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## Champions set to defend title

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REIGNING champions Foundation of Goodness (FOG) Seenigama Sports Academy from Sri Lanka are expected to return to defend their title at the fourth International Youth Cricket tournament that will be jointly organised by the Kuala Lumpur Cricket Association (KLCA) and Royal Selangor Club (RSC) and is scheduled to be held in either July or August.

R. Devindran, the organising chairman of the previous edition of the tournament, said the visitors had a perfect debut at the annual affair and went on to end the good run of two-time winners and defending champions Malaysian Malays Cricket Association (MMCA) in the final of the Under-15 contest.



Role model: English test cricketer Smith turning up to inspire the juniors.

Despite having had to recover from the tsunami catastrophe in 2004, the youngsters overcame adversity and gave a courageous performance to emerge as champions in their first international junior outing last November.

“It was the first time the youngsters had travelled out from their hometown in Seenigama, and were very reserved when they arrived for the tournament. But, the victory here certainly lifted their spirits and boosted their confidence. We noticed the change in their temperament and they were elated. We were delighted to have helped put back the beaming smiles on the faces,” he added.

Last year, the three-day event sponsored by KAF Investment Bank Bhd drew a total of 22 teams, comprising boys and girls.

Besides teams from around the country except for the four states of Perlis, Kedah, Terengganu and Sarawak, foreign sides from Singapore, Australia, India and Bangladesh also joined the fray in the six-a-side tournament decided over five-over.

Former international Devindran said they were considering increasing the number of teams to 24 for the tournament this season.

“Over the years, the quality of play has improved and we have competitive teams in the tournament.

“Our aim is to provide an opportunity for the budding cricketers to soak up the atmosphere and gauge their strength in a high-level junior competition,” he added.

For the past three seasons, notable names in the cricket fraternity were in town to inspire the juniors.



Victorious debut: The winning team FOG from Seenigama, Sri Lanka, celebrating their win.

English test cricketer Robin Smith also donated a helmet and bat during his trip here last year.

In recognition of the organisers' effort in hosting the event, the International Cricket Council (ICC) presented them with the award for the Best Junior Development Initiative in Asia for 2008.

“We knew that cricket has a very small base in the country, but it did not prevent us from continuing to promote the sport.

“Before we introduced the junior tournament, we had invited the powerhouses in cricket to entertain the fans here. But, we felt that it would be more meaningful to replace it with the junior event and create an avenue for the young players to display the talents,” he said.

He added that they had been channelling the funds raised from the tournament to the KLCA development programme, with two full-time Sri Lankan coaches reaching out to 12 schools in the Klang Valley.

In addition, the organisers have also contributed RM10,000 to the Stepping Stones Living Centre, which runs five homes for poor children, single mothers and the homeless elderly, as the beneficiary of their charity drive last year.