Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

ENGIE Gippsland Power’s latest match in the 2016 TAC Cup season demonstrated how far the side has come on its learning curve after a very competitive performance against the Dandenong Stingrays. The Stingrays recorded an eight point victory but, up until the last seconds of the match, the Power looked highly likely to record a well-deserved victory against very considerable odds due to the relative differences of their ladder positions.

The Power went into the match with a much needed boost due to the return of inspirational captain Ben Ainsworth. He had missed several games due to injury and suspension but had played a stunning match for Victorian Country in their most recent game in the National championships. On a negative note, the Power was still without injured state squad members Aidan Quigley and Codey Henness while Nick Hogan joined his bottom-age team mates due to a minor injury.

In the opening minutes of the game it was very obvious that it was going to be a tight game with neither side willing to concede an easy opportunity to get on the scoreboard. The Power defence was playing disciplined, no nonsense football and helped to set up the first goal of the match as Will Stephenson set up Jai Rout to score a fine major as he roved the ball cleverly off the pack. Jai then turned provider as he went long and direct and Ryan Hearn goaled as a result of a free kick.

By the end of the term the Stingrays were goalless and trailed the Power by eight points but, closer analysis of the important statistics, indicated why they were in such an uncommon situation. The Power defence was under consistent and intense pressure but had stood firm despite the ball being in the Stingrays danger zone for much of the term. The tackle totals indicated why they couldn’t convert these opportunities as the Power had applied a stunning thirty-four bone crunchers to help set the tone for the rest of the match.

Things didn’t look good for the Power early in the second quarter after the Stingrays scored two very simple goals with rebound football after turnovers by the Power. The defence had little or no chance to intercept the ball as it came into the zone with little or no pressure on those setting things up. Not to be outdone, the Power used the centre bounce after the second Stingrays goal to regain the momentum.

Will Stephenson went long and direct to find Ben Ainsworth who created the opportunity for Rout to score a very good goal despite being under extreme pressure. The Stingrays hit back quickly to regain the lead but, once again, the Power used the right way to go into attack as Tate Marsh created the opportunity for Trent Armour to snap a morale boosting goal. By the long break, the Power led by one point and were still applying intense physical and mental pressure on the Stingrays.

Once again the Stingrays opened the scoring for the term with another easy goal but it seemed to inspire rather than intimidate the Power. Some wonderful skill and vision by Kieran Jones and Rout resulted in Ben Ainsworth kicking the easiest of goals. It was then The Stingrays turn to kick a vital goal but, importantly, the Power were far from done with. Another long and direct forward thrust by Louis Riseley resulted in a free kick to Nathan Voss and he finished it off accurately.

Some excellent pressure was applied by Will Leslie and Travis Bindley to allow Armour to kick another clever goal. With seconds to go in the quarter, the Stingrays scored another crucial goal and the sides went to the last change level. This situation put the Power into a rare situation for the 2016 season as they needed to be able to play four quarters of highly competitive and consistent football to record a win.

Ryan Hearn set the scene early in the quarter with a deft piece of ruckwork to allow Rout to kick another fine running goal. Ominously the Stingrays kicked a vital reply but the Power were not ready to concede without a lot more hard work. Keenan Hughes set the next scoring opportunity up with another long forward fifty entry and Corey Timms found Charlie Walsh who kicked a critical goal.

Yet again the Stingrays hit back by creating a very easy rebound goal and then added to the pressure with another to seemingly simple major to finally put the game beyond the Power’s reach. Trailing by eight points, the Power again used the ball well to find Voss and he took full advantage of a fifty metre penalty to put his team within a kick with minutes to play. In the last seconds of the game an “iffy” umpiring decision robbed the Power of a chance to regain the lead and, to add insult to injury, the Stingrays scored the last goal right on the siren.

Final scores; Dandenong Stingrays 10 goals 16 behinds 76 points defeated ENGIE Gippsland Power 10 goals 8 behinds 68 points. Goal kickers’ Jai Rout 3, Nathan Voss and Trent Armour 2, Ben Ainsworth, Ryan Hearn and Charlie Walsh 1.

In a match when the Power defence was under a great deal of intense pressure the leadership shown by Sean Masterton made a significant difference. He not only dominated his key forward opponents with seven strong contested marks and thirteen spoils but also amassed fifteen possessions. He then had the confidence to use most of them to set up attacking play and was easily the best player on the ground. Matching Sean’s versatility was Deven Costigan who was able to generate many scoring opportunities with hard-won possessions and strong, contested marks. His ball skills and clever reading of the play meant that team mates were able to receive the ball with a minimum of pressure.

Corey Timms returned to the team and was challenged to take on taller and dangerous opponents. Not only did he easily meet the demands of his coach but also had the confidence to back his judgement and attempt to win and effectively use the ball. Matching his willingness to play disciplined, team football was Keenan Hughes who has become a vital member of the team’s defensive unit. His ability to use his leap and reading of the play was again evident as he spoiled many opposition marking opportunities as well as taking several contested grabs himself.

Up forward, Jai Rout again displayed the skill and uncanny reading of the play that make his a key forward for the side. He was highly effective at taking full advantage of his own scoring opportunities as well as being a crucial contributor in setting up the chances for his team mates to kick goals as well. On baller Callum Porter relishes the most contested issues in games where he uses his courage and strength to win the hard ball. He again led the way in this vital area but also had the willingness and rare ability to take opponents on and break clear to be able to use the ball to his team mate’s advantage.

Despite the loss, the Power coaches and supporters had plenty to be pleased about based on the quality of the boy’s performance. For the first time this season they played four quarters of committed, competitive and very disciplined team oriented football. They followed the key elements of the team’s game plan throughout the match and were extremely unlucky not to reward themselves with a fine victory.

This performance has been coming for much of the season as they have worked increasingly effectively to do the right things for more significant parts of their matches. They now have the crucial self-belief to back themselves to do the team things despite being under pressure. Leigh’s faith in their ability to do what he has asked is being repaid and they now seem to be ready to finish off the season on a high note.

The next phase of this very steep learning curve takes place at home on Saturday when the Power take on the Western Jets in a very winnable match. Both sides will be without their state team representatives and it will mean that several youngsters will be challenged to fill the gaps created. Leigh has already given most of the 2016 list the chance to press their claim for regular selection so the lack of experience will not be a factor.

Adding to this positive is the likelihood that tough on-baller, Nick Hogan, will be available and the team’s best big man Josh Patullo will return from the VFL side, the Casey Scorpions. This means that the team will be justifiably confident of another very competitive performance.