

FOOTBALL

UKM GET SECOND CHANCE FOR GLORY

Perennial strugglers are Challenge Cup finalists again

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UKM FC are among the youngest teams in the M-League and despite their inexperience and limited budget, the small club have been defying the odds since making their Premier League debut last season.

In 2018, UKM were in the relegation zone midway of the season before finishing seventh in the Premier League.

However, they surprised everyone by reaching the final of the Challenge Cup only to lose to Terengganu FC II (TFC II) on a 4-2 aggregate.

As for this year, they again struggled to avoid demotion to the M3 League before finishing eighth.

They have reached the final of the Challenge Cup once again

and are determined to win their first M-League silverware this time.

However, it would be a challenging task as they will face Premier League giants Johor Darul Ta'zim II (JDT II), who finished runners-up in the second-tier competition this season, in the final.

JDT II will host the first leg in Pasir Gudang today, followed by the return leg in Cheras on Oct 12.

The task has been made more difficult for UKM following the absence of coach Sulaiman Hussin, who left for Japan to attend an AFC Pro Licence course. He will only return two days after the return leg.

His assistant and former international, Juzaili Samion has been given the responsibility to handle the team for the final.

"JDT II are an experienced side. They have superstars in their team and have quality players in every department," said Sulaiman when contacted via WhatsApp yesterday.

"However, I have reminded my charges not to give them too much respect. They need to re-



UKM FC will be looking to forward Mateo Roskam (right) for goals in the first leg of their Challenge Cup final against JDT II today.

member that UKM are now among the best after reaching the final of the Challenge Cup.

"The final is an opportunity for them to show their true character and quality."

Although Sulaiman is currently in Japan, he is very much involved in the preparation of the team.

"My assistants have been contacting me via WhatsApp daily to discuss our team's preparation. We have come up with strategies after viewing videos of JDT II's previous matches.

UKM will depend on forwards Milad Zanidpour and Mateo Roskam, who have netted 11 goals between them in the competition, for goals in today's match.

Meanwhile, JDT II coach Ervin Boban hopes his side can record a convincing victory today.

"UKM may have finished only eighth in the league, but they proved their credentials by reaching the final of this competition. We must respect them and play to our strengths in Pasir Gudang."

Boban is expected to field his strongest side.

Among JDT II's key players are Nicolas Fernandez, S. Kumaahran, Hasbullah Abu Bakar, Mohamad Ghaddar, Rozaimi Abd Rahman, Khairullah Halim and Ramadhan Saifullah Usman.