

Syafiq wants to make Asiad team on merit after World Cup sacrifice

By K.M. BOOPATHY

PETALING JAYA: Syed Syafiq Syed Mohd Cholan may have taken a huge gamble by leaving the Malaysian Tigers during the crucial build-up towards the World Cup next year but the defender is ready to fight for his place in the Asian Games next year.

Syafiq, who has 95 international caps, scored for Malaysia in the final where the South Koreans delivered the killer blow with a 2-1 victory in May.

Despite that, Malaysia had already qualified for the World Cup in Rourkela-Bhubaneswar from Jan 13-29.

He chose to skip the World Cup due to studies but the Ipoh-born player is still part of national coach A. Arulselvaraj's Asiad plans.

Syafiq, who enrolled for the Masters of Business Administration degree (MBA) at the University Putra Malaysia (UPM) in March, had decided to sacrifice his goal of playing at the World Cup to complete the first trimester by next year.

He is required to complete six trimesters in order obtain his MBA.

"I had to take a break after the Asia Cup and will try to complete the first trimester before I return to fight for my inclusion again after the World Cup. It wouldn't be fair for other players who are preparing full-time if I

try to return using seniority," said Syafiq.

"I know there are a lot of capable players to fill my spot and it won't be easy to return also.

"But my aim is the Hangzhou Asian Games which also serve as the Olympic qualifiers. I would want to make the team on merit.

"For the moment, I've been also following a decentralised training programme provided by National Sports Institute (NSI).

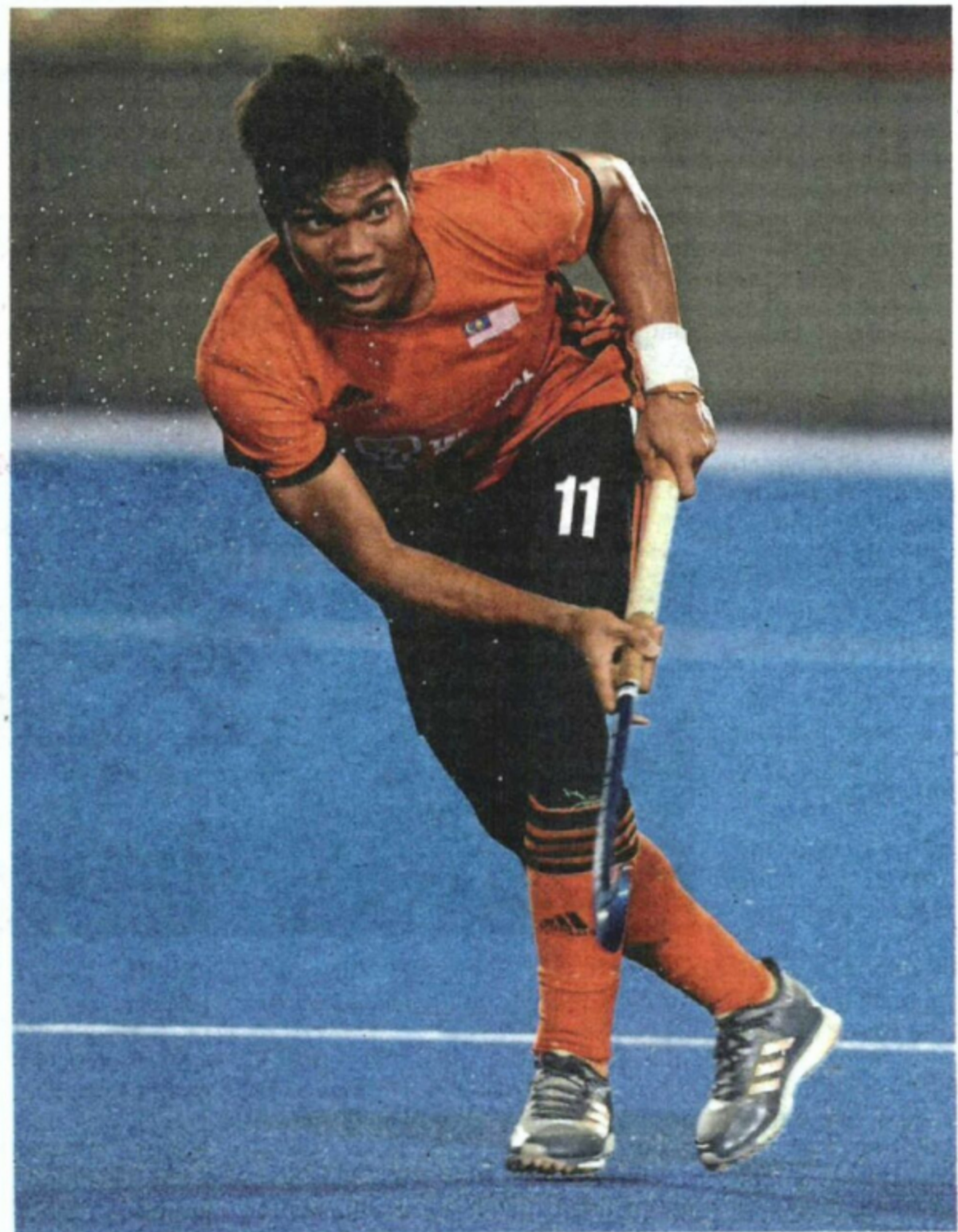
"I should return to competition during the Malaysian Hockey League (MHL) next year where I will be playing for TNB (Tenaga Nasional) and that's where I can impress the national selectors again."

Tigers captain Marhan Jalil and Razi Rahim operate at the heart of the defence while Mohd Najmi Farizal Jazlan and Syafiq play as right and left backs.

Syafiq's absence could open the doors for Mohd Syafiq Hassan, Mohd Amirul Hamizan Azahar, Izad Hakimi Jamaluddin to go for the vacant spot while midfielder Zulpidaus Mizun could also be tried out.

The MHL is normally held between February and March while the Asian Games will be held from Sept 23-Oct 8.

Asian Games gold medallists will qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics. In the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, the Tigers missed out after losing to Japan in the final.



Key player: Syed Syafiq Syed Mohd Cholan is still part of national coach A. Arulselvaraj's Asiad plans.