GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

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ENGIE Gippsland Power finished off their 2016 TAC Cup season in the best possible way with a very strong win for the Kevin Evans trophy against the Bendigo Pioneers. Although they are unable to play finals football this year, the boys able to play next season, will deservedly go into preparation for the 2017 TAC Cup season will be in in the best mental condition. Their end of season form has come after responding so positively to a challenge issued by Coach Leigh Brown seven weeks earlier.

With only two wins on the board with five rounds to go, he spoke to the boys at the end of training and told them that he believed that they could win the last five games of the season. Importantly he didn’t say that they might achieve this, but that he believed that they would win these matches. For the rest of the season he continued to demonstrate his faith in them and their physical and mental capabilities. To their enormous credit, they played the sort of football that more than justified his opinion and were superb in the last game.

With almost a full team of the current squad available for selection again next year, and having had nine bottom-agers play in the last game, the club now has the nucleus for a team that already knows what’s required to be competitive in this elite competition. More importantly, they played critical role in defeats of top teams and will not only have had their self-belief reinforced but will also be ready to be the ideal role models to the talented newcomers who have been part of the under-sixteen program this year.

In windy conditions at IKON Park, the Power opened the game with their typical hardness in all contests, and had the Pioneers on the back foot as a result. However, despite having the ball constantly in attack, they missed many scoring opportunities due to poor finishing skills. After ten minutes of such wasteful football, the Pioneers capitalised on a rare entry up forward. The Power finally did the right thing after Callum Porter used a free kick to link up with Kade Renooy and allow Will Leslie to snap truly.

Instead of being inspired by this, the Power wasted more scoring opportunities and, crucially, allowed the Pioneers to kick three more gaols as the result of turnovers and rebound football. The boys had controlled the game everywhere except where it mattered most, the scoreboard. They were eleven points down but had three times as many forward fifty entries as the Pioneers. Importantly they were still in the match but Leigh needed one of give one of his more “subtle” messages at the first change.

It didn’t take long for the Power to show Leigh that they were listening as Josh Patullo and Nick Hogan combined to go long and direct into attack and Cody Henness used excellent forward pressure to cap it off. Another wasted forward entry allowed the Pioneers to score another “gift” rebound goal, but Hogan again used the ball well to allow Ben Ainsworth to show the team how to kick goals under pressure. Some more hard-won scoring opportunities were wasted but, finally, better ball use by Callan McKeon, Ainsworth, Porter and Renooy was finished off by Trent Armour.

Just when it appeared as if the Power were ready to finally capitalise on their hard work, the Pioneers again effectively used three of their few forward entries and went to the long break fifteen points up. Closer analysis of the situation clearly showed that the Power were still dominating every key statistic but the match score. They had kicked only four goals from fourteen scoring shots while the Pioneers had managed eight majors from nine such opportunities.

Further “encouragement” from Leigh and his assistants set a real challenge for the Power and they opened the second half with effective ball use by Tate Marsh set up Ainsworth for his second goal. The problems of the first half re-emerged as another turnover gave the Pioneers another gift goal. To add insult to injury, they then wasted more goal kicking chances due to poor finishing after working so hard to set up “gettable” shots at goal.

Jim Harrison got the ball rolling and linked up with Ainsworth and Hogan and this time Jai Rout finished it off. This inspired some terrific skill and vision and it gave Nathan Voss the chance to kick a stunning goal. He then turned provider when he used excellent forward pressure to allow Hogan to join the goal kickers. The Pioneers kept themselves in the game after the Power gave away a ‘dumb” free kick, but there was still plenty of time left in the quarter.

With the match up for grabs the Power literally moved into overdrive and began to use the ball with much greater vision, purpose and effectiveness. Deven Costigan and Rout set the new standard and Hogan gratefully accepted the opportunity. After moving up forward, Renooy was able to use his clever finishing skills to kick two gaols after some superb team work was used to get the ball from defence quickly and extremely efficiently.

In the last minutes of the quarter, the magic of Voss was again in use and he snapped an un-gettable goal from deep in the forward pocket. By the end of the term the Power had a twenty-one point lead but, far more importantly, had finally won domination in the part of the game where it mattered most, the score board. Their eight goals from eleven scoring chances final redressed their earlier wasteful finishing and the Pioneers were struggling to remain competitive.

