Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

The magical mystery tour that became the Loy Yang B Gippsland Power’s 2010 TAC Cup season came to an abrupt end when they went down to the Calder Cannons in last Sunday’s Grand Final at Etihad Stadium. The epic journey had begun after four defeats in a row and had steadily developed an irresistible momentum as they charged towards the finals series. Once the cut throat finals series began, the Power had created havoc and mayhem amongst highly thought of opposition sides to deservedly earn a shot at the ultimate glory.

It looked good for the boys from the opening bounce when Hayden Hector cleared the ball to find Dean McDonald and D-Mac linked up with Shaun Marusic for the goal. Ominously the Cannons replied immediately to serve notice that it was game on and they then scored the next two to take a narrow but convincing lead. Poor options and skill execution were clinically converted but a freakish goal by Marusic after some more positive ball use saw the Power claw their way back into the contest.

However, as was to be the Pattern of the day the Cannons were able to score two late goals to go into the first change nineteen points up and with the momentum going their way. Damian Carroll had his job cut out to get the boys refocussed on the game plan that had served them so well as they appeared a little overwhelmed by the Cannons system and clinical use of the ball on the rebound.

Shaun’s hold on goal o the day status didn’t last long as Clay Smith snapped brilliantly to give the boys some hope of remaining competitive. Instead of being inspired the Power persisted with the wrong options and the Cannons pounced yet again. A goal by Tim Northe after a free kick and fifty metre penalty gave the boys hope and then Lachie Todd charged out of defence with strength and confidence to find Jed Lamb who converted his opportunity. The Power were right back in the game and looking set for their trademark charge.

Unfortunately from here on in for the rest of the term, it was all Calder as they capitalised on indecision and the wrong option to score four unanswered goals to go to the long break twenty seven points up. They appeared to have the answer for anything that the Power could throw at them and the normally confident Power were struggling to get any cohesion into their play. In previous finals the Power had rallied in the second half and had been too strong and resolute for their opponents but the Cannons were made of sterner stuff.

This was confirmed early in the third quarter when the Cannons scored two really easy goals to serve notice that something really special was needed to wrest their grip on the premiership cup. It took some resolute and clever pressure by Anthony Tipungwuti to allow McDonald in for a critical goal for the Power and then Jed Lamb swooped on the ball on the defensive side of the wing and simply took off. He dodged opponents and ran to just outside fifty near the boundary line to score the goal of the finals series.

Once again the Cannons seized the initiative and completely shut the Power out of the game. They slammed on the next five goals with a combination of skill and poise that left the usually confident Power totally outclassed. Every mistake was clinically capitalised on and the highly efficient Power defence, ranked second in the competition, were made to look very ordinary. By the end of the term the Cannons led by ten goals and the Power were unable to answer the challenge that they had thrown at them.

The last term could have been a disaster for the Power but to their enormous credit they dug deep to initially stem the seeming endless flow of simple Calder goals and then began to create scoring opportunities for themselves. Admittedly the sting had gone right out of the game but the boys never gave up and, but for inaccuracy, could have scored several goals. Their only major for the term came from good ball use by Lamb and McDonald who enabled Hayden Hector to snap truly. The final margin was fifty eight points and the Cannons were deserved and comprehensive winners over a gallant Power unit.

Final scores Calder Cannons 17 goals 14 behinds 107 points defeated Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 8 goals 10 behinds 58 points. Goal kickers Jed Lamb and Shaun Marusic 2, Tim Northe, Dean McDonald, Clay Smith and Hayden Hector 1.

Grand Finals provide the biggest stage for players to make an impression and Michael Ross responded to this challenge magnificently. With the back line under constant siege all day, he stood resolute to provide solid defence, but, more importantly won the ball himself and then worked hard to use it with some purpose and precision. He has battled niggling injuries all season but has been one of the key contributors to the Power’s wonderful year.

Another to put his hand up on the most difficult day of the year was Tim Northe who, once again, won a stack of important possessions and had the skill and vision to ensure that they were used effectively despite being under close scrutiny. He too was playing under duress and manfully ignored the pain to give his side a consistent and efficient avenue into attack.

After coming back from a fractured shoulder Lachie Todd had taken time to get back to his best form but chose the perfect time to do so. He nullified difficult opponents but, crucially, backed himself to attack the ball and then run and carry it to set up scoring opportunities. But for bad luck he could have kicked a couple of goals but it wasn’t from lack of trying.

Clay Smith has a unique array of skills and attributes and they were all on display when it mattered most. His attack on the ball is typically relentless and often scary but he has exquisite skills as well. Hs ability to win the hard ball in tight situations and then create time and space to use it well was amazing. He showed that he has a huge roll to play as a midfielder in 2011.

Shaun Marusic took on the TAC Cup’s poster boy defender and made him look ordinary in the toughest position on the ground. He provided a consistent avenue into attack for his side by presenting hard and continually beating his highly rated opponent in one on one battles. His work rate was excellent and he could hold his head high at the end of the game.

As he has all season, Jordan Staley took on a huge challenge by tackling taller opponents in the ruck, but once again did a magnificent job. His aerial work was at his usual high level but it was when the ball was in dispute that he excelled. His agility and willingness to play like a ruck rover meant that he was able to make many important contributions in the contests around the ground.

The overwhelming feeling after the game, besides the obvious disappointment at not going all the way, was a strong sense of pride. Damian Carroll and Peter Francis spoke to the players about their magnificent effort to turn their season around and the sort of hard work, sacrifices and discipline that that had shown make it happen. It will take some time for the boys to fully appreciate what they have achieved but, for the staff, parents, family and supporters it was obvious that they were rapt with what the boys had done during the 2010 season.

For the Power it is a time to celebrate a fine season but also to look eagerly to the future for what is possibly to come. Nine of the grand final side can play again in 2011 and there are several others who missed out on this game but have solid experience in the TAC Cup already. They form the nucleus of a strong and highly competitive unit already. What gives even further optimism for the club is the fact that the incoming bottom age players are arguably the best that Power has ever had and that many of them can make a significant and instantaneous impact on the team’s performance next season.

Just to underscore how the club is always focussing on the future while still dealing with the present, the club is holding two induction programs for its elite under fifteen and sixteen players starting on the day after the grand final. The boys will be exposed to all aspects of what it takes to make the step up to the TAC Cup as well as the AFL and will be working with staff from AFL clubs who will be dealing with all the issues that are involved on and off the field.

It’s this attention to detail that has enabled the club to figure in finals consistently at TAC Cup level and now sees the chance for up to eleven Power players in the AFL Grand Final on Saturday. Peter Francis and his team headed by Damian, Rob Reid and Laurie Plunkett have created structures, programs and set of facilities that are unique at this level and allow all the boys in the system to have the best opportunity to stake their claim for a spot on the list and, ultimately, a place in the AFL.