KUALA LUMPUR: Former champions Tenaga Nasional and Sapura loom as favourites in the Premier Division quarter-finals for the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL) overall title.

But their indifferent form during the preliminary round has made them wary of the threat posed by sixth-placed Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) and fifth-placed Terengganu respectively.

In tomorrow's quarter-finals, fourth-placed Sapura will clash with UniKL while third-placed Tenaga take on Terengganu.

Sapura team manager Louis Gregory lamented about the team's inconsistency during the league campaign.

"One minute we play like champions, then we play like novices the next moment. We do have good material with a blend of young players with experienced stars. But when it comes to chalking up results, we are not there yet," he said.

In the preliminary round, Sapura defeated UniKL 3-1 in the first round but lost 1-2 in the return match.

Louis believes the team's biggest problem is the lack of leadership.

"We don't have a player in the mould of S. Kuhin to rally the team and get them moving when the chips are down. Individually, they are fine," he said.

Sapura have three Pakistanis – Kashif Ali (pic), Mohamed Zubbair and Yasir Islam – and one Indian – Raja Veerachamy – as their guest players. Kashif has scored 13 goals and will be relied upon to provide the goals.

But UniKL are no pushovers despite not having any guest players. Former national junior skipper Mohamed Noor Faez Ibrahim is gaining in confidence with his penalty corner flicks and is joint top scorer with Kashif on 13 goals.

UniKL coach A. Arulselvaraj reckons that they have an even chance of reaching the semi-finals.

"At the knockout stage, it is anybody's game. Your have to plan for two matches and every chance you get is crucial. Noor Faez is flicking well and there is no reason why he cannot continue with his fine form," he said.

Tenaga are desperate to win the overall title after failing to land the league crown. Like Sapura, they face inconsistency problems although they have a star-studded line-up.

Terengganu team manager Mohamed Saberi Salleh believes that they can capitalise on Tenaga's yo-yo form.

"Our players are settling in slowly. We started off badly but picked up steam towards the end of the league. We must keep the momentum going and take our chances. We drew with them in the first round but lost 3-4 in the return match on Sunday.

"We are confident of taking the fight to them and play well. It is our first season and we just want to go as far as possible," said Mohamed Saberi.

Awaiting the two quarter-final winners are champions Kuala Lumpur Hockey Club and runners-up Maybank in the semi-finals.