Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

After the disappointment of their narrow loss to the Western Jets last week, the Engie Gippsland Power and their coach, Leigh Brown, had worked hard to address the issues that had led them to that point. With a combined focus on team and a more efficient form of ball use, they went into the match against the Sandringham Dragons with a level of commitment and focus that had been missing for critical moments of their matches so far this season.

On paper, they faced an insurmountable task to overcome the unbeaten Dragons but, fate had assisted them a little. The Dragons went into the match with several players missing due to school football commitments, a problem that bedevils many metropolitan teams during each season. Despite this, the Dragons still appeared ready for the challenges involved but had failed to take into account the fact that the Power had shown some excellent form in each game in the 2017 season.

Leigh is renowned for showing genuine, deep-seated belief in the boy’s ability to respond to such a severe challenge and they went into this match ready to repay his faith in them. With a combination of their traditional ability to apply intense physical and metal pressure on opponents and a renewed emphasis on team, they started the match better than any other game so far this season. Some excellent pressure, vision and skill was applied by Irving Mosquito and it allowed Will Stephenson to kick the opening goal.

Not to be outdone, Bailey Beck stepped up with similar poise and class to link up with Nick Hogan and this time it was Kim Drew who capped it off with a strong, contested mark and goal. Once again the ball was sent forward after some good defence and Jack Hudson was able to kick long and direct into the forward line. Bottom-ager Xavier Duursma took a stunning “speccie” and kicked the side’s third for the term. It was the Dragons turn for a little good luck and they kicked the next two majors after some assistance from the umpires.

With little time left in the quarter, the Dragons levelled the scores but Stephenson and Callum Porter had other things in mind. They combined to use their renowned toughness to set up Mosquito to take his version of a “speccie” and the resultant goal gave the Power a six point lead at the first change. For the first time this season, the Power led at quarter time and had demonstrated the sort of team focus that Leigh had expected from them. Adding to this new scenario was the fact that they had used their forward fifty entries to telling effect and this was to be the vital detail for much of the rest of the game.

Early in the second term, the Power’s ability to apply intense forward pressure was rewarded when Nick Lowden found Stephenson who snapped his second. The Power midfield was dominating the match but an injury to Nick Hogan meant that they needed to readjust to ensure that they maintained this vital element of their excellent form. A long and direct forward entry by Hudson found his skipper, Aidan Quigley and he finished it off with his customary aplomb. Just when it appeared as if the Power were starting to get the match under their control, the Dragons scored from the resultant centre bounce and it was again “game on.”

Some more great work by Stephenson in the middle saw Hudson take a fine contested mark and he again gave the Power a three gaol lead. As if on cue, the Dragons kicked avital goal but it was to be their last for the term. Youngster, Boadie Motton, seemed inspired by his leaders and he applied stunning forward pressure to initially win the ball and then kick a fine goal. In the final minutes of the quarter, some outstanding forward pressure by Stephenson was capped off skilfully by Duursma and this gave the Power a twenty-three point lead by the long break.

It had been the Power’s best half of football for the season as a result of their outstanding efficiency up forward and continued ability to apply levels of intense pressure unmatched in the competition. Further detailed analysis of their first half showed a very effective balance between kicks and handballs and the growing ability of the play makers to take the time to ensure that they wasted few of their hard-won possessions. This meant that the turnovers that had been costly in other games were minimised and the Dragons entries into their attack were in single figures in the second quarter.

It was the Dragons who took the early initiative in the “premiership quarter” after some uncharacteristically sloppy defence by the Power. They replied brilliantly with the usual intense pressure by Duursma and Will Broadbent and it was Julian Patterson’s turn to take a strong mark and goal. The dragons replied with a goal from the centre bounce and, once again they were back in the game. To add insult to injury, the Power wasted several forward fifty entries for the rest of the quarter and went to the last change twenty points ahead.

Leigh and his line coaches had many positives to focus on in terms of what had worked so well for much of the match. A subtle reminder of the disappointing loss last week from a very similar scenario was also a factor in his challenge to the boys. However, even he could not have been prepared for what they were about to do in an exemplary quarter of stunning team football. It was Duursma who started things off with forward pressure and he combined with Quigley to give Porter a chance to take his contested mark and kick a vital goal.

