

MALAYSIAN SUPER LEAGUE



HIDE AND DUCK: The LionsXII taking refuge in their dugout as water bottles rain down.

TNP PICTURES:
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LionsXII survive Sarawak 'hell'



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**SARAWAK 0
LIONSXII 1**
(Shahril Ishak 73-pen)

REPORTING FROM KUCHING

After the final whistle, the LionsXII players and officials surveyed the stands and scurried into the dugout and pulled this reporter in as well.

Goalkeeper Hyrulnizam Juma'at shouted: "Be care-

ful" as heaps of water bottles thumped against the fibreglass shelter.

"Wah, like Angry Birds," quipped defender Safuwan Baharudin.

Teammate Madhu Mohana added: "Hardcore man, welcome to hell."

"Singapore *mati* (die in Malay)," screamed a Sarawak fan, followed by more profanities.

Just then, Sarawak captain Hairol Moktar squared up to referee Suhaimi Mat Hassan, who had awarded the 73rd-minute penalty which Shahril Ishak converted for a gutsy 1-0 win.

And Sarawak assistant coach Farhan Abdullah was seen hurling a water bottle over the official.

True to Bruising Borneo Battle tradition, Sarawak – players and 15,000 fans – hurled abuse, blared air horns, swung elbows, lit flares, flashed middle fingers and launched water bottles – in a bid to unsettle the Singaporean side during and after the physical match.

But for the second time in two months, following January's 1-0 away win at Sabah, the LionsXII stood their ground, refused to be intimidated and escaped

with all three points and their unbeaten away record intact.

Yet this win was one to savour, as coach V Sundramoorthy had to contend with a long injury list which includes goalkeeper Izwan Mahbud, defenders Juma'at Jantan, Baihakkhi Khaizan, Shaiful Esah and forwards Khairul Amri and Agu Casmir.

He couldn't even find 18 fit players to bring to Stadium Negeri, taking just 17 to Kuching without training at the matchday pitch.

Worse, his entire first-choice defence was wiped out when Safuwan failed to pass a late fitness test.

But each of the replacements turned in virtuoso performances to show that the LionsXII have both depth and spirit to count themselves as genuine contenders for the Malaysian Super League title.

Not even two interruptions totalling 14 minutes, due to failed floodlights and firecrackers on the pitch, could unnerve the lion-hearted visitors.

Despite being repeatedly targeted by laser pointers, goalkeeper Hyrulnizam kept out an injury-time free-kick, Sevki Sha'ban and Hariss Harun forged a