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Day of upsets in Champions tourney

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STUNNING upsets saw three of the favourites eliminated in the quarter-finals of the National Under-15 Champion Schools Football tournament (Manchester United Premier Cup) in Kuantan yesterday.

Underdogs Kedah's SMK Kulim threw form book to the wind as they showed defending champions Selangor's SMK Section 11 Shah Alam the exit with a clinical 2-0 win.

Showing good team work, Selangor started promisingly but Kedah stunned them with an early goal as a result of a defensive blunder.

Selangor goalkeeper Muhammad Hafiz Shamsuddin left the goal line to meet a long ball which bounced awkwardly in front of him.

He failed to gather it cleanly and Kedah's top scorer, K. Rajkumar, gleefully fired the ball into an empty goal in the fifth minute.

Soon afterwards, Kedah suffered a setback as their keeper Ruzaini Faizal Zawawilalansari had to be stretchered out following a collision with a Selangor striker.

Kedah came under pressure for long spells and were forced to defend in numbers.

However, substitute goalkeeper, Muhammad Noor Helmi Murad, despite the early jitters, showed a safe pair of hands to deny the Selangor forwards.

Kedah went 2-0 up in the 43rd minute through Ahmad Azzam Essmme Ahmad Rosdi.

Selangor tried desperately to get into the match but Kedah, showing plenty of resilience, frustrated them with some fine defending.

"I am delighted with the boys for their fighting spirit as they were playing against the defending champions," said coach D. Vispalingam.

"My players are really exhausted. I hope they recover quickly enough for tomorrow's cruncher against SMK Sultan Sulaiman.

"Hopefully, we can turn the tables on Terengganu who knocked us out in last year's semi-finals," he added.

In another quarter-final, Negri Sembilan's SMK Tengku Ampuan Durah also failed to make the cut for the semi-finals, going down 1-3 to Sultan Sulaiman.

Rosazlan Rejab (7th, 64th) and Mohd Muslim Ahmad (43rd) scored for Terengganu while Mohd Hilmi Rosli (54th) replied for Negri.

Another favourites, Perlis' SMK Syed Alwi, were also eliminated in the quarter-finals, going down 1-2 to Sarawak's SMK Kanowit.

Elijah Bagau (47th) and Azmie Bungkong (55th) scored for Sarawak, while Mohd Amier Aeydyd (40th) netted for Perlis.

Only Penang's SMK Guar Perahu, who have been in impeccable form, remained on course for a place in the final. In the quarter-finals, the Penang school boys whipped SMK Jalan Junid Johor 6-0 to advance to the semi-finals.

Mahathir Muhamad (36th), Khairzul Azri Jamaluddin Haziq (41st) Mohammad Fitri Abi Hassan (45th), Mohd Zahisham Md Saad (57th) and Noor Akalil Akmal Amran (70th) netted for Penang.

RESULTS: Negri Sembilan 1 Terengganu 3; Selangor 0 Kedah 2; Penang 5 Johor 0; Perlis 1 Sarawak 2.