Gippsland Power media release   
by Bryan Mitchell

In some of the worst conditions for the past few seasons, Loy Yang B Gippsland Power took on and soundly defeated Eastern Ranges to add a vital victory to their 2014 TAC Cup program. The region had suffered heavy rain earlier in the week but Traralgon had an extra fifteen millimetres overnight to ensure that it was always going to a battle for both sides to play any form of cohesive football. Given this challenging scenario, Leigh Brown stressed the need for the Power to ensure that, as a team, they contested every issue with their customary intensity and then see which side wanted to win most.

To their enormous credit the Power responded manfully to his request and applied amazing pressure on every contest in the match from the opening bounce until the match was prematurely called off ten minutes into the last term. Throughout the game, the conditions gradually deteriorated to the extent that players were suffering hypothermia and it was of little value to continue playing with the Power over eight goals up. This is the second time that the Power had experienced such extreme conditions and, in the earlier situation, they had also emerged victorious.

Going into this crucial match the Power had been greatly strengthened by the return of key defender Christian Buykx-Smith who had been missing due to injury since round three of the 2014 season. He would have played a key role in the national championships this year so automatically added some strength and excellent competitiveness against the opposition’s best key forwards. Josh Dunkley, Jordie Cunico and Lucas Webb were missing due to their state commitments but the ranges also had such a dilemma.

Adding to the Power’s need for a team focus was the fact that they still had five key players, Sam Skinner, Darnell Grech, Bohdi Walker, Liam Nash and Dylan Proctor missing due to injury, so their effort to dominate the match in terms of team competitiveness was outstanding. It gave Leigh the perfect ammunition to use to build the rest of the season upon as well as rewarding the team leaders who have been so critical in their steady build up to finishing their games off positively.

The match opened with the sort of intensity that Leigh had asked for and some of that intense pressure up forward resulted in Josh Patullo setting up Aloysio Ferreira kicking an important goal. More of that forward pressure resulted in Power “hard-man” Nash Holmes kicking a fine goal and, for the next twenty minutes, the match became an intense arm wrestle, with neither defensive or midfield unit willing to concede an easy possession, let alone a scoring opportunity.

By the first change the Power led by sixteen points but, more importantly, had kept the Ranges scoreless. The second quarter opened with Tate Marsh going quick, long and direct up forward and Tom Papley snapped a vital goal for the side. More of that purposeful play by Nicholas Argento created an opportunity for Brad Olsson to snap truly. As had happened in the first term, both sides upped the defensive ante and for the rest of the quarter neither side was able to create effective scoring scenarios.

At the long break the Power had extended their lead to twenty-nine points and had ensured that the Ranges remained scoreless. Conditions were getting worse as the temperature feel and the rainfall intensified. This meant that clean possessions were almost impossible and simple hard work was required to move the ball forward. The Ranges had limited the Power’s scoring opportunities and, ten minutes into the term opened their scoring with a point. Jack Hammond joined the “kick it long and direct” brigade and once again Papley was on the spot to snap another major.

Some hard work up forward by the Ranges saw them score a goal on the twenty minute mark of the term but Holmes again did the hard things to allow Argento to reply for the Power. In the final minutes of the quarter more intense forward pressure resulted in Alex Carr snapping truly and the Power went to the final break thirty eight points up. Both teams had worked hard to minimise each other’s scoring opportunities and, although the Power led the inside fifty statistics, the total number of such critical entries were really low. This fact was due to the amazing “arm wrestle” between the team’s midfield units and their unwillingness to concede easy opportunities for each other.

In the opening minutes of the last term some more intense work by Holmes allowed Papley to mark and goal but, after ten minutes, the match was finally called off with the Power forty-five points up. Final scores, Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 8 goals 6 behinds 54 points defeated Eastern Ranges I goal 3 behinds 9 points. Goal kickers, Tom Papley 3, Nick Argento , Brad Olsson, Aloysio Ferreira, Nash Holmes and Alex Carr 1.

On a day when hard-nosed play would dominate, Nash Holmes made the match his own in a superb display of his typically fierce and competitive brand of football. He had nearly fifty possessions in the thick of the heaviest action as well as applying fourteen tackles with his unique brand of one-on-one play. He provided countless important clearances in the toughest contests and was still going hard as the siren sounded. Matching his on-ball mate’s intensity was Alex Carr who also thrives when the match is in the tightest and toughest situations. As he has done all season, he too won many vital clearances and applied continuous tackling pressure when his opponents looked like getting rare easy possessions.

With three fine goals as a forward, Tom Papley might have been content with his day’s work. However, as he has done so well in recent matches, he applied the same work rate when playing in the midfield and added his own brand of intensity in the heavier contests to tackle hard and win the ball with his fierce attacking, mode of play. Another hard midfielder, Connor Ambler also thrived in the most intense passages of play with his willingness to put his body on the line to win contested possessions or, more importantly, apply pressure on opponents. His unselfish and disciplined team oriented play was critical in maintaining the side’s focus on the team plan.

In attack, Declan Keilty had a tough job as very few forward entries were easily won. He made sure that he contested each opportunity hard and provided chances for the running players to pounce on the loose balls he regularly created. When allowed to win clear possessions he used them positively by hand and foot. Fellow forward Aloysio “Neto” Ferreira was another to work hard to ensure that he won many contested possessions. He added to his value as an attacking player with his unique ability to create time and space with his pace, deft footwork and evasive skills as well as his ability to take on and beat bigger opponents.

On a day when Leigh and his line-coaches had asked for the ultimate team performance, they would have been delighted with the fact that so many of the boys applied themselves to the team goals for the entire match. They gave the Ranges players few easy possessions anywhere on the ground and worked efficiently as a unit to get the ball into dangerous situations. It was their best four-quarter effort for the 2014 season and sets them up perfectly for the up-coming challenges.

The first of these will occur next weekend when they take on the TAC Cup’s top side, the Oakleigh Chargers, at Morwell. Both sides will be without key players due to the final round of the national championships. Unlike most rounds of the competition the Chargers will have many of their squad available because they won’t have school-football commitments. This means that the Power will face their toughest challenge for the season and will need to be as focussed on the positive aspects of their game that have been so apparent in recent games.

Leigh and the other coaches have a lot to be enthusiastic about after the boy’s performances in their last two games but the Chargers will ruthlessly exploit any weaknesses in their application of the underlying strengths that they have exhibited. The levels of self-confidence that were so evident against the Ranges are a crucial element in their chances of upsetting the Chargers and Leigh will work hard to ensure that they remain so focussed for this match.