Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

There was far more than four premiership points on the line for Loy Yang B Gippsland Power when they took on the Northern Knights last weekend at a windy Morwell oval. After a dismal effort against the Western Jets, the Power had been challenged to restore their credibility as a serious contender for the 2011 TAC Cup flag. To achieve this they had to get back to the sort of honest and committed football that had been their trademark for much of the season so far.

Going into the game the Power side had been impacted on by the continued absence of Clay Smith, Sam Docherty, Josh Tynan and Anthony Tipungwuti due to state duties but had been further compromised by injuries to Matt Northe and Damien Hector. Adding to the pressure on the boys was the fact that Shannon Lange was unable to play due to soreness on match day and this meant that the side played with twenty one players all day. On a positive note, Daniel Jackson returned from injury and Ben Edwards was given a chance to step up to make a claim for a place in the team.

Conditions were against fancy football with a strong and blustery wind blowing to the northern end of the ground and the Knights had this advantage in the opening quarter. It was obvious that the Power had come to play as they applied trademark pressure to contests all over the ground. Jack Johnstone and Luke Thompson worked hard to find Daniel Jackson for the first of the game but some poor disposal in defence allowed the Knights to answer it far too easily.

Drew McGrath and James Huts used vision and skill to allow Nick Graham in for an important goal before Graham and Tom Fusinato did the same and Ben Edwards finished it off. Disappointingly, the Knights goaled after a soft free kick to stay within five points by the first change but it could have been much more if the Power had been more positive with their use of the ball in defence. Their endeavour was excellent as they applied hard pressure in and around the a packs, but they consistently let themselves down by taking short options out of defence and then creating unnecessary turnovers with poor skills.

Despite having the wind at their backs the Power persisted with the short stuff from the backline but the Knights couldn’t capitalise due to the pressure that they were under. Johnstone, Simon Deery and Graham used the ball with purpose and McGrath was able to snap a clever goal. As if inspired, Thompson worked hard to find Fusinato and he used vision and skill to set up Deery for a simple major. Some more overuse of the ball by the Power led to another turnover and the Knights pounced to keep themselves well within touch.

Danny Butcher upped his impressive work load to find Chris Williams who then found captain courageous Shaun Wyatt for a long goal. Big blokes Shaun Marusic and Deery then showed great skill and agility for another and by the long break the Power led by twenty three points. Coach Adam Dowie was pleased with the endeavour and work ethic of the side and paid particular notice of the effort of those given vital “run-with” role against the Knights more dangerous players. He quietly refocused the boys on the key elements of the day’s game plan.

It seemed to fall on deaf ears early in the third quarter as the boys were still intent on overusing the ball short. The Knights happily accepted the gaol that came from the inevitable turnover and the pressure was on the boys to show the integrity that their coach trusted that they were capable of. Some good work by McGrath and Fusinato resulted in Edwards marking well in front of goal before Tom Muir and Edwards skilfully set up Graham for his second.

Once again the Knights hit back after another unnecessary turnover but some more positive ball use by McGrath, Wyatt and Edwards gave Tim Membrey the chance to extend the Power lead to twenty six points at the final change. The boys had been more purposeful during the term and had kept up their relentless pressure on the Knights all over the ground. Their tackling was impressive and finally they were using the ball better by taking longer options.

The Knights scored the first goal of the last term after a “training run” transition from the opening bounce. It was again time for the boys to respond and they did so in style as they dominated the rest of the quarter. After ten minutes of hard work by both sides the Power broke the drought with a fine running goal to Butcher after being set up by Edwards. Some more impressive pressure by Membrey and Fusinato allowed Edwards to kick his third and then Thompson skilfully hit Membrey for his second. The final major of the game came after Wyatt went long to allow Membrey to set up Graham for a fine team goal.

Final scores, Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 14 goals 11 behinds 95 points defeated Northern Knights 6 goals 13 behinds 49 points. Goal kickers Ben Edwards and Nick Graham 3, Simon Deery and Tim Membrey 2, Danny Butcher, Daniel Jackson, Drew McGrath and Shaun Wyatt 1. Versatile big man Shaun Marusic belied his “fossil” status to once again dominate the aerial duels as well as having the confidence, agility and pace to take the game on and run to set up play as well as linking up with others. He totally blanketed his opponents as well as being a key play maker for the team.

Defender Hayden Hector had a critical role in running with a dangerous Knights forward. He not only kept him to a minimal impact but managed to amass over thirty possessions and take twelve marks himself. To cap his game off, he worked hard to use the ball with purpose by hand or foot. Tom Fusinato has become an important member of the Power midfield unit with his strength in the packs and ability to win and use the ball with vision to set up others. Once again he was also confident enough to be a link player in space and his disposal skills were exceptional here as well.

Shaun Wyatt is a renowned ball magnet and he again amassed a stunning total of possessions as he acted as the side’s quarter-back running off the backline. He upped the ante as he played a vital role in getting the team into a more positive mind set in the second half. Key forward Simon Deery was starved of opportunities early in the game but really thrived when given the chance to have a run on the ball. He not only won his share of hit-outs but was also dominant in the marking duels where he pulled down thirteen marks around the ground.

Lively wingman Josh Scott is another youngster who has stepped up in recent weeks and now plays a major role in the midfield. He has the ability to take the high marks as well win the ball in the heavy packs. He capped his game off with several strong tackles at critical times. Drew McGrath also had a vital run with role and he too did a great job in keeping him out of the game. Like his a Traralgon team mate Hayden Hector, he had the confidence to win plenty of his own possessions as well as apply a dozen crunching tackles in the thick of the action.

Daniel Jackson had been in good form prior to injury and quickly got back into the sort of form that made him a valuable member of the midfield unit. He used his pace to run and carry the ball as well as winning plenty of hard balls in the packs around the ground. Ben Edwards made the most of his recall to the team as a small forward. He combined strong marking with his pace to be a prime target for team mates as well as doing his share of the work in the packs with his fierce tackling and ability to get the ball moving for the team.

The Power now goes to Melbourne to take on the Bendigo Pioneers at Box Hill. This will provide the coaching team with the perfect challenge for the boys as they attempt to get rid of the sorts of indecision and lack of consistency that have cost them two losses recently. The Pioneers have only won one game but it was against the Calder Cannons and they obviously are capable of capitalising on any slackness of effort by opponents. Helping to keep the side back on track, Clay Smith, Sam Docherty, Josh Tynan and Anthony Tipungwuti should be back and Shannon Lange might be able to play after missing due to injury.