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## The same old sad MHL story

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HOCKEY

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**FEW** quality matches, little excitement. That was what the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) offered as it ended on Saturday.

There were some teams making up the numbers and hardly any new exciting players in the league. Umpiring quality was also not up to the mark.

Ten teams took part in the men's league (which started on Jan 4) and everyone knew it was

going to be a two-horse race between Terengganu and Tenaga Nasional. These same two teams dominate the MHL year in and year out.

Terengganu, who achieved the treble of Charity Shield, league title and TNB Cup in 2023, repeated the feat this year after staying unbeaten in 12 matches.

The East coast state beat last year's treble achievers Tenaga 3-0 in a penalty shootout after both teams were deadlocked at 1-1 in the final at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil on Saturday.

Terengganu's Faizal Saari may be 34, but he proved that he is still the best forward in the country by winning the MHL's top scorer award with 23 goals. Tenaga's Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal is the sec-

ond highest scorer with 21 goals.

Maybank, who finished third in both the league and the TNB Cup, were the only ones who could muster some resistance to Terengganu and Tenaga.

But the other teams were just making up the numbers. Teams like newcomers Matador Club, despite being powered by seven Pakistan national players and one Indian player, struggled in the league. Matador even lost 6-2 to TNB Thunderbolts, who are just a junior development squad.

Many had expected debutants Territory Stingers from Darwin to be formidable. After all, they were from Australia, a top hockey nation that have won at the World Cup and Olympics. But the team from Down Under were a letdown

in the MHL. They turned out to be a team of part timers and some of them were overweight.

Territory Stingers had no sting at all and ended up last among the 10 MHL teams.

The Liaoning team from China, though handled by South Korean's pre-eminent coach Kim Sang Ryul, were no better despite playing for the second straight season in the league. They won just two matches, drew one and lost six to finish seventh.

The Malaysia Hockey Confederation should get quality teams from overseas to make the league more competitive and exciting. Enough of the usual suspects, enough of the usual mundanity.

And what has happened to Selangor hockey? It used to be a

powerhouse but only one team from the state, Universiti Teknologi Mara, took part in the men's MHL. Where were the others?

It's the same sad situation for states like Perak, Melaka and Negri Sembilan who used to be known as top hockey states. Nowadays, they don't even have a team in the MHL. What has happened to their grassroots development?

National coaches call up players for national training based on the talent available in the MHL. But there are so few quality players for them to choose from.

So, it is the same old sad story. And national coach Sarjit Singh is likely to stick to the same old faces for the national team. **After Singh**