GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Loy Yang B Gippsland Power coach Nick Stevens has had a lot of very positive experiences in his time with the club as well as the bitter disappointment that only a narrow loss in a grand final can bring. In last week’s game, against the 2012 grand final rivals the Oakleigh Chargers, he had those extremes in feelings as the Power let an eminently winnable game slip after some simple skill and decision making errors gifted the game to the Chargers.

He has been excited by the multi-faceted role that is his job in 2013. He has four talented over-age boys to take an even higher level and about a dozen top-agers who are ready to improve on their impressive existing standards. As well as this relatively easy set of tasks, he has the much harder role to bring a whole lot of talented rookies who are on the steepest learning curves of all the boys under his care.

On a positive note he had to be very pleased with many aspects of the boy’s performance as they worked so hard to apply the key elements of his game plan and meet the individual physical and mental challenges that he has thrown down to them. Vital areas such as contested possessions, tackling and applying consistent and relentless pressure were to the fore for much of the match.

On the other hand, some inexperience, lapses in concentration and ability to stick to the game plan allowed the Chargers to initially stay in the game and then snatch it from the Power late in the match. Overall it was a disappointing loss, but, and it’s a big but, they really showed that they are making great progress on their path towards becoming an impressive and highly competitive team in the 2013 TAC Cup season.

The Power went into the game with only one change to the team from their win against the Dandenong Stingrays with Fraser Brouns replacing Brad Olsson. The Chargers took the early initiative with the opening goal of the match and then the Power began to man up better and stop the Chargers finding easy ways to set up their game structure. Liam Nash and Nate Paredes combined with skill to allow Josh Scott to reply for the Power.

Some brilliant play by Bohdi Walker gave Scott another and then some excellent pressure resulted in Nathan Cunico finding Scott for his third impressive major for the term. The boys were applying intense pressure on the Chargers and they were making basic errors as a result of the Power’s disciplined use of physical challenges. Such intense play allowed Alex Saunders to snap a stunning goal and the Chargers were well and truly on the back foot. More of this terrific application of the side’s game plan saw Rohan Hiderbrand finish it off with a good team goal.

The Chargers finally got their game going in the final seconds of the term to reduce the Power’s lead to nineteen points at the first change. Statistically it had been a fine effort by the boys as they had double the number of forward fifty entries and had applied nearly thirty crunching tackles. However the Chargers highlighted the need to stay focussed on what was needed to stop them from breaking away from the hold that they had worked so hard to apply.

The need to keep up the intensity became obvious early in the quarter and the Chargers had three goals on the board as the Power were punished for their inability or unwillingness to do the hard things after being so good for nearly all of the first term. To their credit, the Power got back on track and Aaron Heppell found Saunders for his second major. Some more hard and clever work resulted in Ed Morris using some deft footwork to get the Power’s control back.

Just when it was looking like they were making it easier on themselves a poor decision gave the Chargers a “gift goal” late in the quarter to reduce the Power’s lead to five points. In the opening minutes of the third quarter the Chargers again took advantage of some Power errors and it took some scrambly and hard-nosed play by Frazar Brouns to allow Scott to kick his fourth for the game.

Lachie Channing took the initiative with some excellent pressure to give the Power a healthier break and things were looking better. Unfortunately his example wasn’t followed and the Chargers hit back with another soft goal. Excellent team work by Nash, Heppell and Scott set up Tom Muir to get a vital goal but the Chargers hit back again. Late in the term some clever ruckwork by Jack Leslie gave Paul Pattison another for the Power and they went to the final change eleven points up.

Once again the Chargers scored the first goal of the quarter to show the Power that they were in for a real contest and then they really upped the ante with another after some more inability to apply the right sort of defensive pressure. Some better team work saw Hildebrand find Alex Carr for a critical Power goal before Nash and Scott combined for another major. As per the pattern of much of the match, the Chargers scored another on ten minutes and then capitalised on another defensive “clanger” to put themselves back in the game.

Bohdi Walker went quick, long and direct to find Nathan Dennison for what appeared to be the winning goal but the Chargers hit back hard and scored a vital goal late in the match. Final scores, Oakleigh Chargers 14 goals 12 beninds 96 points defeated Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 14 goals 7 behinds 91 points. Goal kickers, Josh Scott 5, Alex Saunders 2, Lachie Channing, Tom Muir, Rohan Hildebrand, Nathan Dennison, Paul Pattison, Alex Carr and Ed Morris.

On a day when the team needed to convert hard-won opportunities Josh Scott worked tirelessly to not only kick goals but also provide support for his team mates by hitting packs hard and putting pressure on the defenders with his willingness to tackle hard. He is leading by stellar example so far this season. As per usual Nate Paredes led the way with his unique ability to win the ball in the toughest situation and then work even harder to use his possessions with skill and vision. He had ten crunching tackles and over twenty hard won touches in a fine team game.

Rohan Hildebrand had a few games in 2012 and faced a real challenge to go to another level under Nick’s encouraging coaching. He has responded well and showed why Nick’s faith in him was well placed, with his ability to put the team first and do the sort of disciplined things to follow the side’s game plan. Christian Buykx-Smith has made a great start to his TAC Cup career and once again took on and beat a difficult forward. He not only kept a dangerous opponent out of the game but also had the confidence and skill to win many possessions and use them intelligently.

Paul Pattison is another top-ager who has taken his game to another level in response to Nick’s challenges. He has greatly enhanced his defensive skills as well as reinforced his natural talents. He is now a strong and important player in defence and when asked to go on the ball for the side. On ball hard-nut, Lachie Channing was a vital member of the on ball team last year but has really taken things to another level this year. His pace, strength in tight situations and unselfishness were in full force in this game.

The Power now has its busiest week for the year as it has its under-15 and under-16 development groups involved in their intra-state carnivals as well as their game against the Bendigo Pioneers. The under-15’s will be in Melbourne to play three games in three days this week while the under-16’s will go to Bendigo for their matches next weekend.

Both of these carnivals are vital to the Power’s development as many players use these experiences to prepare themselves for the intensity of the TAC Cup competition. The training programs for both groups are scaled down versions of the courses undertaken by the under-18’s and are so effective that recently drafted players like Nick Graham, Tim Membrey and Will Hams have all been part of these teams in recent seasons.

Bendigo will be keen to build on an early win over the Rebels in round one of the season but Nick will ensure that the Power learns from the good and bad elements of the Chargers game and continue on their steep learning curve. Christian Buykx-Smith will miss due to injury and Ben Kearns will play with Casey in the VFL again but it’s likely that the Power will be close to full strength for their next challenge.