



The Malaysian squad all set for the 5-a-side football match at the Asean Para Games 2015 in Marina Bay Sands, Singapore.

# Gold for blind footballers

Malaysia team clinch top spot after holding off defending champions Thailand in annual event

story by  
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THE triumphant victory by the Malaysian 5-a-side blind football team in the eighth Asean Para Games 2015 has proved that consistent training was not in vain.

All their hard work turned out to be valuable in the annual tournament.

Held at the Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, Malaysia showed defending champions Thailand that they were no pushovers in the game by putting up a solid performance throughout the event.

Malaysian head coach Sunny Shalesh said it was a meaningful win for the team.

"The players played their hearts out during the matches and we are glad to pip Thailand as they are considered one of the best in South-East Asia.

"Since 2009, we have worked hard to develop the game and in the Asean Para Games in 2014 we lost out to Thailand, who went on to become the eventual champion.

"We were also recently ranked fifth at the Tokyo Asian Championships," he said, adding that the local circuits and participation in international tournaments had given the country a formidable team and the much-needed experience for them to succeed.

He also thanked the National Sports Council, Paralympic department, National Sports Institute, Malaysian Blind Sports Association and sponsors

CIMB Foundation, Columbia Asia Hospitals and Milo for their support.

The teams played in a round robin format with the top side being crowned the winner.

Three points were awarded for a win while one point was awarded for a draw.

During the match against defending champions Thailand, Malaysian striker Mohamed Zamha scored the opening goal from a penalty.

However, the Thais equalised through Kittikorn Baodee in the second half through a free-kick.

Ahmad Fikri was the toast of Malaysia as he delivered all three points with a fine solo goal in the dying minutes of the match.

Thailand's Panyawaut Kupan had the chance to level the score when they were awarded a penalty but he blew the chance.

Malaysians ended their campaign by topping the group of four teams with seven points while Thailand finished one point behind.

Earlier, the Malaysian team easily beat hosts Singapore 3-0 and drew 0-0 with Vietnam.

Sunny also praised the players for their hard-fought victory and their perseverance during the matches.

"A lot of the players got injured during the games. The players fought till the final whistle despite two of them playing with a hairline foot fracture and another two severed their meniscus.

"Our goalkeeper Meor Shahrul Azhar Mat Salleh also bruised his shoulder in the Thailand game after an opponent collided with him but was still in top form to help us win the tournament," he said.

Vietnam clinched the bronze medal after defeating Singapore 2-0.



A Malaysian player (centre) going in for a tackle against a Singaporean opponent.



Malaysians on the podium after clinching the gold medal.