GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

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For over three quarters of their match against one of the TAC Cup’s best sides, ENGIE Gippsland Power were highly competitive and even looked likely to score an amazing victory. They had the Sandringham Dragons struggling to get their usually efficient running game going due to consistently applied physical pressure and a lot of hard work in contests. However, in about twenty minutes of the third term, the Dragons kicked eight goals straight to take control of the match and kill off any chance of an unlikely result.

Despite the fact that the Power were without key players Tyrone Hayes, Deven Costigan and Kade Renooy, they were confident that they were ready for the sort of challenges involved in taking on the Dragons with their state players back and most of their best available due to school holidays. Adding to their positivity was the fact that captain, Ben Ainsworth was back and Sale youngster Brad Dessent made his debut after missing almost two years of TAC Cup football due to nagging injury.

In ideal conditions at Sandringham’s Trevor Barker oval, the Dragons kicked the first goal of the game after receiving a fifty metre penalty. Some excellent ball use by Austin Hodge, Corey Timms and Ben Ainsworth allowed Trent Armour to reply for the Power and they were causing the Dragons severe problems by the consistent application of intense pressure. This sort of pressure allowed Matt McGannon to win a free kick and he gave his side a two point lead at the end of the quarter.

In the clash with the Dragons earlier in the season, they had destroyed the Power due to the dominance of their midfield. Throughout that match the Dragons were able to win so many easy possessions because of lack of pressure being applied by the Power midfield. Since that game, the on-ball brigade of the Power had responded manfully to Leigh’s challenge to be super competitive and, consequently, had been more competitive in every match, regardless of the respective ladder positions.

The need to be ready for the sort of problems that the Dragons could create was seen early in the second term when skill and decision making errors caused turnovers and the Dragons kicked two easy goals on the rebound. However, unlike their earlier clash, the Power responded brilliantly and began to minimise the errors and limit the Dragons ability to get their running game going.

A typically strong, contested mark by Josh Patullo was matched by Nathan Voss and he converted his opportunity with a vital goal and then Callum Porter stepped in with his usual hardness in contests to get some positive play started. Clever forward, Jai Rout, linked up with Changkuoth Jiang and found Aidan Quigley who finished off some fine team work. By the long break, the Power still had a two point lead but, far more importantly, had responded well to the Dragon’s attempts to take control of the match.

Just when the coaches thought that the boys had the right mind set, the Dragons went into overdrive and kicked four goals straight as the result of the killer turnovers that they clinically exploited on the resultant rebound. A clever, intercept mark by Ben Ainsworth allowed him to find McGannon who then allowed Brad Dessent to kick his first TAC Cup goal.

Instead of building on this example of positive play, the Power again gifted the Dragons with easy possession that they clinically converted to three more goals. To their credit, the Power stepped up the intensity of their game Rout kicked a crucial goal from a hard-won free kick. They again became competitive in the contests and, some great pressure by Callan McKeon and Keenan Hughes sent the ball long and direct into attack. Once again Dessent was able to kick a clever goal and the scoreboard damage was looking less disastrous.

To add to the Power’s frustration, the Dragons kicked another goal late in the term and went to the final break four goals up. It needed a lot of Leigh’s renowned positivity to restore the Power’s self-belief and he worked hard to make sure that they were ready for the challenges of the last term. The accuracy of the Dragon’s conversion of scoring opportunities was stunning and, on paper, they seemed ready to blow the boys away in the last quarter.

Things looked even worse early in the last term when the Dragons again exploited a turnover and it was time for the Power to up the ante to avoid another torrent of goals. Will Stephenson won a free kick and capped it off with a goal but the Dragons kicked another to extend their lead and put the sort of pressure on the Power that they had struggled to cope with during the previous quarter.

Once again McKeon was the one to throw himself into the action and, his willingness to take the opposition on, gave Dessent the chance to kick his third goal. By the end of the match the Dragons were twenty-six points up but had struggled for much of the game to break free of some determined and disciplined Power players. Closer analysis of the match statistics revealed that the Power had won three quarters in the match and had been highly competitive against a side who had the potential to dominate the game.

Final scores; Sandringham Dragons 13 goals 12 behinds 90 points defeated ENGIE Gippsland Power 9 goals 10 behinds 64 points. Goal kickers; Brad Dessent 3, Aidan Quigley, Will Stephenson, Matt McGannon, Nathan Voss, Trent Armor and Jai Rout 1.

When the Power defence was under a lot of pressure due to the ease with which the Dragons bought the ball into attack, Sean Masterson again took the responsibility to keep the Dragon’s best forwards out of the game. He not only minimised their ability to win the ball but was confident and capable enough to take five contested marks and generate attacking play. Matching his ability to respond to such a challenge was on baller, Jimmy Harrison who continued his journey along a very steep TAC Cup learning curve. He worked tirelessly in the tightest contests to win over twenty five possessions and apply many tackles. His effective use of the ball meant he generated a lot of positive passages of play.

CJ Jiath has shown great potential in glimpses during his debut season but took things much further in this match. His natural athleticism enabled him to be highly competitive in the ruck but he really stood out when the ball was at ground level and had the pace and agility to win twenty possessions and then take the opposition on. Matt McGannon is one day off being eligible to play under sixteens but has showed that he is more than ready to take on the “older” boys. Despite his slight frame, he was able to be very competitive when the ball was at ground level and then had the confidence to take contested marks and back himself to run and set up play.

Diminutive on-baller Callan McKeon has never let his stature limit his ability to play an influential and highly competitive role in matches. He once again won over twenty, often contested, possessions and used his courage and pace to create running passages of play. He finished his stunning contribution off with his trademark, ten plus tackles. When his team mates needed leadership under intense pressure, Ben Ainsworth consistently stepped up to show what was required in terms of levels of total application and effective use of the ball. He was the team “quarterback” like old boys Rob Murphy, Dyson Hepple and Brendon Goddard did it with great style and poise.

The Power now has a week off and hopefully, in that time will be able to have some of the regulars available after missing game due to injury. Players like Nick Hogan, Deven Costigan, Cody Henness, Louis Riseley, Kade Renooy and Ryan Hearn are automatic selections when fit and their availability will give the team a highly competitive edge for the remainder of the 2016 season.

Adding to the reason for optimism for the Power and its supporters is the fact that several of the highly skilled under sixteen boys can also be put forward for selection. Names like Kyle Reid, Irving Mosquito, Xavier Duursma, Kyle Dunkley and Nick Lowden might be unfamiliar now, but they have the potential, skills and determination to be key players in the next two seasons.

They youngsters played in the recent national championships and now train regularly with the main group so are physically and mentally ready for the challenges of successfully stepping up to the next level of football. Another possibility at the other end of the age structure is Leongatha’s top-ager Julian Patterson, who, at 205cm in height, represents a highly skilled ruck man as well as having the potential to be a very effective key position player.

Whichever way that the selectors go, the one certainty is that the Power will be highly competitive no matter who the opponents. However, far more importantly, they will continue to make the sort of learning curve development that has been so evident over the past month. Not only will they be so competitive for the rest of this year, but the possibilities for 2017 and beyond are looking extremely positive as well.