has not only contributed to its own hockey teams but has also impacted the ever improving national squads and there's no better reward than that.