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Winners by a whisker

Thunderbolt edge UniKL in thrilling decider

By S. RAMAGURU

KUALA LUMPUR: Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI)-Thunderbolt won their third MHF-Milo-NSC Junior Hockey League title on goal difference after edging Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) 4-3 at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

Azril Misron (14th, 31st) and Amir Zulkarnain (27th, 66th) scored a brace each for Thunderbolt while 2011 league champions UniKL replied through Mohd Azrul Hasbullah (5th), M. Najmi Farizal (own goal, 29th) and Mohd Syafiq Zulzairin (38th).

Thunderbolt, league champions in 2010 and 2012 and overall champions in 2011 and 2012, completed their fixtures with 18 points – the same as second-placed Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ). Thunderbolt, who received RM15,000 for emerging champions, had a goal difference of +27 while MBPJ's was only +2.

MBPJ took home RM10,000 while third-placed UniKL pocketed RM8,000.

Thunderbolt and UniKL went into yesterday's match needing an outright win to take the title as MBPJ had already completed their fixtures.

And it was UniKL who shot into a fifth-minute lead when Mohd Azrul outran the Thunderbolt defence to score from an acute angle.

Thunderbolt hit back with an Azril penalty corner goal in the 14th minute.

Thunderbolt made it 2-1 in the 27th minute when Amir shot home from their third penalty

corner. This time UniKL hit back after just two minutes when Thunderbolt's Najmi slotted past his own goalkeeper.

But Thunderbolt were not done yet. Two minutes later Azril got his second, and the team's third, off another penalty corner.

UniKL then drew level at 3-3, thanks to Syafiq's field goal just three minutes after the restart.

It was then left to Amir to turn hero for Thunderbolt when he scored the winning goal in the 66th minute off a penalty corner.

Thunderbolt coach Wan Mohd Roslan said that winning the title was hard work.

"But we need to win titles to keep our sponsors happy. So for that reason, we're extremely pleased to have emerged champions," he said.

"We're also happy that our penalty corners worked well, for once.

"All our goals today came from set pieces. Our midfield was almost non-existent.

"That is an area of concern for us for the knockout stage. But we'll worry about that later. For now, we're just happy to go back with the title."

UniKL coach K. Embaraj was clearly disappointed with the result as "we had a good chance to win the game and lift the title".

"We had the lead and we also came back to draw level at 3-3 in the second half. But we were not able to fend them off in the later stages of the match.

"We have one more title to fight for and we'll prepare harder. We don't want to be runners-up a second time like last year," he said.

The teams will have a long break now as the knockout stage will only start on Feb 22.

Six teams from Division One and two from Division Two (to be decided after the playoff on Feb 15) will compete in the knockout stage.

RESULTS AND STANDINGS	
DIVISION ONE	
MSS PENANG-USM	4 SSTMI JRS 3
UNIKL	3 SSTMI-THUNDERBOLT 4
	P W D L F A P
THUNDERBOLT	7 6 0 1 33 6 18
MPBJ	7 6 0 1 11 9 18
UNIKL	7 6 0 1 31 9 15
MBI-ANDERSON	7 2 2 3 11 19 8
SSTMI JUNIORS	7 2 1 4 12 21 7
MALACCA HIGH	7 1 3 3 10 22 6
BJSS	7 1 1 5 9 17 4
MSSP-USM	7 1 1 5 11 24 4
DIVISION TWO	
GROUP A	
STAR	3 MATRI PERLIS 1
SERATAS	5 NUR INSAFI 0
GROUP B	
KLSS	6 SMK PADANG MIDIN 0
SMK TUNKU BESAR	3 TUNAS PAHANG 2
BJSS JRS	0 POLITEKNIK-KPT 3

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Champions: Thunderbolt players and supporters celebrate after beating UniKL 4-3 to win the Malaysian Junior Hockey League title at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil yesterday. — S. S. KANESAN / The Star