

Rugby development on the rise

SK Bukit Lanjan leading the way by training Orang Asli children from other schools

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GRASSROOTS rugby in Selangor could become more competitive in the next few years if the efforts of teachers in SK Bukit Lanjan bear fruit.

The school for Temuan Orang Asli children in Damansara Perdana has been a rising force in the Petaling Utama education district in the last three years thanks to their consistent performance even though its programme only started in 2015 with five pupils.

Led by two coaches – Emir Din Baharudin and Muhamad Fadhli Othman – the school team, known as the Lanjan Tigers, have also recently formed the first ever all-girs Orang Asli rugby team, called Lanjan Lynx.

Five years ago, SK Bukit Lanjan was one of only two Orang Asli schools out of 11 in the state to have its own rugby team and have gone from being the punching bags in the Petaling Utama district to a formidable opponent by emerging as MSSD Petaling Utama district champions in the Under-10 (2018) and runner-ups in the Under-12 age group last year and this year.

Now, the programme administrators are trying to build a competitive ecosystem where teams from other Orang Asli schools around the country can get together to hone their players' abilities.

Last year, with the help of Dialog Group Bhd and their corporate social responsibility arm MyKasih, the teachers initiated a statewide rugby clinic for other Orang Asli schools to encourage them to form their own teams and were able to get nine schools to take up the programme.

"Our aim was to help them build their own school rugby programme which culminated in the inaugural national All Asli Schools Rugby Championship where teams representing their schools played for the Tan Sri Dr Ngau Boon Keat trophy," Emir explained.

"20 teams – six from Selangor and the rest from other states – participated in the tournament hosted by us here in Bukit Lanjan and our pupils did very well to finish in second place in the main event, just behind the champions, SK Runchang from Pahang, while we emerged first in the development category.

"We believe that in the long-term, this will grow the talent pool in the

state as well as the Orang Asli community as a whole as we are serious about developing these youngsters," said Emir, who is also part of the Petaling Utama district rugby program administration with Fadhli.

SK Bukit Lanjan's senior assistant Suhaidi Sapuan said because of the school, rugby is now included in the Orang Asli School Sports Carnival (KSSMOA). A get-together with former Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik in 2018 led to the decision.

He said the introduction of rugby in the annual games bodes well for the development of the sport among the Orang Asli community and also gives younger teams an additional national-level platform to compete in.

"It will give many of them the opportunity to be part of a national competition because not all Orang Asli pupils might get selected for a state-level team outside KSSMOA," he said.

So far, KSSMOA national-level rugby tournament twice with most of the players supplied by SK Bukit Lanjan while in the KSSMOA state-level competition, the Lanjan Tigers has won it twice since 2018.

Emir said that signs of improvement from Orang Asli teams around the country are due to the rising level of competitiveness.

"We became the champions quite comfortably in the first KSSMOA rugby tournament but things were not so easy last year with SK Runchang beating us in the All Asli finals and us having to fight harder for the second KSSMOA title."

Even in the Petaling Utama district, more teams are being formed and the level of competition has also been improving.

To drive rugby development further, SK Bukit Lanjan's new project – the Lanjan Lynx which is less than a year old and still in their early stages of development – have already participated in two competitions.

"The girls were unhappy that only the boys were able to play rugby and used to get all the attention during assembly after returning with medals and trophies, so we decided that we should also give them the same chance and formed the team," said Emir.

"We have about 20 girls aged 10 to 12 and they train together with the boys.

"At first, we were surprised that the girls also wanted to be part of



The SK Bukit Lanjan boys and girls rugby teams are on track to reach greater heights thanks to dedicated teachers and support from Dialog and MyKasih. – Photos: CHAN TAK KONG and SIA HONG KIAU/The Star

rugby, but now we hope to try and replicate the results that the boys achieved," Emir recalled.

Suhaidi noted that the success of the school's rugby programme so far was due to teachers like Emir and Fadhli who built it from the ground up in 2015 with the support of Dialog and MyKasih.

"We can give all the resources but the teachers are the ones that make it happen," he said. Suhaidi added that good teachers and the rugby programme had also made the school a more fun place for the 197 pupils.

"Children who were previously reluctant now look forward to coming. Our attendance figures have risen steadily from around 70% five years ago to almost 90% last year."

The teachers said a number of pupils had what it took to make it to the national level and so far one player had gone on to represent the state in the Malaysian School Sports Council Games, even though he only started playing rugby in 2018.

They, however, said it was disheartening that the majority of parents were not involved and rarely showed support for their children, let alone the team.



Emir (right) hopes to grow the pool of Orang Asli talent in rugby.



Fadhli (right), who is in charge of the newly formed Lanjan Lynx girls squad, hopes they will do well this year.



Pupils preparing for their joint training session at SK Bukit Lanjan.