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Thunderbolt and UniKL banking on their star duos

By S. RAMAGURU

KUALA LUMPUR: SSTMI-Thunderbolt and Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) are each pinning their hopes on two of their players to try and win the overall title in the MHC-Milo-NSC Junior Hockey League final at the National Hockey Stadium in Bukit Jalil today.

UniKL will depend on top scorer Mohd Shafiq Zulzairin (14 goals) and penalty corner flicker Mohd Hafiz Elkan while Thunderbolt will be banking on forward Mohd Azwar Abdul Rahman and midfielder Mohd Amirol Aideded Mohd Arshad, who are back in the team after recovering from a motorcycle accident in January.

Thunderbolt coach Wan Mohamed Roslan said that the team "are much better with them around".

"We lost to UniKL in the league without these two players. I don't expect it to be easy but I believe we have the material to win this time. We're looking at winning our third overall title," he said.

Amirol, who has been with Thunderbolt for the last six years, is a member of the Project 2013 squad while Azwar, who joined Thunderbolt last season, is in the Project 2017 squad.

UniKL coach K. Embaraj is just as upbeat about his team's chances with the presence of Shafiq and Hafiz.

"Of course, they'll need the support of their team-mates. We're lucky like them (Thunderbolt) that we too have a full squad to choose from," said Embaraj.

"Shafiq is good at field goals while Hafiz is good at penalty corner flicks.

"But we also need to be careful not to give away penalty corners. Thunderbolt have a good offensive battery and that'll be crucial. Our defensive set-up for penalty corners is very important."

Embaraj, however, was quick to admit that Thunderbolt held the edge based on the number of titles they have won since 2010.

For the record, Thunderbolt have two league titles – 2010 and 2012 – and two overall crowns – 2011 and 2012. UniKL have only two titles – overall in 2010 and league in 2011.

"Thunderbolt are certainly the favourites if you look at what they've won.

"But we've grown from strength to strength and have a fair idea of what they can do," said Embaraj.

"For me, the main thing is to plan and play your game rather than worry too much about what your opponents will come up with.

"Early goals will be crucial too. That'll give the team an extra edge as it will heap pressure on the other team."

