

19/12/2000

It's about time we look beyond the horizon

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THE Head Asia Cup tournament proved that the time has come for Malaysia to look beyond Asia if they want to be a squash power.

That Malaysia took the title was expected but what was totally unexpected was the way they brushed aside the opposition, Pakistan included.

And to do it with an understrength squad was all the more remarkable.

In the absence of Asian women's champion Nicol David, Malaysia fielded Sharon Wee and Tricia Chuah with Ong Beng Hee, Kenneth Low and Wan Azlan Iskandar to shoulder the burden of winning the inaugural title.

And deliver they did in a comprehensive way. With the exception of the semifinal and final, Malaysia thrashed all their opponents by 3-0 margins.

It was only in the ties against Hong Kong (semifinal) and Pakistan (final) that the Malaysians faltered, when they lost the women's singles and second men's singles respectively.

But kudos to the Squash Rackets Association of Malaysia for the painstaking efforts poured into the development of the players which has made them Asia's best today.

The tournament, a mixed team event, was the brainchild of Asian Squash Federation president Mokhzani Mahathir, and to say that it was well received by the fans would be an understatement.

An estimated 400 fans packed the NSC Squash Centre in Jalan Duta on Sunday and the fact they stayed to witness the prize presentation is testimony of the huge popularity of the sport in Klang Valley.

However, the disparity in the standard of the competing teams put a slight damper on the quality of the tournament.

Most, especially the lower ranked teams, were obviously struggling to cope with the top three, Malaysia, Pakistan and Hong Kong.

The mixed team championship is for the top eight teams in Asia only and the ASF, for the time being, have no plans to expand the competition.

Maybe the organisers of the event can study the feasibility of having a two-tier tournament, Divisions 1 and 2, with four or five teams in each group.

A league system can be implemented as the format of competition as this may be a better indication of the strength of the teams.

SRAM could also look into the possibility of staging the tournament at a better venue.

It was obvious the organisers were taken aback by the overwhelming fan turnout for the final and the 250-seating capacity at the Jalan Duta court were bursting to the brim with enthusiastic fans.

Even journalists were not spared and some had to cover the event based on the score that was announced as they could hardly see the match.

Although the organisers allocated seats for members of the Press, lack of enforcement saw many of the fans blatantly stripping the markers off the seats in their enthusiasm to get a better view of the match.

The RM25,000 prize money may seem paltry to some but since it is an inaugural event, things can only get better.

With Mulpha International guaranteeing sponsorship for the next two years, the tournament certainly has a bright future.

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