GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

ENGIE Gippsland Power’s most recent TAC Cup match resulted in a victory over the Geelong Falcons that saw them break a vital club record and, as a result, respond positively to a challenge set by coach Leigh Brown. The record that they smashed was the number of tackles recorded in a game and it resulted in them adding almost twenty to the previous record of one hundred and forty. The Power have always been in the elite level in this vital area but went even further with a stunning exhibition of hardness in contests that never allowed the Falcons to get an easy possession throughout the match.

The other vital factor in the twenty five point victory was the fact that it represented almost a twenty goal turnaround from the clash with the Falcons earlier in the season. Since that match, Leigh and his assistants Scott, Rhett and Peter have worked very hard to help the boys to develop a level of self-belief that more accurately reflected the true ability that they believed that the boys have. Part of that process involved him challenging the boys to finish the season off in a way that seemed impossible earlier in the season.

This match was the first step in this challenging process and the boys responded brilliantly against a strong team. Over the past five or six matches they have been able to be highly competitive for increasingly longer periods of time in each game. Regardless of the relative strength of each of the opponents, the Power have had a realistic chance to win each game and, in the Falcons game, they were able to apply themselves for the entire match. What was even more important was that they were at their strongest at the end of the match and finished it off exceptionally well.

Adding to the many positives of this performance was the fact that two boys made their TAC Cup debuts. Leongatha youngster Julian Patterson has been injured for much of the season and had only played two matches for his club before this game. Being over two hundred centimetres tall and having an exceptional leap, he represents obvious potential to be successful at this level and Leigh’s faith in this ability was repaid perfectly in an impressive performance.

The second debutant was Foster under sixteen player Xavier Duursma. His season had been totally different to the one that Julian had experienced. For a start he has been injury free and was a vice captain in the Victorian Country team in the national championships. However the important similarity that he had with Julian was that he appeared to be totally comfortable with the unique demands that TAC Cup football represents and was able to fulfil the challenging role that Leigh had asked him to take on.

A powerful westerly wind blew across the ground with and slightly favoured the town end of the ground. It was the Power who had this slight advantage in the first quarter but were unable to reward themselves for their incredible work rate where it mattered most, the scoreboard. The statistics truly reflected how well the boys had played with the inside forward fifty stat showing them having twice as many opportunities as the Falcons. The other vital number was the forty tackles recorded by the Power all over the ground.

By the end of the term that led by six points to two but, far more importantly, had made the Falcons really struggle to get any positive passages of play going throughout the quarter. At the opening of the second term the Falcons got their game going briefly and had two goals on the board almost against the run of general play. The Power then went into overdrive and some amazing forward pressure allowed Nathan Voss to snap the side’s first goal. Some undisciplined play by Geelong gave the Power an opportunity to go long and direct into attack and it resulted in Austin Hodge being able to snap a good goal when under pressure.

Another falcon error allowed Sean Masterson to send the ball into attack and this time Josh Patullo took a strong contested mark and gave Trent Armour the chance to kick a clever goal on the run. By the end of the quarter the Power lead had been extended to six points but once again the Power‘s work rate under pressure was exceptional. They defence had withstood a lot more pressure in the term and, after the opening part of the quarter, had totally stopped the goal scoring. A vital element of this work ethic was the continuation of the incredible tackling statistics all over the ground and it meant that the Falcons had very few uncontested possessions.

It was the Falcons who again opened the scoring in the third term and once again it inspired the Power to up the ante and reapply the sort of physical and resultant mental pressure needed to shut them out of the game. Some stunning vision and poise by Jai Rout set Aidan Quigley up for a crucial goal and once again the Power had the initiative. Captain, Ben Ainsworth was working typically hard and inspired the side with a wonderful snap after the defence had done amazing work to give him that opportunity.

