

A Lions factory at Champions Way

Sports School players make an impression as Safuwan and Madhu eye SEA Games

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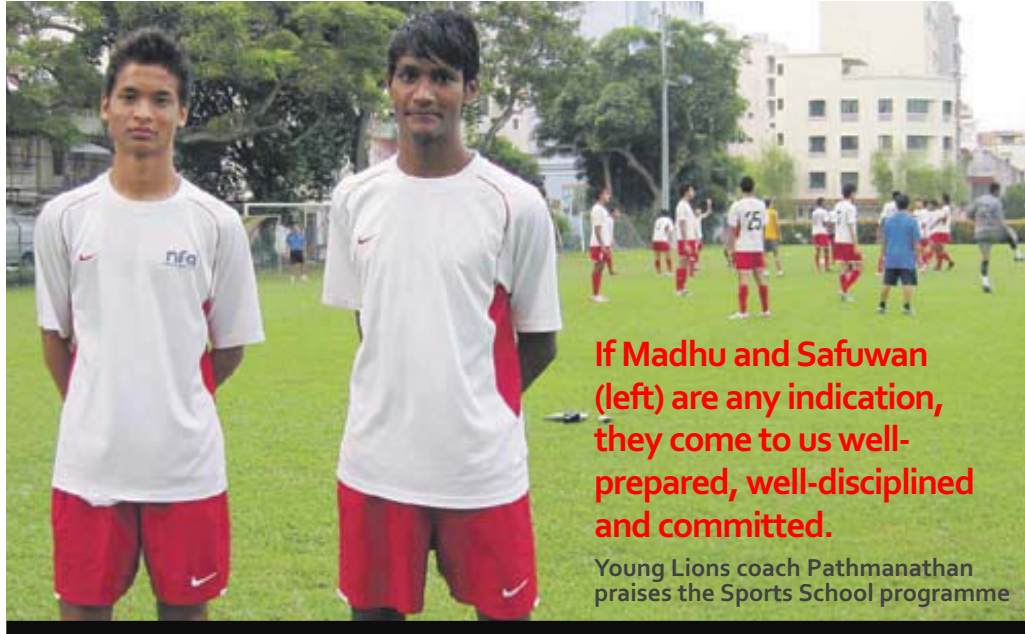
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INDONESIA-BOUND Singapore defenders Baihakki Khaizan and Precious Emuejeraye are both graduates of the Young Lions team. Baihakki, 25, starred for the under-23 team in the S-League from 2004 to 2007, while 26-year-old Precious played for the team from 2003 to 2006.

While the Young Lions' production line has churned out several senior national stars, players from the Singapore Sports School are beginning to take their first steps en route to a possible career as full-fledged Lions.

Former Sports School footballers Safuwan Baharudin, 17, and 18-year-old Madhu Mohana, who were among the first batch of players at Champions Way, broke into Terry Pathmanathan's Young Lions squad this season and have already turned in some assured performances.

Like Baihakki and Precious, both are defenders, and they are eyeing a spot in the Singapore SEA Games squad bound for Laos in December.



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Young Lions coach Pathmanathan praises the Sports School programme

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Singapore coach Radojko Avramovic has been monitoring the progress of the two players and their team-mates from the Sports School. Said the Serb yesterday: "I pulled Madhu from the under-21 squad and Safuwan from the under-18s and put them with the Young Lions.

"We are always looking for young players and we felt that these two should have the opportunity to play and train seriously.

"At the moment, they are in the SEA Games squad and also in the under-18 team that will play in the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers in November."

Besides Safuwan and Madhu, there are five former Sports School footballers plying their trade in Prime League sides of S-League teams, three more in the national under-18 squad and nine others in the national under-17 squad.

Young Lions coach Pathmanathan

believes the Sports School can play an effective role in widening the pool of local talent. "The school has given the players a good base: they know what training is all about, and how demanding the game is and if Madhu and Safuwan are any indication, they come to us well-prepared, well-disciplined and committed," said the former Singapore skipper.

"Having joined us halfway through the season, the two boys have got comfortable in the team fast and helped the team with some good performances."

Republic Polytechnic student Madhu credits the Sports School for his progress.

"The school has made me more disciplined and training under pressure there has also helped to change my mental state," he said. "Hopefully, I'll ... make it to the national team one day. It has been my dream since I was a kid."

Avramovic warned there was still much for players like Madhu and Safuwan to do, if they want to fulfil their national team ambitions.

"Madhu and Safuwan are equipped to succeed and we are giving them the opportunity to, but it is up to them to take the chance," he said. "Like all young players, some will make it, some won't, we'll just have to wait and see."