

Healthy development

INCREASE: More teams make the grade

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WITH an eye on creating more thinking players for the future, the Malaysian Rugby Union (MRU) is more than happy with the increasing number of teams breaking into the top flight of club rugby in the country.

MRU secretary general Suhaimi Zainuddin said Serdang Angels' (Universiti Putra Malaysia's elite team) promotion to the Super League is a healthy development for the future of the sport in the country.

UPM, who were boosted with the signing of nine Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (SSTMI) late last year, are the

Malaysian Universities Sports Excellence Centre for rugby (PKS).

Under this programme, the Higher Education Ministry channels up to RM500,000 worth of funds to UPM to develop the sport in Universities across the country.

"They have a large pool of 50 players who train on a daily basis since they became a PKS a few years ago and have this season shown marked improvement," said Suhaimi.

"After Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Lions were promoted last year, we are more than happy to see UPM now in the top flight as this increases the pool of quality players for the national team.

"They did receive nine new players from

Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School for this season, however, that should not be disputed as they are the PKS for the sport.

"Size is a big factor in rugby but the abilities of each individual to play a smart, intelligent game is also important.

"In a tight match, the decision making abilities of each player often makes the difference between winning and losing and we expect these university teams to be more astute when it comes to gameplay."

Serdang Angels earned promotion to the the Super League by virtue of their second place finish in the just concluded National Inter-club Championships (NICC) where they lost 23-8 to Negri Sembilan Wanderers in the final.

Suhaimi added that competing in the Super League, which for a first time this year will see clubs allowed to field up to seven foreigners, will take the development of their game to a new level.

"I feel they (Angels) could have beaten Wanderers in the final. It was only a lack of exposure which saw them lose against a team using Fijian imports.

"Our local boys often feel inferior when playing against bigger foreigners which is a mental barrier we are hoping to break through.

"This is why we have allowed more foreigners to play this year. As far as we are concerned, it does not matter who wins or loses.

"What is important is that our young local boys from teams such as the Angels and Lions get the chance to play against such opponents on a weekly basis."

Suhaimi disclosed that University teams looking to follow in the footsteps of UPM and UiTM will have to excel in the Malaysian Universities Sports Council championships in order for them to be given a spot in the NICC.



T-Team players cheering after the sponsorship deal yesterday. Pic by Zainuddin Muhammad