Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

In a very strong team performance, ENGIE Gippsland Power showed just how much progress they have made in the 2016 TAC Cup season when they totally outplayed the Northern Knights. Coach Leigh Brown has always believed that they had the capacity to be competitive against any side in the elite competition, but, the main problem was that they didn’t share his optimistic viewpoint.

Throughout the season he, and his assistant coaches Scott McDougal, Rhett McLennan and Peter Mongta, have slowly but surely helped the boys to develop more appropriate levels of self-belief and the quality of their performances has reflected this improvement. Once again they applied themselves confidently to the challenges that the coaches asked them to meet and, throughout the match, they never allowed the Knights to have easy possessions anywhere on the ground.

The Power went into the match with only one change to the team as Will Stephenson was rested and highly talented youngster, Tyrone Hayes, returned from school football commitments. After recording two very impressive wins over top teams Geelong and Calder, the Power had a “downer” against Eastern. Leigh again placed his faith in the boys to respond to the need to be totally focussed on the demands of this game and they showed quickly that they were more than ready to respond positively to his confidence in them.

It was obvious in the opening minutes of the match that the Power’s renowned hardness in contested issues was back. They used typically strong play from defence to allow Deven Costigan and Julian Patterson to combine to set up Nathan Voss for the first goal. Aidan Quigley applied more forward pressure to win a free kick deep in the pocket and he coolly slotted the side’s second. From the resultant centre bounce, the Knights scored a crucial goal to remind the boys that they were ready to exploit opportunities to hit the scoreboard.

Some very deft ruckwork by Patterson gave Voss the chance to snap a stunning goal and then great forward pressure, as demonstrated by Will Leslie, set up Nick Hogan to kick another and give the Power a twenty points lead by the end of the first quarter. It had been a fine term by the Power, typified by their levels of intensity in contests and the fact that they had worked hard to have three times the number of forward fifty entries as the Knights.

It didn’t take long for the Knights to remind the Power that they needed to be aware in contests as they opened the scoring at the start of the second quarter. The Power responded well with their trademark willingness to hit hard in tight contests and Voss turned provider for Trent Armour to take full advantage and reply for the side. Armour then used his uncanny ability to have second and third efforts in contests to combine with Josh Patullo and Ben Ainsworth snapped an impressive goal.

Later in the term, Ainsworth took a good contested mark and then took full advantage of a fifty metre penalty to give the side a thirty two point lead at the long break. Once again the Power had dominated all the critical contested statistics and had used excellent teamwork to use the ball effectively when they won the ball. The real test for the Power was how hard they would be willing to work for the rest of the match and Leigh again showed them that he had faith in their ability to keep up the intensity for four quarters.

Led by Leslie and Cody Henness, they attacked long and direct and once again Voss took full advantage of their unselfish and very purposeful play. Costigan won a tight contest and then used his pace to break clear and go long and direct. Captain, Ainsworth was “Johnny-on-the-spot” yet again and snapped his third for the match. As if on cue, the Knights scored a relatively easy goal after some slackness by the Power and they knew straight away that they needed to remain focussed on Leigh’s game plan.

As they upped the intensity in the contest, Patullo belied his 198cm stature, won the ball at ground level and snapped a fine goal to give the side a forty-six point lead by the last change. Once again the Power had dominated the key contested ball statistics and had three times the number of forward fifty entries as well as over forty crunching tackles.

In the initial part of the last quarter Armour again did the “one-percent” things to telling effect and allowed Kade Renooy to take full advantage of a rare move in to forward line. In what appeared to be over-confidence, the Power used far too many unnecessary handballs and the Knights took full advantage of the obvious turnover that resulted. As if they hadn’t learned the lesson, they allowed the Knights to kick another and doubts about the potential for a four-quarter effort loomed.

To add to this concern, they then began to miss hard-won scoring opportunities and it took some stunning team work to bring the ball from deep in defence and score the goal of the game. Hard-nosed youngster, Callum Porter, was heavily involved in two parts of the play that allowed Leslie to kick a wonderful goal and it meant that the Power were able to run out winners by forty-seven points.

Final scores; ENGIE Gippsland Power 12 goals 13 behinds 85 points defeated Northern Knights 5 goals 8 behinds 38 points, Gola kickers; Ben Ainsworth and Nathan Voss 3, Nick Hogan, Aidan Qigley, Will Leslie, Josh Patullo, Trent Armour and Kade Renooy 1.

Josh Patullo went into the match under deep personal pressure due to the passing of his grandfather earlier in the week. Given such challenging circumstances, few youngsters can be expected to respond positively but Josh stood extremely tall, and dominated the match. He was the key part of a dominant rucking combination with Julian Patterson, won many possessions at ground level as well as taking seven contested marks.

From the start of the match Ben Ainsworth showed his team mates what sort of team-oriented and highly competitive football Leigh expected from the side. His twenty five possessions, ten tackles, six marks and three goals reflected his impressive statistical contribution but his support and leadership when he didn’t have the ball was equally as important. Defender Corey Timms has been very impressive in the second half of the season and once again had the confidence and skill to beat opponents one-on-one. Crucially he used strong marking and gutsy ground work to win many possessions in contests and generate attacking passages of play.

Will Leslie has also stood tall for much of the season with amazing pace and agility as well as excellent aerial skills in tight contests. He too had impressive tallies in all important statistics but, like fellow leader Ben Ainsworth, was also critical in using his body and voice to show how his team mates needed to play. Up forward Trent Armour again was asked to belie his stature and take on taller opponents in key positions. He not only won many of the aerial contests but really stood out when the ball was at ground level with a stunning work rate that was typified by second and even third efforts in the tightest contests.

Defender Sean Masterson was another to excel in a key position as he totally outplayed opponents in the air as well as at ground level. Not content with this contribution, he also was able to set up many highly effective passages of attacking football with his willingness to use his pace and long kicking to telling effect. After being held back by injury early in the season, Callum Porter has quickly established himself as a key member of the team’s mid-field unit. His twenty plus possessions and ten plus tackles per game reflect the level of his importance and he seems to thrive on the challenges involved in such a contribution.

The Power now has one game left in the season against the Bendigo Pioneers and Leigh and his assistants will ensure that they a mentally prepared to have the positive approach necessary to finish their season off in the best possible way. They have made stunning progress in a very steep TAC Cup learning curve and will be very keen to give the impressive bottom-agers the best possible finish to this year in preparation for 2017.