Down, but hopes still afloat

Penang eye Sukma after failure to enter knockout in Presidents Cup

Story and photos by RONNIE OH
north@thestar.com.my

It’s mission accomplished for Negri Sembilan and Kedah as they confirmed their places in the knockout stage of the Presidents Cup campaign.

The battle in the Group B was reduced to a three-cornered fight and the moment Selangor faltered, crashing to a shocking 3-0 defeat, the doors automatically swung open for the two rivals.

With Negri Sembilan needing only a point to move into a secure position, they managed to battle a 3-3 draw against Johor’s Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI) at the Bandar Penawar Stadium.

Kedah trooped out a 1-0 winner at the UTIM Mini Stadium in Arau when they clashed against neighbours Perlis.

Penang which had suffered one hiccup too many, still had something to shout about at the Universiti Sains Malaysia grounds on Thursday.

Playing their last home game of the season, the relatively young Penang outfit was determined to end their home quest in style, by treating their fans to a victory when they edged Kuala Lumpur by a solitary goal.

Coach Kamal Khalid admitted that his boys should have trooped out with a more convincing win.

Nippy striker Amirul Syazani was presented with so many chances to bury his shots into the Kuala Lumpur net, but his dangerous looking attempts were either stopped by the woodwork or turned away from the goal line, after having successfully woven past goalkeeper Wan Ahmad Hababa.

Lucky for Penang, Mohamad Ikhmal had coolly latched onto a cross from Muhammad Shazrul to crack home a pile driver from inside the box, to put Penang into a 37th minute lead.

“It is indeed a good way to finish and I also have no complaints as far as our performances are anything to go by,” said Kamal.

However, he said the same side would be carrying Penang’s challenge in the coming Sukma in Perlis and there was still much to be done to polish up their act.

“Although we have failed to make the cut to the knockout stage, I am confident there is still plenty of room left to improve as well as make Penang proud when the Sukma action gets on its way next month,” he added.

With Perlis to play host in this year’s Malaysia Games, the football challenge is scheduled to swing into the thick of the action in Kangar from May 23 to June 3.

It is indeed a good way to finish and I also have no complaints as far as our performances are anything to go by.

— KAMAL KHALID
Kuala Lumpur goalkeeper Wan Ahmad Hababa has the situation under control as he beats Penang skipper Tunku Noor Hidayat to the ball in this aerial challenge at the USM Stadium.
Penang's Muhammad Shazrul (left) seems to have got the better of his Kuala Lumpur rival in one of their raids during the match at USM.