

First **champions** in tourney

UTM emerge as winners of inaugural netball league

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Photos by LOW LAY PHON

UNIVERSITI Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) became the inaugural champions of the Higher Education Ministry (IPT) Netball League when they defeated Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) 38-26 in the final at the UM Sports Centre in Kuala Lumpur recently.

It was a close match as both UTM and UPM had several internationals on their side. But UTM, under the guidance of Nur Ezzaini Mohd Nor, were impressive in the counter-attack and collected the points.

Nur Ezzaini, who was also the coach, had excellent support from internationals Fazira Mesnan and Nur Shafiqin Mustafa, and did not allow UPM, who had international Puah Pei San in attack, any chance to fight back.

Nur Ezzaini, a final year Sports Science student, said they were proud to be the first champions in the tournament.

"We had trained for almost three months. We have to commend all the players for their determination throughout the season. The final was a close match but we managed to take the lead and maintained it until the end," said an excited Nur Ezzaini.

UTM qualified for the final after beating favourites Universiti Malaya 30-24 in the semi-finals while UPM upstaged UiTM 27-22.

Nur Ezzaini said the semi-final match against Universiti Malaya was an interesting one.

"UM also had several internationals. It was a tough match and our players rose to the occasion to win. The victory also gave us the confidence to take on UPM. The instructions was to play a fast and attacking game. It worked and we have become the champions," said the 25-year-old Nur Ezzaini, a former student of Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS).

As the champions, UTM received RM5,000 and the challenge trophy while UPM settled for RM3,000. UiTM finished third after a 34-21 win over UM. UiTM received RM2,000 and UM RM1,000.

UM's Lim Mun Yee was voted as the Most Promising Player; UTM's Fazira was named as the Best Defender; the Best Player award went to UiTM's Rozliana Mohd



Champions: UTM players with their prize and challenge trophy.

Ridzuan while UPM's Nur Ain Omar won the Top Scorer award.

The grand finals was a culmination of a four-zone circuit initiated by UM. After the zone level competition, the top four teams from each zone qualified for the grand finals.

UM Sports Centre deputy director Dr Mohamad Faithal Hassan said the circuit was a big success.

"Almost 50 higher learning institutions took part in the circuit. In fact the circuit was the first to be initiated by a higher learning institution. The response was certainly overwhelming and encouraging. Looking at the enthusiasm shown by the teams, we are looking at organising more competitions in the coming months.

"It is through competitions that we would be able to keep the play-

ers active. The league will be an annual affair and we will be looking into making the event a more challenging and exciting one," said Dr Mohamad Faithal.

The circuit was also a platform to identify players for the Asean University Netball championship in December. About 50 players, Dr Mohamad Faithal said, have been selected for a series training programme.

"We have about six months for the championship. The identified players are required to attend training regularly. The final squad will be named sometime in November. We are confident of assembling a strong team for the Asean University championship," said Dr Mohamad Faithal.

UM Sports Centre director Associate Professor Dr Mohd Salleh Aman gave away the prizes to the winning teams.





Well deserved: Rozliana (right) receiving the Best Player award from Dr Mohd Salleh.

Stop! Nur Shafiqin (right) trying to block a UPM player from scoring.

No stopping her: Nur Ezzani (left) charges ahead during the final.

