Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

In recent weeks, engie Gippsland Power have struggled to maintain the key elements of their game plan as their growing injury list robbed them of some of the on-field leaders critical to the task. After narrowly losing to the Calder Cannons the injury list grew with bottom-agers Bailey Beck, Irving Mosquito and Josh Wykes unavailable and their absence added to the stunning group already missing in the past few matches.

On a very positive note, the side’s best big man, Julian Patterson was available after resting last week and hard, on-baller Jack Hudson came back after suffering a niggling injury. As part of the altered list, Tom Murray and James McKenzie made their TAC Cup debuts. On paper, the Power side looked strong enough to be highly competitive against the Northern Knights but the key factor was how well they could follow the basic elements of the game plan.

Conditions at Morwell were ideal for good football and the Power opened the game positively with outstanding pressure by Travis Bindley, Grady Cocksedge and Sean Masterson set up Cody Henness for the opening goal. As has been the pattern for much of the season, the opposition were able to reply with a “gift “goal after some ill-discipline by the Power. Things were made even worse when the easily scored after bring the ball the full length of the ground with little or no pressure.

Importantly the Power responded with another goal by Henness after some precise ball use by Rylan Henkel and Will Stephenson. They were struggling to use the ball effectively when going into their forward fifty when often ignoring the long option. One of these errors of judgement allowed the Knights to rebound the ball and they went to the initial break nine points up. The Power had played some excellent football, especially when contesting the tightest issues but, once again struggled to take advantage of hard-won scoring opportunities.

Obviously Leigh had plenty of positives to focus on but the wastefulness up forward was the key issue in his address. Early in the second term, James McKenzie found Henness deep in the forward pocket and he slotted his third to put his side within a kick of the Knights. Young defender, Bailey Patterson initiated some direct play and combined with Callum Porter and Bindley to create a chance for Jack Hudson to put the side ahead again.

The next few scoring opportunities were wasted and then the Knights rubbed salt into these wounds by taking advantage of poor defence by the Power. It took some clever play by South Gippsland youngster Boadie Motton to set up Julian Patterson for a vital Power reply and then Kim Drew took full advantage of a gift from the umpires to extend the side’s lead. Another boy from over the hills, Matt McGannon, then applied excellent forward pressure to win the ball and put the team further ahead.

It appeared as if the Power were on task but, in the final minutes of the term, they let the Knights back into the game after some very poor defensive decisions again gifted them with two simple goals. At the end of the quarter the Power led by one point but it could, and should have been so much more. This gave Leigh and his assistants more positives to highlight but, the inability to finish off up forward was still the crucial area to be focussed on.

Once again, the Power opened the scoring at the start of the third quarter after some excellent pressure saw Aiden Quigley kick the critical goal. Almost as if following a script, the Knights replied with an easy goal on the rebound and then added to the frustration by getting another “soft” one from the resultant centre bounce. Some pressure applied by Hudson, Cocksedge and Stephenson gave Porter enough scope to kick a reply and then Thomas Murray used his strength to add another.

Another unnecessary turnover was exploited by the Knights but some outstanding skills by Porter and Hudson resulted in Henness kicking a ripper from well out. Instead of building on this, the Power grossly over-used hand ball and once again the Knights took clinical advantage from the inevitable turnover. At the last change, the scores were level but, once again the Power had squandered a lot of hard work to assert superiority where it mattered most, the score board.

It was Deja-vu at the last change for Leigh and the other coaches and they tried to keep the boys to remain focussed on what had worked so well for much of the game. Once again the Power started well but were unable to either go long into attack or, more importantly kick goals once within easy distance of the big sticks. Four such misses robbed them of a lead that should have put the game beyond the Knights and this was to be apparent soon after.

The Knights kicked three goals in the final minutes of the match to record a fourteen point win that is in no way a true reflection of how competitive the Power had been for much of the match. If, and it’s a big if, the Power had used their advantage of having ten more inside fifty scoring opportunities in the second half than the Knights then the result should have been very different. This has been part of the problem all year and it means that they don’t get enough credit for the hard work and disciplined play that had been behind much of it.

Final scores; Northern Knights, 13 goals 10 behinds 88 points defeated engie Gippsland Power 11 goals 8 behinds, Goal kickers, Cody Henness 4, Aiden Quigley, Matt McMahon, Callum Porter, Kim Drew, Julian Patterson, Thomas Murray and Jack Hudson 1.

Jack Hudson’s return from an ankle injury, gave the team another vitally competitive cog in the midfield unit that is so vital for the Power. He not only applies intense pressure in each contested issue with his ferocious tackling, but is equally as competitive in aerial contests where he wins many more vital possessions. Youngster, Bailey Patterson has quickly adjusted to the tempo of this elite competition and really shone out in this match. He was able to nullify dangerous opponents with his disciplined play but, crucially won and then effectively used over twenty possessions by backing his judgement to telling effect.

When the ball was directed positively into the forward zone, Cody Henness provided a highly effective target for team mates. He combined excellent aerial skills and accurate kicking to get his four goals but also worked hard in contests at ground level to give others a chance to get on the scoreboard. As he has done all season, Callum Porter was at the centre of much of the side’s positive play with his willingness to put his body on the line to win the tightest contests. He was able set up others with visionary and very unselfish use of the ball throughout the game. His twenty-plus possessions, five contested marks and a dozen tackles reflect his on-going impact on the team.

As mentioned earlier Boadie Motton is a youngster who has made a fine start to his TAC Cup career. He has wonderful skills but really excels in the tightest contests where he wins and then quickly and creatively uses the ball by hand and foot. He has made significant contribution in the midfield as a result of these qualities. In the all-important midfield Matt McGannon is another who stands tall but can also be moved to other vital areas and be equally as effective. He too had statistics such as nearly twenty possessions, five contested marks and six tackles that accurately reflected the impact of his unselfish play.

The extensive injury last has meant that Leigh has to put his faith in many of the bottom agers and they are climbing a very steep learning curve in the process. One of the youngsters who has made an impressive start is Grady Cocksedge who was a vital defender once again. He had over a dozen possessions but his one-percenters, the 13 tackles and 9 spoils show just how well he applies himself to the team goals.

The Power now has a bye before facing top side, the Geelong Falcons the following week at Colac. The time off will be taken up by state squad commitments for ten of the boys while others can return to their home clubs. Most importantly, the injury list at the Power could be reduced with key players Tyrone Hayes, Nick Hogan, Callan McKeon, Bailey Beck, Irving Mosquito and Austin Hodge ready to return to add critical stability and structure to the team.