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FOOTBALL

AKHYAR HAPPY AT JDT

Malaysia's 'best striker' unfazed by limited playing time

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MALAYSIA'S "best striker" Akhyar Rashid hasn't hit the headlines for his exploits since he left Kedah at the end of last season and joined Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT).

The 19-year-old may have bagged the Best Striker title at the National Football Awards last November but that is no guarantee he will find much playing time at Super League champions JDT.

Akhyar, who helped Malaysia reach the final of last year's AFF

Cup, has hardly figured in all of JDT's five matches so far.

He has become a "bench player" for JDT, playing only a total of 34 minutes in five matches so far for the former AFC Cup champions as a substitute.

Akhyar took to the field in stoppage time against Perak (1-0) and Terengganu (2-2), and replaced Gonzalo Cabrera in the 90th minute in Friday's 4-2 victory over Selangor.

The national player managed to feature for 16 minutes in the 4-1 win over Kuala Lumpur and for 13 minutes in the 2-1 victory over Melaka, both as a second half substitute.

However, Akhyar isn't complaining about his limited playing time with JDT.

"I have learned a lot since I joined JDT, mainly on strategies and training techniques. I am honoured to learn from my coaches, Benjamin Mora and Luciano Figueroa," he said yesterday.

"It's very different at JDT. The training drills are different and I believe I have improved in many aspects. Furthermore, I now have a lot of friends supporting me. The coaches are always making sure that I master new tactical drills in training.

"My teammates have been fan-

tastic. They treat me well and they are always supporting me in training. I believe I can achieve my goal to be one of the best players in the country at JDT."

For now, star-studded JDT are not in a hurry to make full use of Akhyar's expertise. The Southern Tigers have roared to the top of the Super League after their latest success, an impressive away win over Selangor.

Dubbed as the Malaysian Neymar, Akhyar signed a four-year contract (with a RM12 million release clause) with JDT in December. It is reported that he earns around RM40,000 a month.

But Akhyar left Kedah in a controversial manner as he still had one year left on his contract. Due to technical reasons, he became a free agent and joined JDT.

"Everything is great at JDT. Initially, Kedah fans were criticising me for moving to JDT, but things are getting better now," he said.

"I am getting good support