

Reality check for YOG team

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Singapore's Youth Olympic Games (YOG) footballers got a taste of the stern test ahead of them yesterday when they were whipped 4-0 by the national Under-18 team in a friendly at the Jalan Besar Stadium.

The Under-15 boys were no match for their bigger opponents, who are lying second in the Prime League.

The game was a curtain-raiser for the FIS Asian Challenge Cup match between England's Burnley FC and a Singapore Selection.

YOG coach Kadir Yahaya said the result would help bring his boys back down to earth after a run of good results. The Cubs had defeated St Andrews Junior College 2-1, Meridian JC 3-0, and held the national U-17 team to a 1-1 draw last week.

Said Kadir: "I was looking forward to this game, because I knew it would expose our weaknesses.

"We need to improve our defending as a team, we can't allow simple goals like that. I can accept the fourth goal, but not the first three."

U-18 substitute Shahfiq Ghani scored the final goal in the 61st minute of the 80-minute game. He controlled a long ball out of defence, created space for himself before lashing a brilliant volley past goalkeeper Fashah Iskandar.

Muhaymin Salim, Ignatius Ang and Shamil Sharif scored the first three goals respectively. The Cubs were caught out each time by crosses from the flanks.

Despite their impressive showing against the U-17s last week, the Cubs found the U-18s an entirely different proposition altogether. They were unable to match the older boys' speed, movement off the ball and superior technique.

The defence was under siege from the kick-off as the U-18s saw two shots cannon off the woodwork before Muhaymin broke the deadlock in the 19th minute.

Pushing forward, the Cubs were closed down swiftly and had little time on the ball. The pressure not only resulted in passes going awry but they also ceded possession easily.

Still, they battled bravely throughout, and created several half-chances for themselves. Star forward Hanafi Akbar was largely subdued, but managed to show some nice touches. He also came close to scoring with a second-half free kick that just skimmed the bar.

Overall, Kadir was satisfied with his team's performance.

The Cubs have three more tune-up matches before they kick off their YOG campaign against Zimbabwe on Aug 13. They have lined up matches against the U-16s and two other club COE teams.

Said Kadir: "During the Asian Youth Games last year, the boys were nervous. If they aren't nervous this time, I'm confident they can put up a good display."

