GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

ENGIE Gippsland Power faced another intense challenge to their improvement in the 2016 TAC Cup season when they took on the highly rated Oakleigh Chargers. As they have done for many seasons, the Chargers have started the year slowly due to the absence of many of their better players due to school football commitments. However, in holiday breaks they can use more of their team and keep themselves in the top eight so that they can be ready for the finals when their whole list is available.

Consequently, their side on Saturday was much better than in recent times and it meant that the Power were going to need to be right on their game if they were to be competitive. A real positive for the Gippsland boys was the fact that their only players who have these school football commitments were available and the return of Tyrone Hayes and CJ Jiath added greatly to the depth and competitiveness of the side.

The need for this level of application was obvious early in the match when the Chargers kicked two quick goals after capitalising clinically on minor defensive errors by the Power. It took some real class and poise by Callan McKeon and CJ Jiath to find Jai Rout who finished it off accurately. The Power defence was under continuous and intense pressure but was standing firm for much of the term. Almost on the siren, a skill error led to a turnover and the Chargers took full advantage to go to the first change fourteen points up.

Statistics for the quarter illustrated the problems that the Power faced as they had to apply forty tackles when the Chargers had twice the number of forward fifty entries. Early in the second term the Chargers maintained the pressure and again took full advantage of some errors by the Power. In stark contrast, the Power had wasted several hard won opportunities to be competitive on the scoreboard and things looked grim.

It took some fine skills by Will Leslie to get the ball to Tyrone Hayes and he demonstrated his amazing talent to kick a vital goal for the Power. Instead of building on this, the Power again were punished for a lack of skilled application and found themselves on the back foot. Jimmy Harrison used the ball with elite poise and skill to allow “old timer,” Josh Patullo to kick a crucial goal and reduce the Chargers lead to sixteen points by the long break.

Further analysis shows how inefficient the Power had been after working so hard to put the ball into their attacking area. They had six more forward fifty entries than the Chargers but only managed one goal for eight entries and this indicates a very wasteful conversion rate. They had again worked hard to apply the club’s trademark willingness to use tackling and intense pressure in contests and had nearly eighty of these in half a game of football.

In the early minutes of the third quarter, Leslie again used the hard won ball well to link up with Rout and this time Austin Hodge finished off the job. Once again the Chargers hit back and it was Leslie who stepped up once more to put the ball deep into attack where Tate Marsh used his pace to full effect to reduce the Chargers to single figures.

Instead of adding to this all-important scoreboard pressure, the Power again wasted possibilities to kick vital goals and were punished even further when the Chargers exploited some soft Power defence. By the last break, the margin was still just sixteen points and indicated how well the Power had used pressure to minimise the Chargers scoring opportunities and create their own. For Power supporters it was a case of “if only” in terms of the scoreboard situation that the side faced going in to the last quarter.

It took just a few minutes of the last term for the Chargers to put the issue beyond doubt as they kicked three far too easy goals. After taking a fine contested mark, Hodge “found” Rout with what he will claim was a pass and the skilled forward took advantage of the “gift” from his teammate. Yet again the Chargers went into overdrive to kick another goal and things were looking decidedly “iffy” for the Power.

Some determined contested football by the Power allowed Trent Armour to unselfishly allow Marsh to kick his second and then another fine intercept mark by Corey Timms resulted in the bally going long and direct into attack. A strong contested mark by Nathan Voss was converted truly and then the Chargers again took full advantage of an umpiring mistake. It was again looking likely that the Power were in deep trouble but excellent pressure by Leslie set up Patullo for his second major.

The latter part of the quarter saw the Chargers kick two more goals and extend the final margin to what appeared to be an easy thirty-five points. Closer analysis of the situation showed that the Power didn’t deserve to be that far behind at the end of the match especially when you consider that they had been so wasteful of the scoring opportunities that worked so well to create, especially in the second quarter.

What was really disappointing for the boys was the fact that the umpires rarely rewarded them for a club record number of tackles. They received only one free kick for about twenty of their amazing one hundred and forty tackles and this indicated how little the umpires had seen despite the obvious dominance of the Power in this crucial area.

Leigh and his assistant coaches asked for intense pressure to be applied and the Power had answered the challenge magnificently. The many, obviously missed, free kicks had not only robbed them of possession and therefore the chance to attack. More importantly, this scenario had “gifted” the Chargers with undeserved access to the ball and they kicked at least five goals from these stunning and extremely frustrating errors.

Final scores; Oakleigh Chargers 15 goals 9 behinds 99 points defeated ENGIE Gippsland Power 9 goals 10 behinds 64 points. Goal kickers; Tate Marsh, Josh Patullo and Jai Rout 2, Tyrone Hayes, Austin Hodge and Nathan Voss 1.

In a match where strong leadership was required, Josh Patullo demonstrated his vital importance as he dominated the match with his aerial skills, pace and ability to us the ball with great poise and skill. He was a prime target in attack early and then moved on to the ball and a similarly important impact on that part of the game. Matching Josh’s work ethic was Will Leslie who creatively used his uncanny quickness and ability to kick the ball long and with great accuracy. Being over 190cm tall he was very competitive in marking duels but also had the ability to be very influential when the ball was at ground level as well. His twenty five possessions and nine tackles reflect this versatility.

Young midfielder Callum Porter has made stunning progress after missing early games due to injury. He again was in the forefront of the strong Power on-ball unit with nearly thirty possessions and a dozen tackles. These statistics are very impressive but his poise and strength enabled him to win many vital clearances from the most intense situations. Up forward Jai Rout again impressed with his ability to be a very viable avenue to goal despite a lack of height. He was very competitive in marking contests but really excelled when the ball was at ground level where his silky ball skills and ability to move expertly through tight situations were exploited to full advantage.

Obviously the Power defence were under a lot of intense pressure during the match and, for much of the time, withstood the pressure well. Leading the way was Sean Masterson who again took on the opposition’s best key forward. He won most one on one contests but also took many contested marks as well as leading the way in vital defensive areas like tackles and spoils. Matching Sean’s effectiveness was Corey Timms who took on and defeated a dangerous set of opponents with his disciplined and very strong play. He took many fine contested intercept marks and had the confidence to back his judgement and create attacking passages of football.

The Power’s next match sees them up against another top side who will be able to exploit their very strong full list due to school holidays. They will face the Sandringham Dragons at their bayside ground and they will further test the boy’s ability to follow the basic elements of Leigh’s game plan. Despite what the scoreboard said, the Power were very competitive against the Chargers and should have been much closer based on their work rate in vital areas.

It means that they have the ability to make it hard for the Dragons and can’t be taken lightly. Adding to their potential to more than match it with the Dragons will be the return of captain Ben Ainsworth who will be available after another stunning performance in the national championships. CJ Jiath and Tyrone Hayes will be able to play as well so there are plenty of positives for Leigh and his assistants to focus on in the build up to the game.