GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

In the 2016 TAC Cup’s season’s most wintry conditions, ENGIE Gippsland Power played its best team-focused football to record a comprehensive forty-three point victory over the Western Jets. It was apparent, after the narrow and highly respected loss to the Stingrays the week before that the Power had taken a huge step forward in their learning curve. In that match the Power had done everything right but win the four premiership points and were more than ready to take the next step forward.

They went into the game without Captain Ben Ainsworth who had starred in the national championship match the day before. Coming back into the side were Callan McKeon, Changhooth Jiath, Josh Patullo, Nick Mulqueen while Fish Creek youngster, Matt McGannon made his TAC Cup debut after finally shaking off the impact of an injury. It meant that the side had the sort of age-balance that would ensure that they were highly competitive for the Jets match and continued to develop the all-important bottom-age group for the 2017 season.

Early in the match, the Power made it clear that they were going to play their traditional hard-nosed, competitive football and the Jets were on the back foot as a consequence. Some long and direct ball use by Tate Marsh and Trent Armour allowed Jai Rout to rove cleverly off a pack and kick the opening goal. The Power dominated the next ten minutes of play with unselfish team football but missed two “sitters” from within twenty five metres of goal. To make the impact of the misses even more striking, the Jets scored two goals to take a narrow lead late in the term.

I took an amazing piece of determined, running football by Callan McKeon to score the goal of the year. He won a loose ball near the half-back line and then ran at least eighty metres to be able to kick a stunning goal. This reduced the Jet’s lead to one point at the first change and reminded them that they weren’t going to find it easy to cope with the Power’s willingness to play hard in the contested issues. To further accentuate this point, the statistics indicated that the Power had applied over thirty tackles and were conceding few easy possessions as a consequence.

In the opening half of the second quarter, things looked even harder for the Jets as the Power upped the ante in terms of contested possessions and applying pressure on opponents. Callan McKeon went long and direct to allow Josh Patullo to take a gutsy mark against the run of play. His goal was followed by more good work from the resultant centre bounce by Will Leslie and Deven Costigan and he kicked his second goal as a consequence.

Once again the Power began to waste scoring opportunities until some outstanding forward pressure, especially by Trent Armour, resulted in a fine snap by Will Stephenson. The last ten minutes of the quarter were dominated by the Jets as they took advantage of a very “iffy” umpiring decision and then punished the Power for some sloppy defence to kick three goals almost against the run of general play.

By the long break the Power led by three points but, the statistics indicated that they should have been far further ahead. The Power had double the number of scoring shots than the Jets but, closer analysis showed that this was even a greater problem the inside fifty stats were also two to one. Adding to the fact that they had been so wasteful, they had applied forty tackles for the quarter and should have rewarded themselves on the scoreboard instead of the statistics sheet.

Obviously Leigh and his assistant coaches had plenty of positives to highlight in the long break. Their seventy plus tackles were an accurate indication as to how hard they were willing to work to apply team rules and the intense pressure that this implies. They reminded the boys about finishing off the hard-won opportunities and it didn’t take long in the third term to see that they were going to do what was required.

Some stunning forward pressure resulted in Stephenson setting up Austin Hodge for a vital goal but the Jets were gifted with a reply after a poor piece of umpiring. Stephenson was again setting things up with long and direct ball use and it allowed Leslie to find Rout and he took full advantage of this opportunity. Just when it appeared as if the Power were ready to take the all-important initiative, they gifted the Jets with another goal due to some very poor defence.

The Jets were right back in the contest and the pressure was on the Power to remain focused on the team elements of the game plan and their determination. More long and accurate ball use by Keenan Hughes and Hodge meant that Rout was able to kick his second major for the quarter. It seemed as if the Power had really stepped up their work rate and as Hodge and Rout used great vision and skill to enable Stephenson to kick his second goal.

Not to be outdone, the forwards were playing really tough, hard-nosed football and again the defensive skills of Armour set up Costigan who took full advantage of his stunning work ethic. As if inspired, back man Kade Renooy created another opportunity with some very attacking play and Leslie was able to finish off his fine team play. By the last change the Power had stablished a twenty six point lead but, far more critically, they had truly dominated much of the play for the quarter.

The statistics were again backing this up as the inside fifties for the quarter were three to one in their favour and had moved two to one for the match. What really indicated their dominance was the tackle count which showed that the Power had applied only twenty five for the quarter. This didn’t mean that they had stopped applying their usual intense pressure but hadn’t allowed the Jets to have the ball often enough to need to be tackled.

