



THE SUPER LEAGUE CAST



JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM (JDT)

Last season's finish: Super League champions
Coach: Benjamin Mora
Foreign players: Hariss Harun (Sin), Gonzalo Cabrera (Arg), Leandro Velasquez (Arg), Bergson Da Silva (Bra) and Mauricio Santo (Bra)
Player to watch: Daniel Amier Norhisham
Home: Sultan Ibrahim Stadium



Benjamin Mora

HANDS down, the favourites for the title again. An eighth straight title can be expected as JDT have added even more quality to their side. They have maintained their core and snapped up exciting players like Daniel Amier Norhisham and Mohamadou Sumareh. Benjamin Mora has the luxury to rotate his team, and it will be interesting to see the number of games each player gets. If the highly-rated Daniel Amier becomes a regular, he will be a real asset for the Southern Tigers.



KEDAH

Last season's finish: Second
Coach: Aidil Sharin
Foreign players: Kpah Sherman (Lbr), Tchetché Kipre (Civ), Renan Alves (Bra), Rabih Ataya (Leb) and M. Anumanthan Kumar (Sin)
Player to watch: Rabih Ataya
Home: Darulaman Stadium



Rabih Ataya

KEDAH under Aidil Sharin have looked solid over the years. Even though they have had to deal with off-field issues, the players have been professionals on the pitch. This season, they have a tight schedule as they will also feature in the AFC Cup. Aidil has drafted some boys from the President Cup team to energise the squad. The signing of Rabih Ataya is a masterstroke as the Lebanese international will bring creativity to the side. Players like Kpah Sherman and Tchetché Kipre will surely benefit from it and if the three can click, defences will have a tough time containing them.



TERENGGANU

Last season's finish: Third
Coach: Nafuzi Zain
Foreign players: Christopher Herd (Aus), Carli De Murga (Phi), David Da Silva (Bra), Petrus Shitembi (Nam) and Makan Konate (Mal)
Player to watch: Nik Akif Syahiran
Home: Sultan Mizan Stadium



Nafuzi Zain

TERENGGANU will have one of the youngest squads in the league, and it will be exciting to see how Nafuzi Zain guides his youthful bunch. In terms of foreign players, they have gone for experience as they aim to impress in the Super League and also AFC Cup. The trio of Makan Konate, Petrus Shitembi and David Da Silva will catch the eye, but the most exciting acquisition is Nik Akif Syahiran. Making his Super League debut, the 21-year-old former Kelantan player has the qualities to impress.



PERAK

Last season's finish: Fourth
Coach: Chong Yee Fatt
Foreign players: Shakir Hamzah (Sin), Careca (Bra) and Leandro Dos Santos (Bra)
Player to watch: Shahrul Saad
Home: Perak Stadium



Shahrul Saad

PERAK are not having the best of preparations, as they have only played one friendly and lost the services of Australian coach Mehmet Durakovic. Chong Yee Fatt comes in with the heavy task of motivating his players but if he can win the trust of the players fast, he can have a good season. For that to happen, he must first be able to inspire captain Shahrul Saad to lead the fight in every game. Together with Shakir Hamzah at the back, Shahrul can steady the ship and help the Seladang challenge the top teams.



SELANGOR

Last season's finish: Fifth
Coach: Karsten Neitzel
Foreign players: Safuwani Baharuddin (Sin), Ifedayo Olusegun (Bah), Michael Konrad (Ger), Oliver Buff (Swi) and Tim Heubach (Ger)
Player to watch: Shahrel Fikri Md Fauzi
Home: Petaling Jaya Stadium



Shahrel Fikri

THE players are embracing the ways set by Karsten Neitzel during training, and once they get into the groove, they will surely be an entertaining team to watch. While Neitzel have foreign quality in Tim Heubach, Michael Konrad and Oliver Buff, the local signings like Shahrel Fikri Md Fauzi, Nik Shareef Haseefy and R. Dinesh can also impress. Shahrel, also known as Eky, is out to continue his goalscoring exploits of last season. If he hits it off with Super League top scorer Ifedayo Olusegun, the Red Giants will be a big threat.



UiTM

Last season's finish: Sixth
Coach: Frank Bernhardt
Foreign players: Nana Poku (Gha), Victor Nirenbold (Fra), Abou Bakr Al-Mel (Leb), Dominik Picak (Cro) and Adam Reed (Phi)
Player to watch: Nana Poku
Home: UiTM Stadium



Nana Poku

LOSING the quartet of Ousmane Fane, Gustavo Almeida, Rabih Ataya and Mark Hartmann is a blow, but UiTM seem to have found capable replacements. Frank Bernhardt's no-nonsense approach and the leadership of Frenchman Victor Nirenbold on the field can lift the side to some surprising results. The signing of Ghanaian striker Nana Poku will be an asset after his exploits in Egypt and Qatar. Players like Abou Bakr Al-Mel, Dirga Surdi and Khairul Izuan Rosli can provide ammunition for the hitman.



