

Stick to experience

UniKL coach insists his veterans are still national team material

By T. AVINESHWARAN

KUALA LUMPUR: The seniors still have much to contribute to the national cause.

For Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) coach Arul Selvaraj, his charges - Tengku Ahmad Tajuddin Tengku Ahmad Jalil, 33, Mohd Sukri Abd Mutalib, 34, Mohd Marhan Jalil, 30, and Mohd Razie Abd Rahim, 32 - are still the best players in the country and should very much be in contention for places in the national squad.

National hockey coach Roelant Oltmans is expected to announce his centralised squad for the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup by this week and some are predicting that some senior players might not make the cut.

Arul said the seniors are still the cream of the crop in the country.

"The gap between them and the next generation is too big," said the coach, who is based in Ireland.

"Even the gap in quality between the now-retired S. Kumar and the other keepers is too big. In Europe and Australia, it's different because the difference between the

seniors and juniors are close, you can build a team with them.

"If you drop these four players, there is no team. Sorry to say, the standard is still low. Who is the next generation coming through? Is our Under-21 team strong enough? Based on the Thunderbolts' performance in the league, I don't think so."

Tengku Ahmad Tajuddin (*pic*) was undoubtedly the hero in the final as he scored the match winning goals and showed great drive and energy throughout the match.

"Tengku, despite an injury, still came back. After the game, he said thank you for having me, and I said no, no, I have been



trying to get you for the last number of years. Finally, I feel successful by getting him to play for us. He is still an asset."

That aside, Arul said for UniKL, believing in their principles and being patient have been the keys to bagging the historic treble.

After bamboozling teams in the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) by going unbeaten, UniKL were made to fight to win the coveted TNB Cup.

They first had to fend off a stern fight from Maybank to win 2-1 in the semi-final. In the final, even though they had the lion's share of possession, they had to fight back in the fourth quarter to trump last year's champions

Terengganu 2-1. Earlier during the season, they also beat Terengganu 3-2 to win the Charity Shield.

"In the fourth quarter, we had to get into higher gear, we were 1-0 down with 15 minutes to go. I believe in 18 players and I don't rely on one player. The whole nation saw that they (Terengganu) were pushing the ball forward to only one player.

"I told my boys to keep to the structure because we are a better team. Just be disciplined and patient.

"But also, I said we needed more fire. I told some of the individuals that I wanted to take them out in the fourth quarter, some even vital players. I said you are not playing if there is no fire. They heeded the call."

Having made their debut in the MHL in 2011, this is the first time UniKL have won a treble and Arul said it would not have happened without the management's support.

"I have to thank the team's management. The team are here because of them. This victory is dedicated to everyone in the set-up."