Leigh again had a smile on his face at the last change and simply asked for more of the same in the last quarter. If they responded to his challenge the Power would have played four full quarters of team football for the season and he obviously had faith in their ability to do so. His belief in them was rewarded in the opening part of the term when Leslie and Marsh again went long and direct to find Costigan who took a fine mark to be able to kick his second.

An astute interception by CJ Jiath allowed him to kick the ball long into attack and Stephenson unselfishly found Rout for another goal. Just when it appeared as if the Jets had gone missing, some poor decision making in defence gave them another goal and reminded the Power about the need to play smart football. To further emphasise the need to remain focused the Jets scored another relatively easy goal.

It took a fine intercept by Callum Porter at the resultant centre bounce to break the pattern of play. He had the vision and poise to set up Jim Harrison to run and carry the ball and then find Stephenson for his third goal for the match. Yet again the Power gave the Jet another simple goal against the run of play but this would be their last chance to worry the scorekeeper. Trent Armour set a wonderful example in terms of forward pressure and it allowed him to finally get the ball back and kick a great team goal.

“Mini” McKeon again used his pace to advantage to find Hodge and he then used his vision and skill to let clever forward Rout kick his fifth major for the match. In the last minutes of the quarter the Power played more team-oriented football and this time it was Costigan who was able to finish it off. The final margin in favour of the Power was just over seven gaols but in truth they really deserved to be even further ahead by the time the match ended.

The final statistics backed this up even further when the inside fifty measures showed that the Power had twice the number scoring opportunities as the Jets. When the second half was further analysed their dominance really stood out. They had outscored the Jets by seven goals and had been almost unstoppable in the contested issues. It was almost a club record in terms of thirty tackles per quarter but, more crucially, the forward line tackles were even more stunning.

Final scores; ENGIE Gippsland Power 17 goals 10 behinds 112 points defeated the Western Jets 10 gaols 9 behinds 69 points. Goal kickers, Jai Rout 5, Will Stephenson and Deven Costigan 3, Josh Patullo 2, Mini McKeon, Austin Hodge, Will Leslie and Trent Armour 1.

In a match when many Power players were hard at it all day, Callum Porter led the way with fifteen tackles, often in the most contested issues. He led the way in clearances as well and, as if not to be done with, was able to amass twenty important possessions as well. This performance indicated why the selectors were so excited to put him in the side after missing early matches due to injury. His amazing work ethic was matched by defender Kade Renooy who used his stunning ability to read the play to full effect. He initially shut dangerous opponents out of the game with tight defence exemplified by seven tackles but also won, and creatively used, twenty five possessions.

Going forward the Power’s direct and long attacking use of the ball meant that the silky skills of Jai Rout were able to be exploited. He marked the ball well in tight contests but was really at his best when the ball was at ground level and he used pace and fine ball skills to kick goals and set them up for others as well. Young ruckman Kieran Jones did the vast majority of the heavy work and set up his on-ballers with many simple possessions. He wasn’t satisfied with this fine contribution and worked tirelessly when the ball was at ground level to apply pressure as well as win crucial possessions himself.

 Will Leslie returned from state duties and demonstrated the level of commitment and disciplined football that such a challenge entails. He too was able to win and creatively use many contested balls but also stood out when he applied intense tackles in the tightest situations. In the first half of the match Deven Costigan was asked to play an important role in the midfield where his pace and skills were used creatively. In the second half he went forward and, as the Power took control of the match, his skills allowed him to kick three goals.

In a match when it was hard to limit the best players to the standard six, Leigh was more than happy to include the contributions made by Mini McKeon, Will Stephenson and Trent Armour. Their contributions belied the fact that they had only played about twenty TAC Cup games between them. Close analysis of their basic statistics indicated nearly sixty possessions between them but, as importantly, they had applied almost sixty tackles as well their critical five goals.

It gives the club immense pleasure to consider the future when so many of the key Power players were bottom-agers and that the most recent additions to the team, Matt Mc Gannon and Matt Pearce have also shown that they are more than ready to cope with the demands of elite football at this level.

On paper the Power’s next match looks to be beyond them despite their improved recent form. They are taking on the Oakleigh Chargers who, for the first time in many weeks, will have many of their better players available due to school holidays. They have not been very competitive due to this but, traditionally become a top side in this scenario.

If you used the Power’s results so far this season as a guide, their two wins isn’t a good start but, Leigh has gradually helped the boys to develop the self-belief that their individual ability truly reflects. The Jet’s game, especially the second half, should be a more accurate indication of their real abilities and they are ready to take the Chargers on and be really competitive in all the vital areas of tem-oriented football.