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READY FOR THE CHALLENGE: Team members and coaches of the Special Olympics posing for a group photo at the end of the centralised training camp at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The function was officiated by UNIMAS vice chancellor, Professor Datuk Dr Khairuddin Ab Hamid who praised their true grit and determination. — Photo by Muhd Rais Sanusi

Heaps of praise for state Special Olympics athletes

KUCHING: Sarawak athletes who will be representing Malaysia in next year's Special Olympics winter games have shown to others that there is no shortage of sports champions here.

Two of the selected athletes have also shown that age and disabilities are no barriers to those who want to excel in sports.

Saie Goeng, at the age of 43 is the oldest athlete from the Malaysian contingent competing in the floor hockey competition and he will be joined by fellow teammate, Jonti Moten aged 41. Both are from Bau and both will play the important role as defenders for their 13-member team when they take on opponents from different countries including those from Europe and Latin America.

"These athletes have shown to us true grit and that despite their disabilities they are still able to represent our country in Special Olympics and for that they had make us very proud," commented Professor Datuk Khairuddin Ab Hamid, vice chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) on the athletes.

Khairuddin was present to witness a floor hockey demonstration game performed by the athletes on the final day of their centralised training camp held at UNIMAS east campus hall yesterday.

He had heaps of praises for the determined athletes who had done Sarawak proud for being selected to represent the country in Special Olympics which is the world's largest sports organisation for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

Next year's event will be held at Pyeongchang, South Korea from Jan 29 to Feb 5.

Malaysia's challenge in next year's Special Olympics winter games floor hockey event will be spearheaded by 13 athletes from Sarawak who came from Kuching, Bau and Miri. The majority of the athletes are also students from special education classes (PPKI) of SMK Demak Baru in Jalan Diplomatik here.

Malaysian team won silver in floor hockey competitions of the 2009 Special Olympics winter games held in Idaho, USA after narrowly losing to Cuba in the grand finals.

Meanwhile, Special Olympics Club of Kuching president Datin Dayang Marini Abang Zain disclosed the athletes will be leaving for South Korea a week before the games start in order to acclimatise with the weather conditions there.

She said the cold weather will be a challenge for the national team members because this is their first time competing in cold conditions. Siew Yong Hock from SMB St Joseph Miri is the only athlete who competed in the 2009 Special Olympics.

"We are grateful for UNIMAS to play host for the team's centralised training camp because they (athletes) do not have a proper venue to training or to train regularly," she lamented on the lack of training facilities for the team.

Marini also expressed appreciation to the university's students' welfare unit (HEP) which has provided 46 volunteers to assist the coaches throughout the camp period.

According to her, the athletes are really excited with the prospect of spearheading Malaysia's challenge in the upcoming games even though many of them have yet to compete internationally.

"We have a series of programme and activities to be undertaken but coincidentally the trip to the winter games will be the first for us at Special Olympics Club of Kuching," she said.

Plans are in the pipeline for a carnival-like launching ceremony of Special Olympics Club of Kuching where members of the public are invited to join the merry making and for them to consider joining the club as members or volunteers.

Source : Borneo Post Online