

RUGBY

No pre-games for players, no problem

FOR rugby 7s skipper Zulkiflee Azmi and utility player Siddiq Jalil, not having pre-games action for the Sea Games shouldn't be a problem in the national team meeting their target.

Zulkiflee, Siddiq and 14 others will skip the pre-games on July 15-16 at the MBPJ Stadium as they stick to their training in Teregganu but the boys do not see it as a disadvantage with less than 40-days remaining to Sea Games.

"We will be given a chance to play on the field just to adapt to the environment, the field and so forth," said Siddiq.

He said the team's various training stints which included a trip to New Zealand in June, have proved to be worthwhile as it has broadened the horizons for the players.

"Our preparations are going well and if there are any changes it would probably be to our training schedules."



Utility Siddiq Jalil fends off two Tengku Mahkota Ismail Sports School players at the Langkawi 7s last April.

"We have been training during the afternoons, to better adjust to the heat that we could be exposed to during the Sea Games."

Zulkiflee added that despite the team's minor injuries, he is optimistic they will be in their best physical condition for gold come August.

"There are two players with minor injuries but they will recover in

time but what we're more worried about is whether or not the players can cope with the pressure as we move closer to the Sea Games."

Siddiq, who is a Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) student, admitted that being the host nation could bring about unnecessary pressure for the players.

"The thing we're most worried about would be the hopes and mission that we carry on our shoulders especially for the Malaysian rugby community who are hoping to see us achieve something great."

"We will certainly try our best to meet those expectations and get the gold."

Zulkiflee, 25, reckons that the Philippines could pose a serious threat to Malaysia.

"Last year, we didn't get to play against them at the Asian Series so we don't know if their playing style is the same as at the last Sea Games," said Zulkiflee.

"The majority of their players are foreigners and their physical build is far different from us."

"We will certainly try our best to meet those expectations and get the gold." **Farah Azharie**