Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

Engie Gippsland Power finally got their 2017 TAC Cup season going with a morale boosting four goal victory against Bendigo Pioneers at the historic Queen Elizabeth Oval. After losing narrowly to the Dandenong Stingrays and Murray Bushrangers the Power were able to minimise the errors that had been so costly in these games. Coach Leigh Brown had maintained his faith in their ability and proven work ethic and they repaid him handsomely with a stunning team based victory.

In each game so far this season, the Power have started slowly and finished strongly, often outscoring the opposition for the rest of the match. The obvious positive factor in each match was a combination of the Power’s trademark intensity and their superior fitness. Once again they put the opposition under extreme physical and mental pressure for the entire match and ran the Pioneers ragged the further the game went. In doing so, they kicked nine second half goals to the Pioneers one and dominated all the key statistical indicators as well.

On paper, things didn’t go well for the boys before the match started as they went into the game without key players Aidan Quigley and CJ Jiath who had AFL Academy obligations and Will Leslie due to injury. On a very positive note they finally had key forward Austin Hodge back after injury and his unique talents gave the side a lot more potency. Ben McKinnon made his TAC Cup debut and Will Gibson regained his spot in the side. Consequently, there were thirteen rookies in the twenty four selected players and they needed a great deal of on-field leadership from the remaining “old-timers.”

Early in the first term, the Power had the initiative and scored the opening goal after some excellent forward pressure by Callum Porter and Sean Masterson allowed Matt McGannon to snap a clever goal. As they had done in the opening two games, the Power allowed the opposition to regain the momentum as the result of poor decisions and skill errors and the Pioneers were able to kick three easy goals. In stark contrast, the Power missed “gettable” shots and it took a long and direct kick up forward by Ben McKinnon to set Jack Hudson for a timely reply.

This seemed to inspire the Power and they upped the ante with forward pressure by Irving Mosquito giving Hudson the chance to kick his second major. Not to be outdone, the midfield unit quickly took the ball forward and, this time, Will Broadbent took full advantage of the resultant free kick. Just when it appeared that the Power were going to have a well-deserved lead, the Pioneers gratefully accepted a “gift” goal after a terrible defensive skill error by the Power. This gave them a one point lead at the first change but, supporters of both sides, had some serious issues with the consistency of their team’s efforts.

The key issue for the Power was the inefficiency of their ball use up forward as they had twice as many forward fifty entries compared to the Pioneers but managed to kick the same number of goals. Things didn’t look any different early in the second term for the Power as they once again missed easy shots and were wasting hard won possessions with “iffy” skills. One such unnecessary turnover resulted in a Pioneer goal but, pleasingly, Porter and Masterson cleverly set up a goal for Kim Drew to score.

The rest of the second quarter was all the Pioneers as they took telling advantage of four “clangers” by the Power. Put simply, the Power were kicking poorly after working hard to win vital possessions and, and subsequently, undid most the effectiveness of these excellent efforts. By the long break the Pioneers led by twenty eight points but, more importantly, seemed to have the momentum totally in their favour.

Instead of reading the riot act to the boys, Leigh took a less obvious and far more effective path during the critical half time session. He praised their work ethic in contests all over the ground and urged them to apply even more pressure. Crucially, he used the term, simple, to refer to the costly skill errors and told them that they could solve the problem themselves with some minor “fine-tuning” based on his faith in their ability to do so.

His faith must have been shaky in the opening minutes of the third quarter when they squandered three hard-won opportunities. It took an inspirational “captain’s” goal by Will Stephenson to get the momentum going their way and it didn’t take long for the boys to capitalise on this. Ben Patterson, Grady Cocksedge, Xavier Duursma and Austin Hodge went long and direct from deep in defence and, once again Stephenson finished it off skilfully. As if inspired, Nick Lowden and Kyle Reid used strength and intense pressure to create another vital goal.

