KLHC losing steam
Champs uneasy with lacklustre win, Faeez hits hat-trick for UniKL

BY AFTAR SINGH

KUALA LUMPUR: Double champions KL Hockey Club (KLHC) came back from a goal down to edge Sapura 3-2 in a lacklustre display in their Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) match at the Wisma Belia Hockey Stadium in Kuantan yesterday.

On the adjacent pitch, the woes of debutants Terengganu continued when they were beaten 3-1 by unsung Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL).

KLHC lead the Premier Division standings with 16 points from five wins and a draw.

Although they can rejoice at retaining top spot at the halfway stage, they will surely be concerned with a sudden drop in form by some key players.

KLHC team manager George Koshy was annoyed with his team's performance.

"We played one of our worst matches thus far in the league and honestly, we are lucky to walk away with full points. A few of our players opted to have an off-day today and this is something we can ill-afford," said Koshy.

"We need to play consistently and convert the chances created. There is no easy game in the MHL and this is a wake-up call for my players that they cannot afford to take any team lightly. All credit to Sapura, they really had us worried and it was composure and experience that won us the match today," said Koshy.

Sapura took the lead against the run of play in the sixth minute. Azreen Rizal Nasir's cross was well-deflected into goal by Mohammad Azrul Hasbullah. KLHC pushed their forwards in search of goal and only found the equaliser in the 35th minute when Muhammad Imran sent in a powerful flick off their fourth penalty corner.

After the breather, Imran scored another penalty corner to give KLHC the lead in the 48th minute. KLHC increased their lead in the 54th minute. Waseem Ahmed's pass was deflected into goal by Chua Boon Huat.

However, Khasif Ali converted a penalty corner in the 60th minute to reduce the deficit but could not capitalise on another two penalty corners in the 64th and 65th minutes to save a point for Sapura.

In another match, defender Mohd Noor Faeez Ibrahim was the hero for UniKL scoring a hat-trick to steer his team past Terengganu 3-1.

Faeez scored two penalty corner goals in the 18th and 22nd and converted a penalty stroke in the 57th minute.

Jivan Mohan scored the consolation goal for Terengganu in the 40th minute.

UniKL coach S. Arul Selvaraj praised his players for the win over fancied Terengganu.

"It was a fantastic performance and I am really proud of the players. They showed what they are made of and never gave our opponents much space, always closing them down fast. We hope to build on this and hopefully, this will boost the confidence of the players," said Arul.

Meanwhile in the last match of the day, Tenaga Nasional outplayed Maybank 5-1 in an ill-tempered match. Although both teams are tied with 12 points, Tenaga are second with a better goal difference against the Tigers.
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No you don't: Sapura's Muhammad Zubair (left) in action against KLHC's Timothy James Deavin during their Malaysia Hockey League match at Wisma Belia Hockey Stadium in Kuantan yesterday. -- NIK NAIZI HUSIN / The Star