Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

The start to the 2014 TAC Cup season gave the Loy Yang B Gippsland Power club plenty of positives to work on but, ultimately, they went away feeling somewhat disappointed after the boys literally kicked away a certain win due to some really frustratingly poor decision making in the second half. A nagging hip injury took away one of the Power’s best ever and most natural leaders, Liam Nash, and it provided the opportunity for Lucas Webb to take the role for the match against the Stingrays.

After losing so many top-age players at the end of 2013, the Power went into the match with thirteen players making their TAC Cup debuts. Seven of these boys were bottom age and had emerged through the club’s outstanding junior development program at under fifteen and sixteen levels, while the other six boys were top age and had more challenging pathways to this elite competition after missing out last season. Either way, they had worked very hard over the pre-season to meet the physical and mental challenges as part of Leigh Brown’s program and had done enough in the practice matches to earn the spot in the team.

In ideal conditions at Morwell the Power resisted some early Stingrays attacking moves before shutting down their run and beginning to dominate the run of play. They were doing everything right except kicking goals and this would later prove to be a key factor in the side’s loss. Some excellent forward pressure finally gave the team a scoring chance and first-gamer, Michael Jacobsen kicked truly. This seemed to inspire the boys to up the ante in terms of pressure and, this time, Connor Ambler was able to finish it off.

Captain Webb used the ball creatively by hand and allowed Tate Marsh to give the Power a twenty-two point lead by the first change. It was a well-deserved lead for the Power but their dominance of the run of play and ten scoring shots compared to the Stingrays two should have resulted in a much greater margin. The Power kept the Stingrays under extreme pressure at the start of the second quarter and once again Jacobsen goaled as a result of this hard work.

Diminutive forward Nick Argento used excelled skills and vision to set up another debutant, Sam Skinner, who marked and goaled before Nathan Dennison took a strong mark after a long and direct kick by Jordan Cunico. Things were looking very grim for the Stingrays as the Power maintained their intensity in the contests and rookie Josh Dunkley added to their concerns with a strong mark and goal to extend the boy’s lead to almost eight goals by the ten minute mark.

The Stingrays broke their duck at this time and it took some more good pressure for the Power to allow Dennison to kick his second for the term. Some very lazy and often poor quality forward delivery by the Power finally allowed the Stingrays to get their rebound football going and they began to really punish the Power on the rebound after some very sloppy ball use. They kicked four unanswered goals to reduce the Power’s lead to less than four goals by the long break but, more importantly, had regained their confidence and, the all-important momentum going into the second half.

To emphasise the problems that the Power had created for themselves, the Stingrays kicked the first of the term and they then made things even worse after another poor turnover on ten minutes allowed them to bring the margin to less than two goals. The Power were delivering the ball appallingly up forward and yet again it gave the Stingrays free use of the ball on the resultant rebound. They kicked two more goals the same way and it meant that they had kicked eight of the last nine goals of the match.

As if it was scripted, once again it was Jacobsen who kicked the Power’s only goal of the term after some good work by Brad Olsson and Christian Buykx-Smith but the Stingrays took the ball from defence after another Power “howler” up forward and went to the last break only one point behind the Power and seemingly able to control the all-important centre bounce contests as well as capitalise on their poor use of the ball going forward.

With the match well and truly up for grabs, the Stingrays were again getting easy possessions as the Power wasted hard-won scoring opportunities. By mid-way through the last term the Stingrays had added two more goals but the Power, when they did find their forwards, only managed points instead of goals. A typically long and direct forward thrust by Alex Carr allowed Buykx-Smith to mark well and goal and the boys were within grasp of victory by the time the siren rang.

Final scores, Dandenong Stingrays 12 goals 7 behinds 79 points defeated Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 10 goals 18 behinds 78 points. Goal kickers, Michael Jacobsen 3, Nathan Dennison 2, Christian Buykx-Smith, Tate Marsh, Josh Dunkley, Connor Ambler and Sam Skinner 1.

On a day when on-field leadership was needed for the debutants, Tate Marsh put his hand up and set a fine example for team-mates. He was typically elusive up forward with his pace and abundant skill but, was also able to have an impact in close to win contested ball and then use it intelligently. First-gamer Michael Jacobsen had responded brilliantly to Leigh’s challenges during the pre-season but took it to another level in this match. He read the ball brilliantly of the packs to kick goals and was able to apply excellent pressure on opponents when the ball was in dispute.

Jordan Cunico won plenty of the ball in the mid field as well as having the ability to apply pressure on opponents. His ability to kick the ball long and direct into the forward zone was critical to the side’s early dominance and he capped off a fine game with some very strong contested marks. Highly rated bottom-ager, Josh Dunkley has been outstanding through the Power’s development squads and had the composure, skill and courage to back himself in the tightest situations to win the ball and then use it creatively. He was moved around the field and responded positively to each challenge.

Nick Argento is another who has risen manfully to the challenges involved in the pre-season and responded to Leigh’s faith in his ability and disciplined play to win many crucial possessions and then use them intelligently when under pressure. After missing the 2013 season due to the dreaded OP injury, Brad Olsson is another who has worked tirelessly to regain full fitness and then work hard on his skills to be ready for an important role this season. He showed that it was well worth the wait with a fine, all-round game on his return.

The story behind debutant Alyosio Ferriera-Neto is amazing as the Brazil-born, former excellent soccer player has been on an incredibly steep learning curve as he develops his game at this elite level. His pace, ball skills and use of his strength are obvious but he adds a vital “extra” factor with his unique reading of the game. Strong midfielder Nathan Dennison has had a tough pre-season but has met the challenges head on and showed why Leigh has always had faith in his ability to cope. He won many contested possessions and made great use of them in tight situations.

The final margin was only one point but the Power’s wastefulness of their opportunities to put the game beyond dispute can be seen by analysing two sets of statistics. The first is obvious, the scoring shots, and the Power had seven more than the Stingrays. More importantly was the inside forward fifty numbers where the Power had nineteen more forward trusts than the Stingrays and this further emphasised the inefficiency of their ball use.

Even closer analysis of these numbers shows that, in the second half, the Power only managed two goals from thirty-two entries while the Stingrays kicked seven majors from only twenty-three opportunities. This is a pitiful return for a lot of hard work and will have Leigh and his assistant coaches working hard this week to get a much better result up forward.

It wasn’t all bad for the Power on the day as the club’s under sixteen development team comprehensively won their first match in the 2014 intra-state championship. The team was mostly made up boys who were involved in the under fifteen championships last year and have responded incredibly well to the club’s fitness and skills programs during the pre-season under coach Ro Reid and his assistants Tom Hams and Darren Thain.

The Power boys defeated the Stingrays side by many goals but it was the intensity of the pressure that they applied all over the field and their willingness to follow the game plan that was so impressive. Goal kickers, Clayton Kingi and Kade Renooy 3, Will Jolley, Scott Van Dyke and Nathan Voss 2, Ben Ainsworth, Keenan Hughes, Louis Riseley and Jai Rout 1. Better contributors in a wonderful team victory were Kade Renooy, Ben Ainsworth, Nick Mulqueen, James Harrison, Tom Sabell, Sam Whibley and Brenton Wells.

Both Power teams now meet the Murray Bushrangers at Highgate Stadium in Melbourne next weekend. They will present a real challenge to both sides and the “senior” boys will have to be a lot smarter if they are to take full advantage of their incredible ability to apply intense pressure in contested issues. Leigh will live nothing to chance in this regard and has great faith in the boys to respond to the challenges that he will throw down as a response to this waste of such an opportunity to win easily.