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Penang back in second spot

PENANG denied the East Coast a one-two finish as Kelantan 1-0 in their Premier One clash at State Stadium in Batu Kawan last night.

The industrious midfielder Mohd Aiman Wong, who single-handedly orchestrated Penang's game throughout a barren first half, helped himself to the only goal of the game eight minutes into the second half.

His excellent effort not only hauled Penang back to the second spot which they once occupied but also enabled the islanders to claim the RM27,500 special cash incentive for being the League's first round runnersup.

The defeat, however, must have been painful for Kelantan as they not only slipped to third spot but slipped further behind Terengganu and Penang.

Having won three matches in a row, the defeat to Penang was unexpected.

But Penang, who did well to notch two away wins last week against Negri Sembilan and Selangor in the FA Cup quarterfinal second leg, trooped in without six key players either due to suspensions or injuries.

That probably contributed to the sluggish start they had in the first 30 minutes of play. And although they penetrated the Kelantan backline consistently, the goals refused to come.

Their best chance perhaps came through a 10th minute attempt by midfielder Ooi Hoe Guan from inside the box but that, too, was easily pushed over the bar by Kelantan goalkeeper Mohd Sany Fahmy, a callup to the national senior squad for next month's Merdeka tournament.

Kelantan nearly went ahead through Anuar Abu Bakar two minutes later, only to see his shot strike on-rushing Penang goalkeeper Kamarulzaman Hassan.

Striker Mohd Hardi Ahmad followed up with the rebound but much to Kelantan's despair, the goal-bound ball hit the left upright before rolling out of play.

Having regained their rhythm, Penang continued their onslaught against the Kelantanese and were duly rewarded in the 53rd minute.

Midfielder S. Sutesh, having spot Aiman and Ooi inside the Kelantan half, crossed from the right into the box where Ooi cleverly chested it towards the hard-running Mohd Aiman, who coolly tucked the ball beyond the reach of Mohd Sany's reach to put Penang one-up.

Kelantan came close to cancelling Penang's lead in the 72nd minute but Nik Ahmad Fadli Nik Leh, despite having only Kamarulzaman to beat, placed his header wide.

Penang: Kamarulzaman Hassan, Aziz Ismail, Chee Wan Hoe, Rahim Hassan, Nordin Kamis, Zailani Jaafar, Ooi Hoe Guan (D Samuel Raj), Ng Kok Heng (Mahathir Mohd Jamal), S Sutesh (R Suresh Kumar), Mohd Aiman Wong, Hasmawi Hassan.

Kelantan: Mohd Sany Fahmy, Nik Ahmad Fadli Nik Leh, Arman Zairi Johan (Faturazi Razi), Rosli Omar (Rezal Zambery Yahya), Anuar Abu Bakar, Azman Yusof, Tuan Kamree Tuan Yahya, Saifumizan Hussin, Roslisham Md Nor, Hardi Ahmad, Sarudy Aziz.

(END)