The Power were making the Dragons second guess themselves with their actual and implied pressure and youngster Lowden linked up with the relentless Stephenson to allow Mosquito to kick an amazing goal. Lowden then worked with Quigley to set up Stephenson for his third goal and, suddenly, the Dragons were on the back foot and struggling to have the time and space to get any effective ball use going. The ability and willingness of the forwards to apply intense pressure was again in evidence and this time it was Drew and Matt McGannon who found Stephenson for his fourth goal.

Not only were the Dragons really finding it hard to cope with the pressure that the boys were applying but were also under the pump because of the Power’s superior fitness at the end of the match. More pressure resulted in a free kick to Cody Henness and he coolly slotted another goal from deep in the pocket. From the resultant centre bounce, Lowden and McGannon used strength and skill to find Patterson for another mark up forward and he kicked his second goal.

Even more good team work resulted in Broadbent winning the ball in the forward pocket and he then managed to kick a stunning goal from an acute angle. In the final minutes of the match, more forward fifty pressure created an opportunity for McGannon and he skilfully created the time and space to become the twelfth Power goal kicker. Not only had the boys kicked eight unanswered goals in one term but they had played four quarters of the team focussed football that Leigh had challenged them to do in the week prior to the match.

In terms of following the specific game plan, the Power had done so perfectly but, had done something even more important in terms of the rest of this season. They had finally started a game positively and had crucially, overcome a defeat that could have undermined their ability to be competitive for the 2017 TAC Cup season. They demonstrated the self-belief that Leigh and his assistants have been working on and now look ready to build the sort of game that will enable them to be highly competitive for the rest of the year.

Critically it wasn’t just the key top-age players such as Stephenson, Quigley, Porter, Hogan, and Patterson who set the tone for the day but, youngsters such as Duursma, Beck, Mosquito, Bailey Patterson, Lowden, Cocksedge and Motton also made stunning contributions. The ultimate bonus was the role played by top-age debutants Drew and Hudson who also played the sort of football that was all about team and discipline rather than individual effort.

After the match the players, their families and supporters a well as the Power staff were delighted with the boys performance and there is bound to be very keen to use of the club’s amazing social media network. The clubs social media director, Kate Mitchell, takes and posts over three hundred photos per game as well as providing on the spot data of the match as it progresses. There will be some amazing snaps of the game available now and many of the boys and their parents will be able to add to the selections that they have already accessed.

Final scores engie Gippsland Power 18 goals 11 behinds 119 points defeated Sandringham Dragons 7 goals 8 behinds 50 points. Goal kickers; Will Stephenson 4, Xavier Duursma, Irving Mosquito and Julian Patterson 2, Aiden Quigley, Cody Henness, Matt McGannon, Callum Porter, Kim Drew, Will Broadbent, Boadie Motton and Jack Hudson 1.

On a day when strong leadership was required the Power’s midfield “mob” were at the forefront all day. To illustrate their impact, a statistical analysis of the contributions of Will Stevenson, Aiden Quigley and Callum Porter is a good start. Between them they had over fifty possessions, mostly contested, fifteen marks and over forty bone-crushing tackles. Not only did they each initiate continuous passages of stunning teamwork but, also were able to finish it off as well by kicking goals or being the key contributor in those kicked by teammates. To add the final gloss to their efforts, they were able to do this amazing work for four full quarters and in a way that gave teammates the confidence to back themselves to make positive contributions themselves.

Much of the midfield dominance was assisted by the ruckwork of Julian Patterson. He won many hit outs but was also able to amass many possessions around the ground in the air and at ground level. His two goals were the icing on the cake that was his most complete game. Matt McGannon was able to play a significant role on the wing, up forward and on the ball. He too was good in the air as well as being just as effective at ground level where he often backed himself to win the contested ball as well as breaking free by using his pace and skills. When the ball did enter the Dragons forward areas, Sean Masterson was able to be the one to be in the right place at the right time. He took his usual number of vital intercept marks as well as ensuring that he was able to generate attacking play with precise ball use.

The next round of the TAC Cup sees the Power going up to the delightful Healsville football ground to take on the Eastern Ranges. Based on their ability to apply themselves to the team game as shown against the Dragons they will give the Ranges a lot to be concerned with. Eastern will gleefully exploit any deviation from the team focus but Leigh and, more importantly the boys, have the elf-belief that they can continue to develop the commitment to make his strategy an on-going reality.