

02/08/1999

Where are you, Mr Manager?

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DATUK Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar should give up the team manager's job if he cannot spare his time for the national soccer team.

Already embarrassed 2-1 by Singapore in their opening Sea Games match, Malaysia face Indonesia today in a match they have to win to stay afloat.

At a time like this, what the players need is a morale-boosting talk but sadly, Raja Ahmad has left that task to coach Abdul Rahman Ibrahim and his assistants.

Raja Ahmad was back in Petaling Jaya yesterday for the FA of Malaysia council meeting and instead of flying to Bandar Seri Begawan immediately, he decided to head home to Ipoh.

The reason? Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed will be visiting Perak for two days and Raja Ahmad, being a politician, has to be there.

Clearly, Raja Ahmad's political role takes precedence over everything else. Why then did he accept the post of team manager?

Granted he has an assistant in Datuk Jamal Nasir but the players would obviously love to have their confidence buoyed by the team manager himself in their hour of need.

"I'll be going back in two days but Jamal left (for Brunei) this morning," said Raja Ahmad after yesterday's FAM council meeting.

Raja Ahmad's other priorities only serves to put FAM's rationale in appointing council members, most of whom are politicians, as managers of the various national sides to ridicule.

This was an issue raised at the National Football Seminar in June as many outsiders felt that appointing a council member as team manager serves little or no purpose.

FAM have to agree that more often than not, a team administrator is appointed to handle the tasks of the manager. This is not the case with the Sea Games as the Olympic Council of Malaysia are strict in the number of officials accompanying teams.

FAM deputy president Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah said on Thursday coaches would be given more responsibilities in the running of the various national teams and administrative work with the help of their assistants should be one of them.

On Malaysia's 2-1 defeat by Singapore on Saturday, Raja Ahmad blamed it on inexperience.

Such is the state of affairs that Malaysia now lack experience even at South-East Asian level.

Malaysia have a League that is thriving compared to Singapore, the national squad have had stints in the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Myanmar plus friendlies against New Zealand, Iraq and Arsenal in Kuala Lumpur. Whatever happened to that experience?

"That is why we did not place any target for the team but I have to say that I was pleased with the fighting spirit the players showed," said Raja Ahmad.

"It isn't over yet as the players can bounce back and beat Indonesia (today). Give the team a chance."

A fair request but judging from reports from Brunei, they need all the help they can get from all quarters concerned. More so from absent team officials.

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