PETALING JAYA CITY

Last season's finish: Seventh
Coach: P. Maniam
Foreign players: None
Player to watch: K. Gurusamy
Home: UiTM Stadium



K. Gurusamy

PETALING Jaya City believe they can defy the odds with an all-local cast. Coach P. Maniam, known for his work in developing youth players, is optimistic that a blend of youth and experience will help them to a creditable finish. Leading their quest will 32-year-old captain K. Gurusamy, who is still considered one of the best midfielders in the country. Maniam will need him to be at his best if the team are to perform well. Youngsters like R. Kogileswaran, Syahmi Zamri and Sunil Chandran can also be relied on to provide energy and creativity.



PAHANG

Last season's finish: Eighth
Coach: Thomas Dooley
Foreign players: Lee Tuck (Eng), Mamadou Wague (Leb), Herold Goulon (Fra), Pedro Henrique (Tls) and Yevhen Bokhashvili (Ukr)
Player to watch: Nor Azam Azih
Home: Darul Makmur Stadium



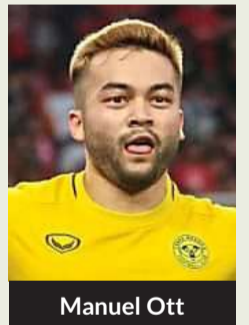
Thomas Dooley

AMERICAN coach Thomas Dooley is capable of elevating Pahang with his tactics. With foreigners like Lee Tuck, Yevhen Bokhashvili, Herold Goulon, Mamadou Wague, and Pedro Henrique, the Elephants can make big strides. Keeping Nor Azam Azih is a good move, as he is highly sought after by many clubs. If Dooley allows him to be the focal point in midfield, he can do wonders. Pahang also boast a quality local signing in Abdul Malik Mat Ariff, a top winger with a knack for scoring goals.



MELAKA

Last season's finish: Ninth
Coach: Zainal Abidin Hassan
Foreign players: Manuel Ott (Phi), Jang Suk-won (Kor), Alex Goncalves (Bra), Stefan Nikolic (Mne) and Sony Norde (Hai)
Player to watch: Manuel Ott
Home: Hang Jebat Stadium



Manuel Ott

THIS will be Zainal Abidin Hassan's third season with the team and if he fails, he may lose his job. He has added experience to the Mousedeer, in the form of centreback Khairul Helmi Johari and winger Wan Zaharulnizam Wan Zakaria. As for the foreigners, each of them can bring a different dimension. Manny Ott can dictate the tempo, Jang Suk Won can toughen up the defence, Sony Norde offers pace and creativity on the flanks, while Alex Goncalves and Stefan Nikolic can fire home the bullets.



SABAH

Last season's finish: 10th
Coach: Kurniawan Dwi Yulianto
Foreign players: Park Tae-su (Kor), Levy Madinda (Gab), Saddil Ramdani (Ina), Sam Johnson (Lbr) and Risto Milevski (Mne)
Player to watch: Rawilson Batuil
Home: Likas Stadium



Rawilson Batuil

SABAH have kept their key local players such as captain and centreback Rawilson Batuil, goalkeeper Rozaimie Rohim and midfielder Azzizan Nordin. But Kurniawan Dwi Yulianto can't just rely on them, and he has snapped up some quality imports like winger Saddil Ramdani and midfielder Levy Madinda, who has won more than 50 caps with Gabon. Rawilson will surely learn a lot from defender Risto Milevski, who has played on the Europa League stage. Sam Johnson is Liberia's captain, and will be trusted to deliver the goals.



PENANG

Last season's finish: Premier League champions
Coach: Thomas Trucha
Foreign players: Rafael Vitor (Bra), Casagrande (Bra), Endrick Santos (Bra), Ryuji Utomo (Ina) and Sheriddin Boboev (Taj)
Player to watch: Sheriddin Boboev
Home: City Stadium, Georgetown



Thomas Trucha

THEY were imperious in the Premier League, but can they impress in the Super League? Penang look confident under new coach Thomas Trucha, already popular for being a Juergen Klopp lookalike. The Panthers have kept their key players like Casagrande, Endrick Santos, Al-Hafiz Harun, Rafael Vitor and Samuel Somerville and bolstered the squad with new names like Jafri Firdaus Chew, Zafuan Azeman, Ryuji Utomo and Sheriddin Boboev. If the highly-rated Boboev can conjure up a good partnership with Casagrande, Penang will be a clear and present danger.



KUALA LUMPUR

Last season's finish: Third in the Premier League
Coach: Bojan Hodak
Foreign players: Dominique Da Sylva (Mrt), Romel Morales (Col), Paulo Josue (Bra), Kevin Ray Mendoza (Phi) and Giancarlo Gallifuoco (Aus)
Player to watch: Paulo Josue
Home: Cheras Football Stadium



Paulo Josue

HIRING Bojan Hodak as coach is a smart move and Kuala Lumpur have made some worthy signings too like Safee Sali, Irfan Zakaria and Hadin Azman. Hodak is someone who relies on substantial team depth to get wins and in this team, he has at least two good players for every position. Right now, it's the chemistry they have to work on, and if they can get that going in the first few games, they can be a top team. Captain Paulo Josue is a gifted playmaker, and the attackers will benefit from his metronomic passes. KL will survive, but it will be interesting to see where they finish.