

Sports

Football

SJI targets football revival under Kadir

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AFTER a 13-year football hiatus, one could be forgiven for thinking that St Joseph's Institution (SJI) would be happy to start small.

But the school has gone all out to revive their glory days of the '60s and '70s.

They have installed one of the biggest local football names – LionsXII assistant coach Kadir Yahaya – as the man to do just that.

Kadir, 44, who also led the Singapore team to a bronze medal at the Youth Olympic Games last year, is currently coaching the SJI C Division team.

He guided his newly-formed squad to a third-placed finish, out of a six-team group, in the first round of the National School Games (NSG).

Despite not qualifying for the second round, they maintained an unbeaten run during the course of their five matches – winning two and drawing three.

Another highlight was the 10-0 drubbing of Holy Innocents' High.

But their return to the NSG ended yesterday with a 0-0 draw against Bartley Secondary, who qualified

ahead of them.

Speaking after the match, Kadir was full of praise for his team.

"They gave everything, and some of them were even crying after the match," he said.

"They have a lot of fighting spirit, and today, they learnt that winning isn't everything."

Said the school's head of Physical Education and Co-curricular activities, Mohamed Tahir: "I am very impressed by the quality of play from the boys, given how we've had only one-and-a-half months of preparation.

"Furthermore, out of the 17 players, only four of them are in Secondary Two, the rest (are in Secondary One."

Influence

When asked about Kadir's influence on the team, he said: "He's had a great impact.

"He's known to be a no-nonsense and strict coach, but with the boys, he's adapted well – being friendly and firm at the same time.

"They really look up to him."

But the coach was quick to play down the "Kadir Effect" that he had on his players, and said the landslide victory over Holy Innocents'

High was a coincidence.

"I don't emphasise winning. I just tell them to play to the best of their abilities, and the results will come," he said.

He admitted using a different approach when handling the SJI student athletes as compared to the professional players of the LionsXII.

"With these boys, you need to be more of an educator," he said.

"I should not be shouting or be angry at them. Instead, I let them experiment on the field, get them to do their best and that's enough."

For SJI footballer Elliot Ng, 12, playing under such a prestigious coach only served to motivate the entire team.

"He's a really good coach. He's very friendly and down-to-earth with us," he said.

"He hardly scolds us. At the most, he just asks us to be more serious.

"We feel that we owe it to the school and him to get the best possible results."

In 2000, the sport was omitted from the school's list of Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) due to declining interest and resource constraints.

But the decision was made to bring back the sport, and SJI ap-



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– SJI footballer Elliot Ng (left), on Kadir Yahaya

proached the coach of Singapore's Youth Olympic Games team last November.

Said Tahir: "We had a lot of offers, from old boys as well.

"But we wanted someone who would be able to lay a strong foundation for our school's football, not just anyone with a coaching certificate."

Negotiations with Kadir eventually reached a successful close – as he put pen to paper on a year-to-year contract early last month.

Said Kadir: "The school approached me through Tahir, said

they were looking for someone to be a football coach and consultant.

"I was impressed by the philosophy, and they gave me a good projection for the years to come."

He admitted there were other schools who were interested in his services, but the only concrete offer came from SJI.

Since then, he has not looked back, and intends to stay with the school for the long term.

"It depends on my schedule in the future," he said.

"But if everything goes well, I intend to see through the development of this squad."



MAKING A SPLASH: Kadir Yahaya (in white) building good rapport with his players during a training session.

TNP PICTURES: CHOO CHWEE HUA, BENJAMIN SEETOR