GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

For the second week in a row, engie Gippsland Power went down in a TAC Cup match with the Murray Bushrangers despite being highly competitive for much of the game. As they had done in their opening game against the Stingrays, the Power had many opportunities to apply scoreboard pressure but, were unable to convert far too many gettable scoring options. To add salt to the self-inflicted wound, it was their ball skills and decision making under pressure that further added to the coach’s headaches as they get to work for the next match against the Pioneers at Bendigo.

Going into the match the Power made two selection changes with Tom Fleming and Bailey Beck making their debuts for the club and there was an element of optimism after showing so much in the Stingrays match. The game opened with a gusty wind favouring the eastern end of the ground and, seemingly, to the Bushies advantage. The Power were playing with their trademark hardness in every contested issue but, were wasting the hard-won opportunities to convert them positively.

To add insult to injury, the Bushies were far more clinical with their ball use and some indecisive defence gave them their opening goal. This seemed to inspire the Power to up the ante and they minimised their errors and set up their own scoring opportunities. However, simple shots were missed and the Bushies replied with a “gift” goal after a soft umpiring decision. By the first break the Bushies led by nine points and it could have been much more but for the Power’s ability to apply intense pressure in contests.

In the opening minutes of the second term, the Power took the initiative and once again created easy scoring opportunities. Instead of kicking goals, they scored one point and were unable to apply pressure where it mattered most, the scoreboard. It took some outstanding forward pressure by Cody Henness to allow Callum Porter to finally break the drought but, once again, the boys let themselves down with a critical skill error. It was frustrating to watch the Power go to the long break twelve points down considering how much they had controlled most of the general play with their unique work ethic.

To have scored only one goal from sixteen forward fifty entries was an obvious issue for the coaches to address but, they could never have questioned their willingness to put the Bushies under intense pressure with a stunning number of tackles for the quarter. If the second term highlighted the boy’s commitment, the third was their worst for at least the past year as they seemed to take their decision making to a new low.

They gave the Bushies three goals due terrible decision making and skill errors and, then they further added to the problem, by missing more hard-won but easily gettable scoring opportunities themselves. The Bushies had extended their lead to thirty four points and Leigh had the tough job of trying to get the boys to refocus and reward their hard work with goals. To the casual observer it appeared as if the Bushies were ready to break free from the Power pressure but the boy’ fitness was not to be underestimated if Leigh’s message was adhered to.

Another missed scoring opportunity by the Power seemingly let the Bushies off the hook but, great work by Nick Hogan, allowed his Sale team mate Will Stephenson to finally kick a vital goal. The Power were once again controlling a lot of general play with their unique level of intense pressure and they were reducing the errors that had been so costly during the match. Some excellent decisions and skills by rookies Grady Cocksedge, Kim Drew and Stephenson allowed Sean Masterson to kick their second for the term.

As if on cue, the Bushies replied but, the Power were not done with just yet. Typically hard-nosed forward pressure by Xavier Duursma and Matt McGannon resulted in another opportunity for Masterson and he converted truly. By the final siren the Bushies had recorded a four goal victory but, the Power had been highly competitive for much of the match. Due to this the coaches have lots of positive to focus on next week but, the costly errors must be addressed if the hard work is to be rewarded where it matters most.

Final scores, Murray Bushrangers 7 goals 13 behinds 55 points defeated engie Gippsland Power 4 goals 7 behinds 31 points. Goal kickers, Sean Masterson 2, Will Stephenson and Callum Porter 1.

With the defenders under undue pressure because of the error count, some-one needed to step up and lead the way. Travis Bindley has a well-deserved reputation for his disciplined work ethic and added a vital element to his “tool-kit” in this game. Not only did he soundly defeat dangerous opponents, but also won and clinically many possessions himself. Up forward, AFL Academy member, CJ Jiath, demonstrated his unique aerial skills, pace and evasive talents to win and effectively use many of his possessions. However, his goal kicking let him down badly and he will need to address this if he is to realise his enormous potential.

Rookie big man Brad Daniel was another to add to his repertoire when he not only was highly competitive in the rucking contests but also did well in key areas at ground level. He worked very hard to win and effectively use many possessions as well as applying excellent pressure with crunching tackles. Fellow newcomer Kim Drew statistically played a fine game but, closer analysis of his twenty plus possessions and ten plus tackles highlights his true value of his work ethic to the side. Most of his possessions were won in tight, often physical contests and his tackles were inflicted when, seemingly, the Bushies appeared ready to cut loose.

Key position player Sean Masterson has a wonderful work ethic against the best tall players in the TAC Cup and, once again, took on and defeated the Bushies best forwards. Leigh needed his work rate in attack in the second half and he won and clinically used many vital possessions as he answered his coach’s challenge. Inexperienced but, highly talented ruckman Julian Patterson, was another to make a solid contribution in the aerial contests but really excelled in general play. His twenty possessions, many intercept marks and ability to apply tackling pressure at ground level were a vial part of his most complete game for the Power.

A real highlight for the Power occurred before the under eighteen match when the club’s highly rated under sixteen team totally outplayed the Bushies by over nine goals. All at the club have been well aware of the boys amazing individual potential but, they have taken it to another level with their ability to combine as a wonderful team unit. Considering the fact that four of the team’s best eight players are missing due to injury and other elite sporting commitments, it has the club eagerly anticipating the contributions some of them could make to the main team later in this season and for the side in 2018.

Round three of the 2017 TAC Cup season sees the boys venture to take on the Bendigo Pioneers at the historic Queen Elizabeth Oval. All of the country based sides will be in action on Saturday to assist the Victorian Country selectors get a squad ready for the national championships later this year. Based on the many positives based on intense pressure that have been so impressive this season, the Power look ready to be highly competitive in this match. However, if they can’t minimise the errors that have so costly so far this year, the Pioneers will be sure to take telling advantage.