Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

Followers of engie Gippsland Power thought that the match against the Oakleigh Chargers was as good a demonstration of TAC Cup football as you would expect to see. They totally blitzed the Power with some outstandingly skilled and disciplined team football and it served as the perfect lesson for the Power about what’s needed to be competitive at the highest level of junior football in Australia.

When the Power then faced the highly rated Sandringham Dragons they showed that they had learned the lesson extremely well and did everything to be that competitive right up until the final minutes of the match. This meant that they were mentally ready for the challenges that the Eastern Ranges presented as they attempted to firmly establish themselves into the upper echelons of this elite competition.

On paper things looked to be difficult for the Power as the Ranges had seven of their Metro players back after their stunning contributions to the side’s victory. Included in this stellar group were three youngsters who have been rated as first round picks in the 2017 AFL Draft in November. The final plus for the Ranges was the fact that they had all of their players back from school football commitments and had their best side available for the first time this year.

Instead of being able to match the Ranges, the Power were on the back foot from the opening bounce and never at any stage could match it with them. The Ranges played more disciplined and direct team football than the Chargers and definitely made the Power look second rate. Their skill, pace and decision making were outstanding and they served notice to the rest of the competition that they are now ready to excel when it matters most.

In the opening minutes of the match, the Ranges set the tempo for the match by punishing Power mistakes with slick rebound football that gave them two easy goals. It took some more effective ball use by Will Stephenson to find Kyle Reid and he kicked truly. Instead of learning from this, the Power again allowed the Ranges to control their use of the ball on the rebound and had loose players ready to set up two more “gift” goals.

To add insult to injury, the Power wasted possible scoring opportunities before CJ Jiath kicked his first goal for the side after missing his nine previous shots this season. The margin at the first change was fifteen points but this really flattered the Power considering how little pressure they applied to the Ranges once they began to generate attacking football.

This looked worse early in the second quarter as the Ranges kicked the first two goals with almost no opposition form the Power. They were dominating the clearances from stoppages due to the dominance of their ruckmen and the skill and pace they used to get the ball away and then set up scoring opportunities. In direct contrast the Power had no system going and it took a clever snap by Austin Hodge to get a vital goal.

To further insult to the Power, the Ranges kicked another stunning goal from the resultant centre bounce and it seemed to inspire Will Leslie to kick a stunning, running goal from the next centre bounce. It didn’t take the Ranges long to re-establish control of the momentum as they slammed on two more majors with consummate ease on the rebound. By the end of the term, they led by thirty-six points but had hardly raised a sweat as the Power provided them with so many easy opportunities due to poor skill and or decision making.

The third term was not pretty footy as both sides wasted scoring opportunities despite working so hard to set them up. Late in the quarter, the Ranges restored the status quo by clinically exploiting unnecessary Power turnovers and playing incisive rebound football. They extended their lead to fifty seven points by the end of the term and had kept the Power goal less in the process.

Considering how well the Ranges had followed their game plan, the Power looked to be facing a severe mental challenge in the last quarter. Importantly, they upped their work rate and started to be more effective with their ball skills and decision making. They minimised the unnecessary turnovers and began to set up better scoring opportunities. One of these more effective passages of play allowed Sean Masterson to kick the opening goal of the quarter and seemed to give the side vital self-belief.

Youngster, Xavier Duursma initiated good ball use with Tom Murray and Kim Drew and then cleverly finished it off with an excellent goal. The Ranges regained the initiative in the last few minutes with another of their running goals and, by the end of the match, had recorded a fifty-four point victory. It was a sound win that could have been much bigger but for some hard work by the Power in the latter part of the match.

Final scores, Eastern Ranges 13 goals 18 behinds 96 points, defeated engie Gippsland Power 6 goals 6 behinds 42 points. Goal kickers CJ Jiath, Xavier Duursma, Austin Hodge, Will Leslie, Sean Masterson and Kyle Reid 1.

On a day when the Power really struggled to get their own game going, it was a bottom-ager who set the tone. Xavier Duursma defied his slight build to put himself in the tightest contests and then win vital possessions. He strove hard to use the effectively and rounded off a fine game by soundly beating talented opponents in the midfield. Defender Will Leslie was under intense pressure due to the quality of his opponents as well as the ease with which the Ranges were able to move the ball into attack. Not only did he withstand this pressure but he was able to win the ball and set up attacking paly himself with his pace and long kicking.

Midfielder, Kim Drew was often at the bottom of the toughest packs attempting to win vital contested possessions or to prevent opponents from getting their hands on the ball. His intensity in these situations has been stunning all season and, once again, he was able to be a key prime mover for the side. Diminutive on-baller, Callan McKeon demonstrated how important it was that he was back after missing much of the season due to injury. His hard ness in tight contests nearly won him the Morrish Medal in 2016 and he was back in the thick of the action as well as using his pace to generate positive passages of running play.

Fellow on baller Nick Hogan has also had much of his season disrupted by hamstring injury and he too stepped up to play a vital role in winning tough possessions and ensuring that they were used effectively. He was better as the game progressed and was a critical factor in the team’s ability to minimise the Ranges’ winning margin. Tall defender, Sean Masterson, has a well-deserved reputation as being one of the best key position backmen in the competition. He once again used his aerial skills with discipline to ensure that dangerous couldn’t win vital possessions and then had the confidence to win many important possessions himself.

Leigh and his fellow coaches now have the task of ensuring that the boys learn from the lesson so expertly taught by the Ranges side. Glaring deficiencies in their ability to respond to rebound football were highlighted and they can’t be competitive at this level while this is the case. The other key variable is the side’s inability to use the hard-won forward fifty entries that has been an issue all season. In the second half of the match they dominated this statistic but could only kick two goals from twenty four entries.

At any level of football this sort of efficiency is totally unacceptable and one goal per four forward fifty entries is seen as the hall mark of good football. These two factors are directly linked and the sides to be faced in the rest of the season indicates that the Power must work incredibly hard to ensure that they minimise these problems. They have a bye next weekend before taking on arch rivals, the Dandenong Stingrays at Frankston on the twenty-ninth. This is the ideal challenge for the boys and Leigh will work hard to get the boys ready to respond effectively.