It took more direct ball use by Hodge and Reid to create yet another scoring opportunity and this time it was Broadbent who capped off the effective ball use. They had almost removed the finishing errors but had applied even more intense pressure in contests all over the ground. Even the luck with umpires went their way as Masterson was gifted a gaol as the result of a terrible decision on the goal line. From the resultant centre bounce, Nick Hogan and Bailey Beck combined cleverly and Stephenson kicked another “blinder.”

The Power now led by twelve points but closer analysis showed a lot more than merely what the scoreboard indicated. The first was that they had kept the Pioneers gaol less, the second was that they had nearly three times as many forward fifty entries than the Pioneers and the tackle total for the Power was in the thirties, almost unheard of at this level. A delighted coach had a very basic request during the final break ……..just keep it simple. They had done so perfectly in the third quarter and he knew that they were ready to keep it all going their way in the last term.

More simple opportunities were wasted in the opening minutes of the last term and, the Pioneers added insult to injury, with the opening goal of the quarter. Some excellent ball use by McGannon and Hogan set up Hudson for a vital goal and both sides then worked hard to limit each other’s scoring chances. Once again, the Power seized the initiative and some outstanding pressure by Lowden gave Reid his second. The superior fitness of the Power was really obvious the longer the game went and they outran the Pioneers to allow Mosquito to set up Masterson for his second major.

The dominance of the Power in the last term was obvious on the scoreboard but another statistic gave even further indication of how well they had finished the game off. They had only applied twenty tackles for the quarter when such a total normally indicated a negative reading for the team. However, in this match the small total of tackles was due to the fact that the Pioneers never had the ball in their possession for long enough to require them due to the dominance of the Power.

Final scores, engie Gippsland Power 14 goals 15 behinds 99 points defeated Bendigo Pioneers 10 goals 13 behinds 73 points. Goal kickers, Will Stephenson and Jack Hudson 3, Sean Masterson, Kyle Reid and Will Broadbent 2, Matt McGannon and Kim Drew 1.

The progress of ruckman Julian Patterson through a very steep TAC Cup learning curve has been excellent and, once again he showed just how important he has become to the side. He dominated the aerial contests as well as being just as effective in general play around the ground. His skilful palming of the ball was the key element of many of the team’s goals. Will Stephenson made a poignant speech to teammates prior to the match and then went out and set a stunning example to then as to how to respond to his challenge. His three goals were important but, his hard work at the base of packs resulting in an impressive number of contested possessions and tackles was even more valuable.

Young defender Xavier Duursma responded manfully to the undue pressure that was applied by the Pioneers in the first half. However, when the Power took control, he turned defence into attack with his willingness to win, and effectively use, many possessions. Travis Bindley has been a standout in defence so far this season and, once again, he totally blitzed dangerous opponents with his hard-nosed and disciplined defence. He too took it to another level as the game progressed and he became the generator of many positive passages of play.

Rookie Kim Drew is another to impress in each game this season and is quickly becoming a key member of the Power’s all-important midfield unit. His combination of strength in tight contests and clever use of the ball were again in evidence and he added excellent contested marks to his burgeoning repertoire of skills. Throughout the match Nick Hogan was in the thick of the tightest action and won over thirty vital possessions as a result. When you add nine tackles to his contribution it adds up to a significant day’s work but, his leadership in the second half blitz, cannot be underestimated as he initiated many of the goal scoring opportunities.

It would be unfair to limit the number of players mentioned in such a fine team performance. Tall utility player Sean Masterson has a well-deserved reputation for doing well in attacking and defensive positions. Once again he took on a beat the Pioneer’s best defender and, in doing so, provided his side with a highly effective avenue to attack as well as kicking them himself. Top-age newcomer Jack Hudson was again a key member of the side with three goals but really emphasised his impact with his intense activity in contests at ground level as well as in aerial duels against taller opponents.

The Power now has a week off from TAC Cup football but, several players will be beginning their work with the 2017 Vic Country state squad for the national championships. Some of the squad will have the opportunity to return to their local clubs and demonstrate how they have developed during their time with the Power this season.