Just to remind the Power to say focussed, the Pioneers kicked the first goal of the last quarter after another defensive error and then they fell into the other problem area of the first half, poor finishing up forward. Once again captain, Ainsworth had to set the example and he kicked truly after a hard-won free kick. Not to be outdone, the Pioneers again goaled but it was to be their last for the match as the Power stepped up the intensity and finished the game off brilliantly.

Once again Hogan was the initiator as he combined with Julian Patterson who sent the ball long and direct to allow Renooy to demonstrate his unique skills as a forward. He was far from done with and again capped off excellent forward pressure by teammates to snap his fourth for the match. Another long attacking move from the bounce resulted in an “iffy” free to Renooy and, naturally. He didn’t waste the chance to kick his fifth major.

Almost as if it was part of a script, Patullo and Ainsworth combined brilliantly form the resultant centre bounce and Ben kicked the last goal to give the side a well-deserved forty-one point win after such a highly inefficient first half. They had kicked thirteen goals from nineteen scoring shots and ended up with more goals than points as a consequence. The size of the final margin was a much more fitting reflection of how hard they had worked and dominated all the important contested statistics.

Final scores; ENGIE Gippsland Power 17 goals 16 behinds 116 points, defeated Bendigo Pioneers 12 goals 5 behinds 77 points. Goal kickers; Kade Renooy 5, Ben Ainsworth 4, Nick Hogan and Nathan Voss 2, Will Leslie, Cody Henness, Trent Armour and Jai Rout 1.

In a match that was vitally important for this team as well as the 2017 side, on-field leadership was crucial. Ben Ainsworth led the way in every key area with his many hard-won contested possessions, his bone-crunching tackles and ability to do the one percent things to support team mates. He capped off a stunning match with four critical goals. After spending so much time in defence this season, Kade Renooy has been a leader in this area and did so again in the first half. However, he relished the chance to become a finisher up the other end and kicked amazing goals from seemingly difficult positions and under intense pressure.

In his last game with the Power, Josh Patullo again showed why he has been such a vital player during the past three seasons. He dominated the rucking contests, won many contested marking duels and again showed the balance, skill and poise to be as creatively effective when the ball was at ground level and in tight situations. He was brilliantly supported by his “apprentice” Julian Patterson who belied his relative inexperience to match the stunning contribution made by Josh. He is on an incredibly steep TAC Cup learning curve and has the physical and mental ability to use his height, agility and reading of play to be a play maker as well as do the aerial things.

Another “veteran” to go out on a high was Will Leslie and he too led by example. Will is renowned for his speed and agility and once again used them to full effect. He backed his judgement to win many contested balls and then went one step further to run and generate positive passages of team play all day. Defender Sean Masterson is another who has thrived at both ends of the ground all season. He stood tall against the tallest Pioneer’s forwards and kept them out of the game with his aerial skills and balance once the ball was free. Considering the easily the Pioneers were able to go into attack his contribution was vital.

In such a fine performance the coaches were keen to mention the contributions of other players to the team focussed result. Key forward Trent Armour again proved a target for others but really excelled with the hard work needed in the thickest of the action at ground level. Will Stephenson was another to excel in the contested issues and then had the confidence and skill to use the ball effectively. His contribution was matched by Jim Harrison who amassed an impressive tally of contested possessions and hard tackles when it mattered most. In defence Corey Timms was in the thick of the action and combined his contested aerial skills and hardness at ground level to defeat opponents and win his own possessions.

Unlike “normal” football clubs the Power are always in the middle of a four-year development program with Peter Francis and Leigh Brown working closely with three separate groups all year. As a consequence, they are ready to move forward at all times and have eighteen players with TAC Cup experience ready to become the nucleus of the 2017 team. They have also the opportunity to have up to five nineteen year olds who have AFL draft potential to remain in the system. Recent AFL inclusions, Tom Papley and Anthony McDonald-Tipungwuti represent the quality of the sort of player give such an opportunity.

Both Peter and Leigh have been heavily involved in the 2016 under sixteen development program and there are twenty-five boys who have been through this. Five of these players, Xavier Duursma, Kyle Reid, Nick Lowden, Kyle Dunkley and Irving Mosquito have had national under sixteen championships experience and Xavier has already played two games with the Power as well.

The final stage of the club’s ongoing program is the under fifteens and two groups of twenty three boys are being selected from over one hundred chosen last year from the club’s region that stretches across Gippsland from Pakenham to the NSW border. Once again the club is very aware of all of these boy’s skills and their potential to develop further. The coaches, Rob Reid and Ricky Galea and others involved are excited about the quality of the members of both of the squads being prepared for the up-coming competition in late September.