



Members of the UCSI University basketball team with their medals after winning the Gatorade University League title.

BASKETBALL

SPARRING WITH DRAGONS

UCSI boys learn from AirAsia Asean Basketball League team

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TO be a towering force in college basketball may seem like a tall order for UCSI University but the members of their basketball team, however, are not whistling Dixies as they are up to the challenge.

After all, they have had a good track record as their players used to be the sparring partners of the Westports Malaysia Dragons (also known as the KL Dragons) that featured in the AirAsia Asean Basketball League.

The latest batch of players of the UCSI Basketball Club are not to be outshone as they won this year's Gatorade University League title, vastly improving on their fifth placing last year.

Kalaiselvan Siraman, head of sport and fitness department, student affairs and alumni division in UCSI University, said they were the co-organisers of the month-long league, which saw a participation of 15 teams.

"MVP Marketing was the other co-organiser of the league, where the games were played from April 8 to May 7 at UCSI University's multi-purpose hall and South

Wing in the Taman Connaught, Cheras, campus in Kuala Lumpur," said Kalai, as he's more popularly known.

Kalai, who assumed his latest position more than a year ago after being in a similar capacity for nine years with another private college, is basically in charge of developing all sports in the college.

"Apart from basketball, I also monitor the performances of the other teams, such as futsal, badminton, netball and volleyball in UCSI University," he added.

"UCSI advocates a policy of churning out all-rounded students who not only excel in their academic pursuits, but also in their co-curriculum activities.

"By joining sports clubs, students can pick up soft skills, such as teamwork, commitment, discipline and time management in addition to staying fit and healthy."

Kalai pointed out that for the University Basketball League, the participating teams' fees helped to cover the cost of medals, trophies, light refreshments and court rental fees.

"While I am responsible for looking for sponsors, the team members also do their own fundraisers and sourcing for sponsors. This is a chance for them to do networking and develop their

non-academic skills," said Kalai, adding that 90 per cent of the RM3,000 of the league's prize money would be shared among the winning team members while the balance would be kept by the university "for future usage".

He lamented UCSI University cagers' reversal of fortunes in the Masiswa (Majlis Sukan Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Swasta or Private Institutions of Higher Learning Sports Council) Basketball Championship, held from Sept 9-30 at SJKC Kwon Hon in Sungei Besi, Kuala Lumpur, where they were knocked out in the preliminary round.

"It was a bitter pill to swallow as we were placed fifth in last year's edition, making us one of the top eight teams to qualify for the Varsity Basketball League, where we finished fourth," said Kalai.

He added that UCSI University were placed in the Group of Death, where they came face-to-face with formidable teams such as Taylor's University and Help University.

Taylor's, in particular, had five national cagers who played in the Kuala Lumpur SEA Games. And many of their players are also "graduates" of the national youth and back-up squads.

Kalai is, however, keeping his fingers crossed that UCSI Uni-

versity may get a wild card for the Varsity Basketball League (VBL), which is supported by the Ministry of Higher Education.

"As in previous editions, the top eight sides from the Masiswa competition will qualify for the VBL, along with eight teams from public universities, community colleges and polytechnics."

If the wildcard is confirmed, UCSI University will pin their hopes on team coach Foong Ming Joe, a former national player, to chart the cagers' path.

The VBL is the premier basketball competition for private and public universities as the sport is not contested at the Higher Education Institutions Sports Championships (Sukipt - Sukan Institut Pendidikan Tinggi) in Kuala Lumpur next February," said Kalai.

"I am in the process of building up the team. UCSI University are currently talking to a national Syrian basketball player to transfer here with the offer of a scholarship.

"The UCSI University cagers are a blend of local and foreign students.

"Of the international students, Africans are more skilful and hardworking. They are also taller, averaging between 1.85m and 1.90m in height."

Foong will train the team at the Cheras campus every Friday evening. Prior to that, members of the UCSI Basketball Club, will have usage of the court for their practice sessions before the team take over.

