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Weakened MHL champs Terengganu admit the energy this season lies with Tenaga

PETALING JAYA: Treble winners Terengganu are not the favourites anymore in the Malaysian Hockey League (MHL) as their skipper has conceded that rivals Tenaga Nasional will be the team to beat when the competition begins on Friday.

The exodus of Terengganu's main pillars – South Korean penalty corner specialist Jang Jong-hyun, and Speedy Tigers players Marhan Jalil and Shello Silverius – to Tenaga will shift the tide in their favour in this year's title fights.

Besides the trio, Tenaga have another 10 national players in their line-up and several national junior players who competed in the Junior World Cup in Kuala Lumpur last year.

Terengganu, on the other hand, will be depending on the Saari brothers, Fitri and Faizal, national first-choice goalkeeper Hafizuddin Othman and another Speedy Tiger Abdul Khaliq Hamirin as well as their two imports – South Koreans Jung Man-jae and Yang Ji-hun – to win at least one of the three titles this year.

The considerably weakened Terengganu side must not only battle against Tenaga but also be wary of Maybank and China's Liaoning, the only foreign team to compete in the MHL this year.

"The advantage this year is with Tenaga as they want to win the treble and Terengganu will be considered the underdogs," said Fitri.

"They have 13 international players as well as several national juniors in their squad and it will be tough to beat them. If we can win one of three titles, it will be an achievement considering the strength of Tenaga.

"However, we also cannot take Maybank lightly as they also have many national players in their side while Liaoning will come with a few China internationals.

"We have never faced such tough competition in the MHL and it will be satisfying if we can win a title this time."

Terengganu will play their first match – the Charity Shield – against Tenaga on Feb 7, which will give an indication of how well the East Coast giants will do in the shortened league this year.

Although a total of 11 teams are playing in the MHL, the home-and-away format has been scrapped with teams playing 10 matches each due to the fasting period that begins in early March.

Terengganu also have seven players from the Malaysian squad competing in the Hockey's World Cup in Oman who will join the team.