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An oldie to stick with

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Terengganu's Jong-hyun shows he can still grab spotlight at twilight of his career

By K.M. BOOPATHY

PETALING JAYA: Jang Jong-hyun is like vintage wine – not only has he aged superbly but he's living some of his best moments at the twilight of his career.

A proven match winner for South Korea for almost a decade, he has now produced that similar magic for Terengganu and capped his best performance in the Malaysian Hockey League (MHL) that concluded on Saturday with the final of the TNB Cup in Bukit Jalil.

Jong-hyun, who turns 39 on March 28, converted the penalty corner winner against Tenaga Nasional in a 2-1 victory that handed Terengganu the TNB Cup, thus earning them the first treble in the club's 10-year history.

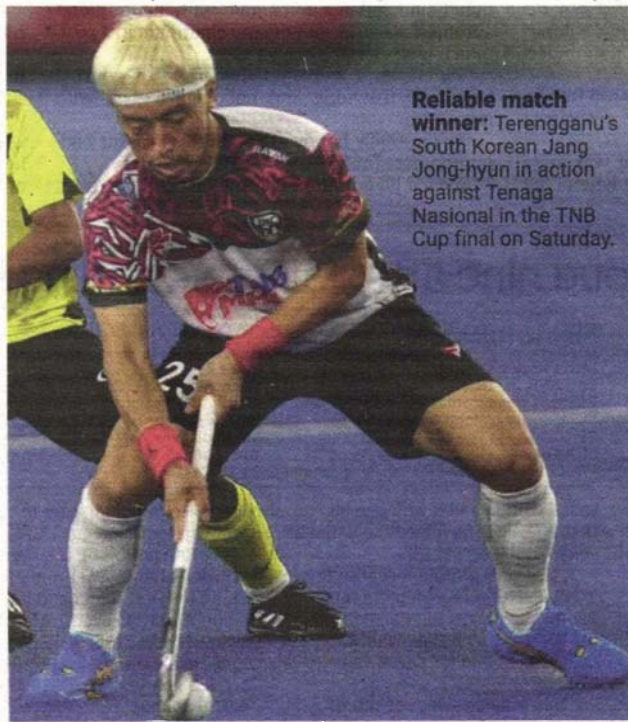
Despite his advancing age, Jong-hyun knows when to strike the killer blow and Tenaga were hurt by him three times this season.

His penalty corner conversions in the Charity Shield (4-3) and MHL league title decider in Batu Buruk (2-1) assured Terengganu of the other two prizes.

Knowing his ability as the most valuable player for Terengganu, Tenaga coach Norsaufil Zaini even joked about "locking Jang in his room" before the TNB Cup final at the National Hockey Stadium.

Despite earning respect from all quarters, Jong-hyun doesn't celebrate too much but continues to enjoy the matches as he is fully aware of the limited time he has as a player.

"I am very happy that I was able to contribute goals for



Reliable match winner: Terengganu's South Korean Jang Jong-hyun in action against Tenaga Nasional in the TNB Cup final on Saturday.

Terengganu but it is still a team effort," said Jong-hyun.

"The season has been my best for them, I have scored the most goals and they have won three titles and I can't ask for more.

"I'm not sure about next season but I hope I can play and help Terengganu again. But we have to wait and see."

Jong-hyun has featured for Terengganu every year since 2016, except for 2021 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic but his appearance will depend on his role for the South Korean

team who are aiming to qualify for the Paris Olympics next year.

"We are not sure if Jang can play for us next year as much will depend on the South Korean team's preparation plans for the Olympics if they qualify. It is too early to say anything on that," said captain Fitri Saari.

Terengganu also had Hafizuddin Othman to thank for keeping Tenaga at bay in the TNB Cup final but he had the help of defender Firdaus Omar for his heroics in thwarting the opposition's barrage of penalty

ROLL OF HONOUR

■ CHARITY SHIELD
TERENGGANU

■ LEAGUE CHAMPIONS
TERENGGANU

■ TNB CUP
TERENGGANU

■ MAN-OF-THE-MATCH (TNB CUP)

FAIZAL SAARI
(Terengganu)

■ TOP SCORER

AZRAI AIZAD ABU KAMAL
(Tenaga Nasional) – 40 goals

■ BEST GOALKEEPER

HAFIZUDDIN OTHMAN
(Terengganu)

■ MOST PROMISING PLAYER

ALFARICO LANCE LAU JR
(Maybank)

■ FAIRPLAY AWARD

TNB-THUNDERBOLTS

corner attempts.

Tenaga earned five consecutive penalty corners in a row, beginning in the 50th minute but as the first rusher, Firdaus put his body in front of the Tenaga players to block their attempts, giving Hafizuddin good cover during those tense moments.

"I was confident we could win the treble as our team are stronger but Tenaga really fought in all the title battles. They were really pushing us hard in the TNB Cup final," said Hafizuddin.

"I've to give a lot of credit to Firdaus in the fourth quarter for blocking the flicks of the Tenaga players. They got five in a row and the score was 1-1, and things could have been different.

"But Firdaus gave his all and we managed to come out of that tough situation."

Those five penalty corners, however, did take a toll on him as he collapsed on the pitch in pain and had to be stretchered out.

National player Shello Silverius, who also had an outstanding season for Terengganu, was also stretchered out five minutes from time due to cramps but it did not matter as they had Jong-hyun to save the day for them.