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Leading scorer Syafiq puts his team above everything else

By AFTAR SINGH

KUALA LUMPUR: Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) forward Mohd Syafiq Zulzairin won the best player award in the MHC-Milo-NSC Junior Hockey League (MJHL) last season and is currently the top scorer in the Under-19 league with 10 goals.

But it's the team that come first. Everything else, he says, is secondary.

"Helping UniKL win the overall title is more important than me bagging the top scorer's award," said the skipper.

"Last year, I was named the best player in the league but I was disappointed when we didn't win any silverware. We finished as runners-up in Division One and lost in the final for the overall title," said the Sentul-born Syafiq,

who helped UniKL bag the league title in 2011. Last season, Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI)-Thunderbolt bagged the double.

"This season we finished a disappointing third in the league. But my team-mates and I have vowed to give our best to qualify for the final and win the overall title," said Syafiq, who will turn 19 on Oct 5.

UniKL will face SSTMI Juniors in the first-leg

of the semi-finals at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil today. The return leg will be played at the Taman Daya Stadium in Johor Baru on Friday.

UniKL had hammered SSTMI Juniors 6-2 in the league but Syafiq said that won't lull them into complacency.

"SSTMI Juniors ousted former champions MBPJ (Petaling Jaya City Council) in the quarter-finals ... they'll definitely go all out to get the better of us. So, we have to be cautious," said Syafiq, who was delighted to be called up to join the Project 2013 training squad two weeks ago.

He hopes to keep on improving and earn a place in the Junior World Cup, which will be held in Chandigarh, India, from Dec 5-16.

SSTMI Juniors coach Mohd Shafiq Nordin, meanwhile, admitted that they would start as the underdogs against UniKL.

"Ten of my boys are making their MJHL debut ... so, reaching the semi-finals is already a bonus for us. Our initial target was to make the quarter-finals," said Shafiq.

The other semi-final pits Thunderbolt, who won the Division One title, against MBI-Anderson.

LIGA HOKI REMAJA MALAYSIA 2013		SEMI-FINAL FIXTURES	
FIRST-LEG			
TODAY			
SSTMI-THUNDERBOLT vs MBI-ANDERSON	5pm	(Taman Daya Hockey Stadium, Johor Baru)	
UNIKL vs SSTMI JUNIORS	5pm	(National Hockey Stadium, Bukit Jalil)	
SECOND-LEG			
FRIDAY			
MBI-ANDERSON vs SSTMI-THUNDERBOLT	5pm	(Sultan Azlan Shah Stadium, Ipoh)	
SSTMI JUNIORS vs UNIKL	5pm	(Taman Daya Hockey Stadium, Johor Baru)	