Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

Round ten of the 2017 TAC Cup season presented engie Gippsland Power with a strong challenge after they had caused the upset of the season when they defeated the Geelong Falcons in their previous match. After losing several games narrowly earlier in the year, the Power needed to repeat this commitment and play consistently if they were to overcome the Greater Western Victoria Rebels at Casey Fields.

Injuries to strong defender Travis Bindley and dashing forward Irving Mosquito made the task more difficult and the fact that captain, Aidan Quigley was rested after state duties added to the problem they faced. On a very positive note, Austin Hodge, Will Leslie and Liam Carrol were back from injury while Cody Henness returned from the national championships. The Power has regularly had over ten bottom agers in the side and three youngsters, Rylan Henkel, Ben McKinnon and James McKenzie came in to give the team twelve “rookies” for such an important game.

Conditions at Casey were perfect for good football with a stunning surface and no wind, a rare occurrence at the Cranbourne ground. In the opening minutes of the term, the Power were playing their trademark intense football but were going too short by hand and foot when they used the ball. One such error in defence gave the Rebels the opening goal and they quickly added another to add to the pressure that the Power were under.

It took a wonderful ”speccy” mark and goal by midfielder Callum Porter to put the side on the scoreboard and then, some wonderful forward pressure by Jack Hudson and Kyle Reid set up Will Broadbent for their second major. The Rebels hit back after another defensive error “gifted” them with another goal and they added insult to injury by kicking a fourth on the rebound. From the resultant centre bounce, Will Stephenson went quick, long and direct where Reid contested strongly and Boadie Motton kicked a ripper on the run.

Once again Stephenson generated excellent team play as he linked with Xavier Duursma and he found Reid who gave the team a two point led at the first break. It had been a sound start by the Power but there was till scope for improvement with the boy’s finishing. Leigh used the opportunity to remind them of this fact after recognising the many positives that were evident in much of their play during the quarter.

An unlucky bounce allowed the Rebels to kick the opening goal of the second term but, great contested football by Bailey Beck and Stephenson set up Reid for a long goal. Stephenson became the finisher with a great goal off the pack but the Rebels replied courtesy of two deplorable umpiring errors. They then gave themselves a four point lead with another goal on the run and the Power found themselves regretting the missed scoring opportunities during the quarter.

The Power coaching panel were justifiably pleased with the endeavour of the side in contests all over the ground but, the turnovers were still being costly where it mattered most, the scoreboard. In the opening minutes of the premiership quarter the Power set up several scoring chances but were unable to convert them to goals. In stark contrast, the Rebels scored a vital goal from a rare forward thrust and this exemplified the problems that occurred when hard-won opportunities were squandered.

Once again, excellent pressure by Duursma and Beck was finished off by Stephenson and this seemed to inspire boys up forward. This time it was Tom Murray and Beck who applied the blowtorch so that Stephenson was able to kick another courageous and inspirational goal. From the resultant bounce, Julian Patterson and Porter combined and Reid finished it off with an excellent contested mark and goal.

Just when it looked likely that the Power were going to set up a good lead, the Rebels hit back with two “gifts.” Their first came after a defensive error by the Power and then an umpiring errors gave them the second. The Rebels led by one point but Leigh was far from pleased as he analysed the true factors behind the situation. It was a case of the Power letting themselves down once again with inefficient conversion of scoring opportunities.

At this elite level of football, an average of one goal for every four forward fifty entries is considered to be effective ball use. The Power have been far less effective for crucial times in each of their narrow losses and once again could only manage three goals despite going into the danger zone nineteen times for the quarter. Obviously, it gave Leigh a vital area to focus on during the break and he stressed that he believed that they could take control of the match if they answered this crucial challenge.

It took about fifteen seconds for Porter to set the standard for the side when he kicked a stunning long goal from the opening bounce. “Old-timer,” Sean Masterson went “QLD” to find Beck and he then followed suit so that Matt McGannon could kick a fine goal off the resultant pack. As if inspired, great pressure by Kim Drew put the ball long into attack and a Beck tackle set up Stephenson for his fourth running goal. The Rebels took advantage of another gift from the umpires but it didn’t deter the Power. Once again, forward pressure, this time a Masterson tackle, put the ball in Motton’s hand and he kicked a fine long goal.

