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Quality of hockey league on the rise >19

Surging higher with extra voltage

Success of recently concluded TNB-Malaysian Hockey League bodes well for future of game

THE recent conclusion of the TNB-Malaysian Hockey League 2017 (TNBMHL) Premier Division bodes well for hockey lovers.

League champions for three straight years since 2014, Terengganu Hockey Team (THT) were on course to make it four titles on the trot, when they were edged out 3-2 by Kuala Lumpur Hockey Club (KLHC) near the end of the match on Feb 19.

Such is the unpredictability of the TNBMHL Premier League now that even the most experienced pundits dare not make predictions.

THT head coach Sarjit Singh said the league had become tougher by the year and it was now no longer a place for teams to experiment, what with the stakes continuously being raised in rapid fashion.

Since their involvement three years ago, THT had consistently returned as tournament favourites, having won the double three times in a row.

They also emerged champions of the 2017 Tan Sri P. Alagendra Cup (knockout tournament), which was introduced for the first time last year.

The East Coast outfit had been labelled "untouchable" by opposing teams going into this year's edition, right until the shock sprung on them by KLHC.

The only thing missing from THT's trophy cabinet is the Charity Shield, held by KLHC for the last four years.

"There are a lot of positives in the TNBMHL. It has provided youngsters from every team with a platform to improve quickly," said Sarjit.

"For instance, players from all-local outfits TNB Thunderbolts and Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI) fared extremely well against established sides fortified by imported players in the Premier League.

"This kind of exposure is nothing if not good for Malaysian hockey. The youngsters are maturing fast into better players," he added.

Credit for the success of TNBMHL is attributed to Tenaga Nasional Bhd's (TNB) commitment towards Malaysian hockey.

Its support of the league is part of the RM20mil sponsorship agreement with the Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC) for five years beginning 2015.

Meanwhile, the TNB Thunderbolts team is a product of the company's proprietary development programme.

It is an initiative focused on unearthing and

grooming newfound talent.

Thunderbolts comprise players from Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS), Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI), SMK Anderson, Ipoh and Pahang Sports School (MSP-SSP).

The team provided several inspiring performances in the Premier League this season, but none greater than the 7-3 victory over Maybank, a team that has been a regular feature in the league.

University Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) head coach A. Arul Selvaraj has the same opinion.

"Overall the quality of the league is good. Premier League teams spend millions of ringgit in the league. If the league gets better, then the national team will be the first to benefit. It will get stronger," said Arul, who guided UniKL to a commendable third-place finish in the league.

Arul, however, has several ideas for the MHC competition committee to consider.

Among them is to fix early dates for the league rather than towards the end of the year.

Other ideas include an improved marketing strategy to disseminate information about the league, umpires conducting weekly post-mortem sessions, and ensuring logistic aspects are met on match days.

"My interest is in us having a strong national team and a high quality league. We are here to help MHC in improving the game. There is a lot we can do together by working closely with clubs involved.

"It would be ideal if clubs were also invited in the planning and structure of the Premier League as we are able to provide pertinent feedback."

Arul also added that foreign players should be invited to conduct coaching clinics to school children to expose these players to the myriad training mechanisms and diversity of mindsets prevalent in countries outside Malaysia.

"This is a norm in European countries where foreign players are invited to conduct coaching clinics. We have some good foreign international players in our TNBMHL League, but this opportunity was never explored.

"Perhaps we should look into this next year," he said.

Sarjit and Arul's impartial and objective assessment of the League provides the right pathway for MHC's competitions committee to continually improve, all for the betterment of Malaysian hockey.

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TNB's Muhamad Aminudin (right) dribbling past a Thunderbolts' player when both teams met in the recently concluded TNBMHL 2017 Premier League.



Terengganu Hockey Team (THT) celebrating their recent win over Kuala Lumpur Hockey Club (KLHC) in the TNB-Malaysian Hockey League 2017 finals. THT were pipped to the league title by KLHC earlier. — filepic