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We must set higher targets for results that matter

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THE national hockey team may have put up a courageous display in the Sydney Olympics but they must realise only the end results matter.

Their 11th placing in a 12-team competition will not go down well, especially after the call for national athletes to achieve higher standards instead of the pathetic results at the Sydney Olympics.

The hockey players must understand that they must back up a good show with the results.

And they must show this when Malaysia host the 2002 World Cup in Kuala Lumpur.

For a country who were once ranked among the top five in the world, the hockey team - whether they like it or not - must make every effort to be in that position in 2002.

And with this target achieved, they must then set higher standards for the 2004 Athens Olympics. Only then can the hockey team justify all the funds that have been poured into preparing them for major tournaments.

Like many other sports in the country, the hockey team have not been performing at their best when it comes to major tournaments.

While they will definitely point to the side who won the silver medal at the 1998 Commonwealth Games, the hockey team must also admit their performance in the last World Cup and the Olympics were simply not remarkable.

In fact, they finished 11th at the 1998 World Cup and also at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. In the 1998 Asian Games, Malaysia finished fifth, one of their worst showings in recent years.

This was one of the reasons that prompted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to criticise Malaysia's poor showing in Sydney.

"We have spoilt our athletes with too much reward. They think of themselves only now ... but they must also think of what they can contribute," he said last Friday.

Former team manager R. Yogeswaran, who handled the national side from 1998 until the Sydney Olympics, while pointing out the current Malaysian side have a good future, admitted they lack motivation.

"We were unlucky in Sydney. We should have won several of our matches but there is no excuse for that," said Yogeswaran.

"We did well to hold Holland 0-0 although we should have beaten Pakistan. We drew 1-1 but if we had tightened up at the back, we would not have let in a goal with 37 seconds to go.

"It is on such basis that we must buck up and then go for the jugular in 2002."

Yogeswaran said many players in the side are young but experienced and this augurs well for the future.

Several players of the side who finished fourth in 1975 World Cup agreed the national team have to set higher targets in order to achieve success.

"What is for sure is that all the hard work put in by a good bunch of players did not come to much good. They must understand we cannot go on patting backs for mediocrity," said R. Ramakrishnan, the 1975 skipper.

"I would rather play a bad game and still win instead of having played creditably but finish 11 out of 12. At the end of the day, the end results are all that matter.

"Next year, the records will show Malaysia were only 11th out of 12 teams and that is hardly encouraging. The firepower is also missing and

this is one area the officials in charge must try to improve."

But Ramakrishnan and S. Balasingam, one of the best lefthalves and flankbacks the country have ever produced, agreed the current team can go far.

"The talent is there and some of the youngsters in the national side are also coming up well," said Balasingam.

"But the motivation to win must be there. Sometimes, I feel that when we move into a competition, we don't set high targets. That can be better and it surely must when the 2002 World Cup takes place."

Balasingam cited MHF must also find someone like Yogeswaran who can motivate the players as seen in recent years.

"Maybe a new man can inject fresh ideas to bring back the hunger in their eyes. Because it is never easy to take over from Yogeswaran, who has done a god good job thus far," he said.

In short, what is a must for the hockey side is that qualifying for the Olympics and World Cup cannot be the standard. Achieving status in these competitions must now be their target.

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