From the centre bounce, pressure by Julian Patterson allowed Motton to go long into attack and, this time it was Duursma who finished it off. The Power’s superior fitness was obvious as they put even more intense pressure on the Rebels with tackling and their commitment to quick team football. They missed some chances to further extend their lead but the intensity continued. In the last minutes the Rebels scored another but Reid then took a fine intercept mark and kicked the Power’s sixth for the quarter.

Final scores engie Gippsland Power 15 goals 14 behinds 104 points defeated Greater Western Victorian Rebels 12 goals 5 behinds 77 points. Goal kickers, Will Stephenson and Kyle Reid 4, Callum Porter and Boadie Motton 2, Xavier Duursma, Matt McGannon and Will Broadbent 1.

After a stunning game against the Falcons, Callum Porter went up a notch with an even more amazing effort. His statistics of over thirty possessions, six marks, thirteen tackles and two goals tell the obvious story. However, his trademark clearances based on speed and strength enabled him to generate many of the side’s positive passages of team play. The side’s captain, Will Stephenson, worried the Rebels so much that they resorted to calling him “the Hobbit” to try to put him off his game. His four goals showed that it didn’t work but his tally of contested possessions, tackles and gutsy marks reflect his critical contribution to The Power’s dominance of the on-ball contests.

The third member of the “Bruise Brothers” in the Power midfield was Kim Drew. He too amassed a large number of contested possessions as well as over ten crunching tackles but this didn’t reflect his true impact on the game. The fact that he was often at the bottom of the biggest and most intense packs showed his willingness to commit to the all-important one-percenters for the team. Youngster, Boadie Motton has been on a steep learning curve this season and his rapid progress indicates his skill, pace, reading of the play and ability to take on and soundly beat opponents in one-on-one contests. He rarely wastes possessions by hand or foot and does this so quickly that you almost miss who it was that got play started.

Another South Gippsland youngster, Kyle Reid had shared Boadie’s rapid progress in defence and attack. He showed his potential to full effect as a key forward with the ability to take strong, contested marks and effectively apply intense pressure at ground level in the tightest packs when tackling or putting pressure on opponents. Skilled utility, Matt McGannon has been invaluable all season with his disciplined and committed play. Once again, he was able to be a stout defender, minimising the impact of dangerous opponents. Importantly, he was also able to have a huge impact when on the ball and up forward with his pace and silky skills used to full effect.

Sean Masterson has played a vital leadership in defence with his ability to take on and nullify the opposition’s most dangerous forwards. In doing so, he inspires youngsters like Patterson, Cocksedge and Carroll to back themselves. He did this again and then revelled in the opportunity to go up forward and use his aerial skills to full effect. At the other end of the age spectrum, Xavier Duursma belied his youth with another clever game in the midfield. He took on and defeated talented opponents and seemed to thrive as the intensity of the contests increased. Either in the aerial contests or at ground level he was able to be a consistent and effective contributor.

At the end of the match Leigh indicated how pleased he was with the way that the boys responded to his faith in their ability to follow the key elements of the game plan. The statistics reflected two vital factors that allowed this to happen. As expected, and as is the trademark of the Power, the side had over one hundred tackles and, as a result applied intense pressure on the Rebels all over the ground.

Far more importantly, they made much better use of the ball up forward despite the lapse of the third quarter. To score fifteen goals from fifty-five forward fifty entries is the sign of a top team in any competition and reversed the pattern of the season that has cost the team at least another four victories. It places the side in a strong position for the rest of the season if they can continue to apply themselves so well.

The next match sees them take on the highly placed Oakleigh Chargers at their home ground. Due to the under eighteen national championships, both sides will be without vital players but the Power has a key advantage under the TAC Cups rules. The teams have to play twelve bottom age players while the championships are on and the Power has been almost doing this all season.

As a result of this, youngsters like Xavier Duursma, Grady Cocksedge, Bailey Patteron, Liam Carroll, Bailey Beck, Nick Lowden, Kyle Reid, Will Broadbent, Brad Daniel and Boadie Motton have already adjusted to the pressure and tempo of the most elite junior competition in the nation. Added to this foresight by the club, Tom Murray, Rylan Henkel and James McKenzie have recently joined the team and are quickly adapting like the other youngsters on their steep progression curves.

As a result of this, Leigh and his fellow coaches find themselves in a much better position over the coming weeks compared to many other sides. Consequently, these bottom-agers will be crucial in not only maintaining the key elements of the game plan because they have already played such an important role in its development. They also have the opportunity and ability to take the advancement even further as they continue to respond so positively to the coach’s faith in them.