Despite the fact that the Falcons had been able to have many forward fifty entries, the Power defence had stood firm and applied their trademark pressure each time the Falcons went into attack. The scoreboard showed that the Power only led by seven points but, any analysis of the play indicated that the Power were in charge for most of the time. By the start of the last quarter the Falcons would have believed that they were right in the match and, based on the earlier game in the season, it was unlikely that the Power had the desire or ability to keep it going for four quarters.

Adding to the Falcon’s optimism was the fact that the wind still favoured the end to which they were kicking and the pressure was on the Power to respond to Leigh’s challenge from earlier in the week. It didn’t take them long to show that they were on song when some fine work by Quigley and Ainsworth saw Hodge kick the all-important first goal. The Power continued to apply intense pressure all over the ground and Callan McKeon and Hodge combined to provide Armour to use his skills under pressure to extend the Power lead.

A series of wonderful efforts in contests saw Will Stephenson, Hodge and Patullo combine and this time Voss was able to finish it off with a fine snap under pressure. Despite the fact that the Falcons were trying very hard to take advantage of the gale, the Power defence continued to respond manfully to the challenge and limit them to a few behinds from their restricted number of forward fifty entries. The final margin was twenty five points but the most important fact was the way in which the boys achieved the result.

They had responded positively to every element of the coaches’ challenges and, as a result, had denied the Falcons a chance to get their trademark attacking game going. To have so many of the team achieve the amazing statistical combination of twenty possessions and ten tackles was really pleasing for Leigh and the boys. More importantly though was the fact that a lot of the forward line players did this, and, it meant that they were able to keep the ball in their zone and minimize the impact of turnovers and rebound goals.

Final scores; ENGIE Gippsland Power 8 goals 12 behinds 60 points defeated Geelong Falcons 3 goals 17 behinds 35 points. Goal kickers; Austin Hodge, Nathan Voss and Trent Armour 2, Ben Ainsworth and Aidan Quigley 1.

A lot of the important contests in the match occurred in stoppages and mid-fielder, Will Leslie set the tone with his unique combination of natural skills and disciplined football in contests. His leap and pace meant that he dominated when the ball was in the air as well as at ground level but, he really excelled when setting up attacking passages of play with vision and skill. Helping Will to be so dominant was Josh Patullo who also had the skills and understanding of the game to make a vital contribution. He did a fine job in the ruck but really excelled in general play where he too contested marks as well as winning vital possessions at ground level.

With the Falcons potentially dangerous in attack, the Power defence needed disciplined contributors and Aidan Quigley led the way. He not only totally blitzed dangerous opponents but had the ability to win and skilfully use nearly thirty possessions as well as applying six tackles and five spoils. On-baller Nick Hogan came back after injury and quickly returned to the fine form that was so evident in his last match. He too thrived in the heat of the battle either by applying intense pressure on opponents as well as winning many contested possessions himself.

Fellow on-baller Callum Porter was another whose work ethic is outstanding, especially when in the hottest contests. He is rarely satisfied with a quick clearance and often takes opponents on to break free and give himself extra time and space to make better use of the ball. Young defender Campbell McKenzie was another who responded to the challenges involved in minimising the impact of dangerous opponents and ensured that he was never beaten in one on one contests as well as having the confidence and ability to win and effectively use many hard-won possessions.

In such a wonderful team effort Leigh and the assistant coaches really struggled to limit the number of players named in the best. The contributions of Ben Ainsworth and Tate Marsh were reflected by not only high numbers of vital stats but also the ability to win them in close and then use them positively. Defender Keenan Hughes again took a key opponent out of the game with his aerial skills that allowed him to spoil seven times as well as the ability to apply twelve tackles.

The next phase of the boy’s season sees them travel to Craigieburn to take on the Calder Cannons. Based on the boy’s rapid rise up the steep TAC Cup learning curve, this is a winnable match and Leigh will continue to demonstrate the belief in their ability to respond to his challenges. After such a fine total, team effort the boys owe it to themselves to keep it going and continue to commit to the team’s game plan. There is still room for further improvement and the boys now know this. It means that the Cannons will be under extreme pressure and will find it very hard to shake off the persistent Power team.