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MPPJ keeping feet on the ground

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FIRST time Junior League finalists Petaling Jaya MC (MPPJ) will be hoping they do not freeze on the big occasion against Malacca MC at the National Hockey Stadium tomorrow.

With a fans from Malacca and Petaling Jaya expected to fill the stadium, both teams will have to be at their best to concentrate on the job instead of being frizzled in front of the big crowd.

Although MPPJ's fantastic run to the final this season is a major feat for the club, coach Roslan Salikon is aware the job is not over until the overall title is won.

Everyone is congratulating the underdogs, who had upset League champions Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) and Anderson, even before the final but Roslan prefers to wait for the conclusion before engaging in a discussion of the team's performance this season.

Unlike Malacca MC, who are at full strength, MPPJ will miss the services of influential midfielder Mohamad Hashim Rahmat and defender Mohamad Rohizan Ramli through suspension.

Hashim's role in the centre of the field will be taken over by the equally skilful captain Mohamad Reezwan Sufar with goal poacher Ikmal Abdul Jabar likely to feature in the first 11 after sitting out the semifinal second leg.

The battle in the engine room between two of the best midfield generals in the League - Reezwan and MMC's R. Rama - should keep the fans on the edge of their seats and could have a bearing on the outcome of the match.

MPPJ also enjoy the benefit of having a safe pair of hands in former Anderson goalkeeper Mohamad Mahathir Thayin, while the defence has learnt to handle the pressure well.

However, they are still vulnerable to attacks down the flanks.

But it is MPPJ's fighting qualities and ability to salvage a match despite trailing the opponents that have carried them through on numerous occasions. MMC will pay dearly if they chose to play it safe before the full 70 minutes are up in the final.

Man for man, MPPJ are by no means inferior to their opponents but the real cruncher tomorrow will be on how well they handle the pressure and atmosphere of the most important match of the club in the junior hockey scene.