Preparing early for success

Training starts next week as Sarawak target sparkling run in national schools rugby contest

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KUCHING: State rugby teams will start training next week in a bid to better their showing in the Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM) tournament in Seremban, Negri Sembilan.

Rugby technical director Zulkaraninshahm Sarbini said the training camps would either be at Kolej Datuk Patinggi Abang Haji Abdillah (Kolej) or SMKA Sheikh Haji Othman Abdul Wahab (SHOAW) here. A total of 32 players, the majority of whom are from Kuching, had been selected and the number would be trimmed to 25 to form the final squads for both the Under-12 and Under-18 categories.

"The final 25 players will be announced next week and the team will be coached by Zamzy Abdul Rahman and his assistant," said Zulkaraninshahm when contacted by The Star yesterday.

He said the players selected for the training were the best from the sides that took part in the Sarawak Schools Sports Council (SSSS) Inter-Division tournament on Wednesday.

"The official centralised training will only start on May 25. The tournament proper in Seremban is from June 3 to 9."

"We are looking to do better this year because we had been developing our teams in 2010 and 2011. The boys have now matured into better players. "We are aiming to reach at least the quarter-finals, if not among the top four," Zulkaraninshahm said. Perak were last year's champions in the Under-18 category, with Johor finishing as runners-up.

Zulkaraninshahm said the other favourites in the tournament would be Selangor, Kelantan and Sabah. The state teams, he said, would also play friendlies against Kuching Rugby Football Club, SHOAW Old Boys, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Politeknik and Universiti Teknologi Mara.

"Although these are senior teams with players aged between 18 to 22, our players are capable of beating them. "Playing against those teams will also be a good match exposure for the boys as they will be playing against strong teams at the national championships," he said.

Meanwhile, Zulkaraninshahm said Kolej and SHOAW would be representing Sarawak in MSSM Milo Under-15 tournament in November.

In the MSSS meet, Kuching continued to stamp their dominance by winning the Under-18 title for six consecutive years.

In the final match of the round-robin league that saw the participation of only four teams, Kuching overwhelmed Samarahan 46-15.

Sibu and Betong finished third and fourth, respectively.

Zulkaraninshahm said the standard of the tournament had improved, adding that Kuching, made up of players from Kolej and SHOAW, were clearly one level ahead of the rest.

"Kuching won by a big margin, which really showed their superiority and prowess."

"They won because they were better in terms of technique and skill. It is also because of their experience as they had participated in many tournaments, including those in Kuala Lumpur," he said.

Zulkaraninshahm noted that Samarahan players were bigger physically but they lacked technique.

On the other teams, he disclosed that they would still need to improve to be on par with Kuching.

In the Under-15 category, SHOAW beat arch-rivals and defending champions Kolej 24-12.

Third and fourth went to SM Sains Kuching and SMK Asajaya No. 2 respectively.

In the Under-12 final, Sibu emerged champions while Betong finished runners-up.

Kuching and Samarahan were third and fourth, respectively.
Too fast: A Kuching player escaping his Samarahan shadows in the Under-18 final.

Resilient: A Samarahan player is winded after being brought down by a heavy challenge.
Remedy: A SHOAW player putting an ice pack on his injured teammate.

High sporting spirit: Samarahan coach Wan Ahmad Ramzy congratulating the Kuching players.
Potential stars: The 32 best players of the tournament. Only 25 will be selected to represent the state in Seremban.