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LMSFA on cue for a revolution

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JUST three days ago, in a little sleepy district in Perak that's now better known for it's durians, curry mee, and char kueh teow, a significant chapter was inserted into the annals of Malaysian sport when the Larut, Matang and Selama District FA (LMSFA) - once known as Taiping FA - included a clause in its Constitution to set a term limit for its president.

And the person who had championed the cause to set that two-term limit of not more than four years, was the president himself, Datuk Abdullah Hishan Hisham.

Some may scoff at it, many might pour scorn on it, a few would be thrilled about it, while the rest would be just plain indifferent. This would just about sum up the typical Malaysian reaction to change.

But when you consider the damage to sport that incompetent and apathetic leadership had caused at just about all levels of it, what LMSFA and Hishan did on that Saturday evening at the King Edward VII Secondary School, was kick-start a revolution that could help rescue Malaysian sport.

This significant move to limit presidents and key officials to shorter terms of office would not only rid sport of inept leaders, but also introduce into the equation more passionate leaders and new concepts.

And don't we all know that soccer can do with this change.

Our beloved Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for it, Malaysians want to see it happen, and the sport itself has been crying for it.

And with the LMSFA setting the cue for this revolution, the onus should now be on all State FAs - the main cause of Malaysian soccer's destruction - to re-evaluate the situation, re-examine themselves, and more importantly initiate this constitutional change that has become so crucial to the salvage operation of Malaysian soccer.

For it has become common knowledge that the leadership at this level of the sport is either bankrupt of ideas, or just plain indifferent. In some cases, its both. Sadly, the poor quality of the M-League, bears testimony to the inept leadership of State football associations.

There are no more those exciting players who could lift the quality of the game or even a match. And that's mainly because State FAs have been guilty of neglecting development at schools and district levels.

When Malaysian soccer went semi-professional in 1989, and fully professional a few years later, the focus was on the M-League. And the result of that was the deterioration of the school, district, and club leagues.

In their haste to sign on players, State FAs all but broke their backs by paying out hefty wages. There was no budget for district and club leagues.

Which is why Hishan, a former Perak youth player and now a businessman, decided it was time to revive activities in Taiping, the district he grew up in. Given his passion for the game and his penchant for success, he rescued the district from its financial chains and set it free. They were in the red to the tune of RM70,000, and now they are in the black.

There wasn't a league. But now there are 53 teams registered in the LMSFA district league. And after Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi launched the league in May, the district FA completed three

tournaments of 168 matches over two months. In December they will hold their LMSFA Soccer Awards Night.

To revive interest in the district, Hishan flew in former Singapore star Fandi Ahmad into Taiping to conduct coaching clinics for the schools. More than 200 boys attended the clinics.

Next year, LMSFA will be organising a schools league for the under-12, under-14, under-16, and under-18 schoolboys. In addition to that, they will be holding discussions with former Manchester City legend, Ken Barnes on how his Soccer Skills programme can help develop the game in the district.

What is crucial here is that LMSFA and Hishan have realised that for soccer to thrive again, districts and schools must play key roles in this equation. No amount of money will save the sport if the game at these levels keep being neglected.

The FA of Malaysia hands out RM1.4 million to its State FAs every year, but how much of that has been going into development, is visibly reflected in the M-League - the Mediocre League.

What the sport could do with is bring in more people like Hishan at these levels, for this is where the rot has been deeply entrenched.

And maybe then Taiping will also be known for its soccer stars, just as it was in the 60s and 70s when they had players like Syed Ahmad, M. Karathu, and V. Krishnasamy.