GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Loy Yang B Gippsland Power had an ideal opportunity to press their claim to be a serious contender for the 2013 TAC Cup premiership when they took on top side, the Geelong Falcons, at Box Hill. After making a stunning start in the first term where they followed Nick Steven’s well thought out game plan, the Power then went into limbo for the next three quarters and managed to kick only two goals in the final three terms compared to the Falcons eight majors in the same time.

This obvious difference belies the true nature of the Power’s loss as they had innumerable chances throughout this time to take the game by the throat and soundly defeat the Falcons. The problem was what’s been their “Achilles heel” in recent games, they wasted much of their hard work all over the ground by being terribly ineffective with most of their forward fifty entries. They had seventeen more opportunities than the Falcons for the match but, it was even worse, if that’s possible, as they scored only two goals from their thirty-eight forward fifty entries in the last three terms whereas the Falcons scored eight goals from their twenty three entries during the same time period.

The Power went into the match with some positives such as the return of star ruckman Jack Leslie and young winger Lukas Webb while Traralgon youngster Connor Ambler made his debut despite being an under sixteen player. However, on the negative side of the ledger, they were without Jordie Cunico, Mitch Mustoe and Alex Saunders due to injury and captain, Josh Cashman, was a late withdrawal which allowed Jack Hammond to come back into the team.

Going into the match, Nick had stressed the need for the boys to play disciplined team football with one-on-one responsibility being the key element of their ability to limit the Falcons strengths. It was the Power who took the early initiative when Jack Leslie intercepted the ball to kick a fine goal. It was tight football all over the field and the Falcons hit back after capitalising on a Power turnover. An Alex Carr “long bomb” was cleverly marked and converted by Declan Keilty but another Power mistake allowed the Falcons to hit back far too easily.

With the pressure on, Connor Ambler tackled fiercely and goaled with his first kick from the resultant free kick and then Lukas Webb did the same after winning another free and then getting a fifty metre penalty after some really intelligent work by Tom Muir. By the end of the quarter the Power led by eleven points after doing what Nick had asked and shutting down the Falcon’s ability to get their dangerous game plan going.

The second quarter opened with both sides contesting ferociously all over the ground and scoring was almost impossible. A poor defensive decision by the Power allowed the Falcons to break the deadlock and they then capitalised on another skill error to seize the initiative. It took a typically clever interception by Liam Nash to set up Carr to give the Power a one point lead by the end of the term. Late in the quarter the Power got back on track to stem the Falcons ability to get the ball moving and minimize the unnecessary turnovers that had been so costly earlier in the term.

In the all-important third quarter, the Falcons took the early initiative with a goal after both sides had worked hard to stop each other scoring. Things got worse for the Power when another poor defensive decision “gifted” the Falcons with another soft goal. For much of the rest of the quarter the Power went into attack but either missed gettable majors or turned the ball over with poor use of the ball when it mattered most. Some great forward pressure by Keilty gave Wes Russell a major to allow the Power to be level with the Falcons going into the last term.

On paper, this was a reasonable effort by the Power but, closer analysis, showed that they had really stuffed up a deserved winning chance by kicking only one goal from seventeen forward fifty entries. This is a deplorable statistic at any level of football but, in such a key game against the top side, it was suicidal for the Power. The only possible explanation for the poor forward play was the fact that gun forward, Josh Scott, was off with an injury but Nick would never use this to excuse some terrible ball use.

The fact that the Falcons were let off by the Power’s wastefulness of hard-won opportunities was highlighted when the kicked the first goal after some ill-disciplined manning up on the rebound. For the first time in the game the Falcons were able to get their running game going and they kicked three more unanswered goals. In stark contrast, the Power again squandered their more numerous chances to get back into the game. Again, the statistics said it all, with the Falcons scoring four goals from their six entries up forward and the Power were goal-less from eleven such oportuinities.

Final scores; Geelong Falcons 10 goals 9 behinds 69 points defeated Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 6 goals 9 behinds 45 points. Goal kickers; Wes Russell, Lukas Webb, Jack Leslie, Declan Keilty, Alex Carr and Connor Ambler 1. The Falcons have many highly rated midfielders and Nick assigned some Power players with run-with roles. Rohan Hildebrand had such a challenge and not only subdued the influence of his dangerous opponents but also had the willingness and skill to work hard to win vital contested possessions and use them to the team’s benefit.

In pressure games Liam Nash has a well-deserved reputation to being one of the competition’s best exponents of man on man football. He again did it all with his ability to apply consistent and intense pressure on his opponent as well as the skill and application to win many critical possessions himself. Another Power “hard-nut” Aaron Heppell is also revered for such unique skills and he too stopped dangerous opponents with his disciplined play based on the team’s needs. He also was able to win the contested ball himself and maintained his effectiveness by using it intelligently.

Young defender, Christian Bukyx-Smith is getting back to full fitness after injury and showed his immense value to the side by taking on and totally nullifying the Falcons best key forwards. His totally team-oriented play saw him continually spoil marking opportunities and use his slim frame to stunning effect. His fellow key defender, Tom Muir did the same thing again when he too kept good forwards out of the match. He took the next step by continuing to be a vital play maker for the side with his willingness to back himself and win the ball and use his pace and long kicking to telling effect.

Ruckman Jack Leslie showed why he was such a good contributor in the national championships when he dominated the aerial contests against good opponents. He used his leap, strength and ability to read the play to ruck tirelessly as well as marking around the ground and applying pressure in contests. Ed Morris was his hard-working best with many vital contested possessions and his usual number of good tackles on dangerous midfield opponents. He has responded magnificently all season to Nick’s challenges to add key elements to his natural game and is now the key paly-maker for the team.

The Power now has a week off before taking on the Eastern Ranges at Morwell in a fortnight’s time. This again is a vital match for the Power and gives Nick the chance to again challenge the boys to improve their use of the ball where it matters most, the forward fifty-zone. Hopefully Scotty will be back and key smaller forwards Alex Saunders and Jordie Cunico will also be available to address what’s been a costly flaw in the side’s performances in recent games.

Nick will ensure that most of the side use the bye to have a week’s rest to prepare for the business end of the TAC Cup season. They have shown that they can play a big role in the finals in 2013 and their mental and physical fitness will be vital in their ability to play well when it really matters. Adding to the side’s possibilities will be the availability of four of the clubs superb under-sixteen unit, Sam Skinner, Josh Dunkley, Nash Holmes and Darnell Grech.

They were part of the national championship winning Vic Country team and have been training regularly with the Power. Sam went one step further by being named the best player for the team throughout the national carnival. It is a wonderful achievement and honour. He joins another Power player who did exactly the same thing in 2000 as a skinny half back, Brendon Goddard, so he has the perfect role model to use as he continues his amazing journey with the club.