



The Lanjan Tigers have their eyes on taking the Petaling Utama education district cup this year.



Under-10 captain Darius Daud (with the ball) in action during a training session.

# Lanjan Tigers on the rise

Rugby gives orang asli schoolchildren solid footing, thanks to CSR arm of oil and gas services firm

## PETALING JAYA

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TUCKED among the many high-rise buildings in Damansara Perdana, Petaling Jaya, is the Desa Temuan orang asli community. Like the locale, their daily struggles go largely unnoticed by most.

For the young ones in the community though, their school, SK Bukit Lanjan (Asli) (SKBL), stands as a respite from the worries that plague the older generation.

Only a few years ago, social ills stemming from low-income households of the community were apparent and its effects could be seen in the lives of the children.

SKBL was the worst-performing school in the Petaling Utama education district. Students would often miss classes, contributing to poor academic performance across the board.

Even getting school uniforms was a challenge, let alone having the money to buy school books and food from the canteen.

Since the adoption of SK Bukit Lanjan in 2014 by MyKasih, the corporate social responsibility arm of oil and gas services firm Dialog Group Bhd, things have been on the up and up.

By providing students with monthly cashless bursaries through its "Love My School" programme – from 70 students in 2014 to the entire student population of 177 in 2017 – students have been able to get books for school as well as eat regularly and on time.

Other Dialog initiatives that engage the students in school projects include sponsoring UPSR camps and sports days as well as activities like fun outings to KidZania and back-to-school shopping.

This has contributed to a jump in overall school attendance from 76% in 2013 to 87% in 2016.

Aside from supporting students through providing meals and education, Dialog's aim of providing a holistic schooling experience also includes encouraging a sporting culture.

It was discovered that some students were losing out on scholarships based on their weaker extracurricular experience when compared with their peers who were more exposed to sports.

Even though athletics and handball were the two most popular sports in SKBL, there was no consistent training.



(Standing back row, from left) Fadhli, Emir and SK Bukit Lanjan senior curriculum teacher Ridzuan Othman with the energetic Lanjan Tigers – Selangor's first orang asli rugby team sponsored by Dialog Group Bhd. — Photos: ROHIAZAT MD DARUS/The Star

Enter Emir Din Baharudin and Muhamad Fadhli Othman, both teachers at SKBL and avid rugby players when they were training to become teachers.

Their timing in entering the school in 2015 was perfect as Dialog was finding more ways to maintain consistent engagement with the school.

Emir, being a Petaling Utama education district coach and always wanting to spread rugby to youths, mooted the idea – the school was on board and the first Selangor orang asli rugby team, "Lanjan Tigers", were born.

With Emir and Fadhli assisting on the technical side of things, Dialog taking up the sponsorship of equipment and transportation to and from matches, everyone had high hopes.

"For our very first session, five kids showed up," head coach Emir recalls.

Interest among the students grew eventually, but with a limited number of students in the school, Emir and Fadhli did not have the luxury of choice when it came to selecting players and had to build a team from scratch.

"While other schools got to select

who they wanted, I didn't have a choice.

"We started from zero and worked on everything from the very basics. But we kept at it, training, then having friendly games as much as possible," he said.

From not having a school field to use and resorting to sharing the community field, to the shy and clueless boys that did not know anything about the game, challenges were apparent.

"During the early sessions, the boys needed instructions on everything, otherwise they would just stand there with their hands in their pockets," he said.

But now, comprising 25 students from Year One to Year Six in Under-12 and Under-10 teams, they have come a long way.

"Nowadays, they get to the field maybe an hour early, sometimes more, and start warming up by themselves," he added.

For a new outfit against other schools who have been playing for a longer time, the Lanjan Tigers showed a glimpse of their potential when their Under-10 boys came in second in the Cup category of the 2016 Petaling Utama Rugby Championship.

One of their key players, Afqil Miquel Mohd Affindi, who moved to a different school, was selected by the state team the same year.

"We used to be the punching bags in earlier tournaments and many teams would look forward to playing us, but now, not so much," said Emir.

He added that even though the players in the Under-10 team were smaller than average, they brim with confidence and are not afraid of the bigger boys.

In 2016, the Lanjan Tigers won one gold, one silver and two bronze medals at various district and national championships and maintained a good record last year with two golds and two silvers, including a win in the Bowl Category of the Rimau Lavender-KGV Rugby Championship held at the prestigious SMK King George V, Seremban in September.

Guided by their teachers' vision and passion, the team's philosophy puts a strong emphasis on teamwork and knowing each player's roles, and they seem to be on the right path.

"These days, even before we tell them to make tactical adjustments in the game, they will tell us, 'Don't

worry teacher, we know what we need to do'."

The first batch of players who have been training since 2015 now have a bit of experience. It also means it will be the last year for them in the team.

With that in mind, Emir has set a target of challenging for the district cup but knows the task will be hard.

"Under-12 rugby is very competitive, especially in the Petaling Utama district which has the most teams in Selangor. There is no dominant force.

"But we are all proud that we were able to form a competitive team from just a little school with so little players while the others have hundreds more to pick from.

"At least we have two teams, because when the Under-12 players leave school, the Under-10s will be ready to take over.

"After that, we will have to start to look for new players again.

"Hopefully, we get to work with senior clubs that can give the youths some extra coaching, not just for exposure on rugby, but the experience of friendship through the sport so they can excel beyond rugby and school," he said.