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Juniors get off to winning start

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THE National Juniors got off to a rousing start in their first Razak Cup match at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil yesterday when they beat Pahang 4-1.

The scoreline was not very impressive, but Juniors are the future and the future of Malaysian hockey should look brighter as they mature.

There was a promising show of discipline in the Juniors, who looked very much at home, shrugged off the first 10 minutes of jitters when they were presented with a penalty stroke in the 15th minute.

Jiva Mohan flicked from the spot to beat Pahang goalkeeper Ahmad Bazli Razali on the right side for the lead.

The weak link in the Pahang defence was M. Thevadas and upon resumption, the Juniors mounted a fast attack with Fairuz Hamsani and Izwan Hassan completing a swift one-two for Izwan to slot home their second goal.

In the 24th minute, a cross from the 25-yardline found Juniors' Hanafi Hassan un-marked in the semi-circle facing Bazli.

Hanafi turned around and fired a reverse stick goal in the 24th minute to consolidate the Juniors' position.

The Juniors got their fourth goal just before the break when Azlan Misron fired home for a 4-0 cushion at half-time.

After the breather, Pahang substituted their goalkeeper Bazli for Mahathir Thayin who held on well to fend off a series of attacks.

Mahathir even palmed off a few point blank shots to keep the score low, as the Juniors kept up the pressure for more goals.

The beauty about the match yesterday was that none of the players made protests, though some of the umpire's decisions were doubtful.

This showed that the Juniors are more mature than their seniors, who are known to protest whenever provided with the slightest opportunity.

Juniors defenders Engku Abdul Malke and Jivan also deserve special mention because they were rock solid. Their passes were accurate and the forwards could mount swift counter-attacks with deft balls from the duo.

But in the 50th minute, the Juniors finally cracked when Pahang were awarded a penalty corner. Islahudin Ideris took a direct shot which sounded the board.

The goal lifted Pahang for a few minutes but the Juniors didn't take their feet off the pedal, mounting more daring attacks.

In the 60th minute, they executed a superb penalty corner set-piece and the ball went crashing into the net after a deflection from Jiva.

However, the umpire disallowed the goal because the ball was not stopped dead by the stopper. There were no protests.

Pahang defender Thevadas played much better in the second half to keep the deficit low, despite the Juniors trying from all angles.

"We did not play well in the second half and this has to be addressed if we want to finish well in this tournament," said Juniors' coach Stephen