

# Tourney set to be a nail-biting affair

Tough draw ensure inaugural Minister's Cup will be competitive

**Top 16 qualifiers:** Abdullah (centre) pulling one of the hopefuls for the final rounds from the bowl while Azzuddin (right) and FAM assistant secretary Ahmad Fuad Daud look on.



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**T**HE champions and the runners-up from three zones are setting a date for re-matches after they were drawn into the same group for the final rounds of the inaugural Higher Education Minister Cup tournament from July 17 to 25.

Central zone one champions and the preliminary stage favourites Grik Community College will have the company of the second ranked team Universiti Teknologi Mara Malaysia (UiTM) in Group A.

Grik will retain five former Perak President Cuppers in their line-up for the upcoming campaign.

Following a 3-0 victory over the more fancied UiTM earlier, Grik team manager Zulfikar Zahri Abd Aziz said they are wary of the threat coming from the northern region runners-up Bandar Darulaman Community College.

"The score line against UiTM was not a reflection of the actual contest on the pitch. We had a tough time against UiTM.

"We are expecting them to come back stronger in the next match. Although we have not played against Bandar Darulaman, we are aware of the strength of their side.

"We have to be careful and prevent them from walking away with a win against us," he added.

Coincidentally, southern winners Universiti Teknologi Malaysia will have another qualifier

from the same zone – Universiti Tun Hussein Onn – in Group B.

And the two sides from Sarawak – Universiti Teknologi Mara Sarawak and Kuching Polytechnic – are in Group C.

In contrast, Group D is the only section with a balanced representation from four different zones comprising Yayasan Sabah College (Sabah), Kepala Batas Community College (northern), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (central zone two) and Universiti Multimedia Malaysia (private tertiary institution) in the fray.

Kepala Batas team manager Mohd Suffian Halmi said they were surprised with their feat in emerging as the best performers from the northern zone.

"We scored a hard-earned win (2-1) over Bandar Darulaman in a very tight match to stay at the top of the table. It is going to be a more challenging journey to overcome more formidable teams in the next stage.

"Unfortunately, we will be missing the services of our goalkeeper Amir Omar Khata, who will be joining the national team training.

"But, we can still rely on our key players with a combination of former Kedah and Penang President Cup players to shoulder our challenge," he added.

The champions of each zone pocketed RM10,000 while the runners-up picked up RM5,000 for moving on to the second stage.

The hopefuls are scheduled to complete the

## THE QUALIFIERS

- **Group A:** Bandar Darulaman Community College, Universiti Teknologi Mara Malaysia, Grik Community College and Universiti Malaya

- **Group B:** Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn, Universiti Industri Selangor and Kota Bahru Polytechnic

- **Group C:** Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuching Polytechnic, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Teknologi Mara Sarawak

- **Group D:** Yayasan Sabah College, Kepala Batas Community College, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Multimedia Malaysia

group fixtures at four venues – UiTM, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Tenaga Nasional (Uniten) – on July 21.

The group champions will advance to the semi-finals on July 23 and the championship match is scheduled at UiTM in Shah Alam on July 25.

In the decider for the challenge trophy, the champions will take home RM30,000 while the runners-up will settle for RM15,000.

UiTM students' affairs and alumni deputy vice chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Abdullah Mohamad Said and Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) secretary Datuk Azzuddin Ahmad were present to conduct the draw.

Azzuddin praised the organisers for adding excitement to the local football scene in allowing the youngsters pursuing their education to continue to develop their football skills.

"The victorious team and the losing finalists will secure their places to feature in the FAM league next year.

"If they already in the league, we will be offering the slot to the next deserving team according to their ranking in the tournament," he added.