GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

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Analysis of the final score of engie Gippsland Power’s second TAC Cup match for the 2018 season, could give the impression that the boys were well beaten by their arch-rivals, the Dandenong Stingrays. However, nothing could have been further from the truth as, but for ten minutes in the last term, the Power were well and truly into the match. It was one of those “what if” games where the Power did everything right in terms of aggression and defence but were made to pay dearly for some poor ball use and decision making when in attack.

After a stunning performance against the Murray Bushrangers at the historic Punt road oval in the opening match of the season, there was some justifiable confidence that the young Power side was going to be highly competitive this year. The only change in the initial team was the loss of Rylan Henkel due to injury and his absence gave Levi Munns the chance to take up the vital role of the team’s number one big man.

In front of a huge crowd and in ideal conditions at the side’s home ground, the Power opened the scoring with a goal to Sam Flanders after some excellent ball use and the side’s trademark use of intense pressure. Instead of using this as the start of a scoring barrage, they only went into attack one more time for the whole quarter. In direct contrast, the Stingrays took control of general play and kept the ball in their half of ground for much of the rest of the term.

Historically, it was the Power’s worst scenario in terms of attacking opportunities but, thankfully, the defence were able to apply enough pressure to limit them to only two goals form their fourteen entries into their forward fifty area. Consequently, the Stingrays only led by twelve points at the first break, but it could have been much worse.

The key issue for Leigh to address at quarter time was the way in which the Power consistently turned the ball over once they had worked so hard to win vital possessions and opportunities to hit the scoreboard. Poor ball skills or, even worse, decision making, “gifted” the Stingrays with many chances to easily set up rebound opportunities but, the Power defence stood tall against the many unnecessary forays forward.

It was obvious the Leigh’s reminder had been absorbed by the Power as they went “quick, long and direct” into attack and Irving Mosquito’s skill, pace and vision set up Josh Wykes to score a vital goal. Instead of building on this more positive approach, the Power again lost focus and the Stingrays gladly accepted another gift goal. As if inspired by this situation, Austin Hodge went directly into attack and allowed Josh Smith to set up Wykes for his second.

Once again, the Power wasted the chance to be direct and went unnecessarily wide which allowed the Stingrays to kick two “gift” goals after the inevitable turnover due to this poor decision making. It took some excellent forward pressure to allow Fraser Phillips to redress the scoreboard situation for the Power but, things got worse rather than better for the rest of the quarter.

Going wide rather than direct was again a problem but, missing sitters added insult to injury for the Power. By the long break they trailed by ten points but could, and should, have been at least that far ahead rather than trailing. They had redressed the forward fifty issues of the first quarter but had far too many where scoring chances were squandered due to skill and or decision making.

At the start of the third quarter, the Power continued to be wasteful of scoring chances and it took some wonderful skills by Caleb Serong and Boadie Motton to allow Mosquito to use his uncanny skills to kick a stunning goal. After even more wasted forward entries, Josh Smith kicked a long bomb form the fifty metre line to give the Power the lead just before the end of the term. Their lead was only a point but, the way in which it had been achieved was the key factor.

Despite being under a lot of pressure, the Power defence had withstood the Stingrays attacking forays to the extent that they only allowed them one point near the twenty minute mark of the quarter. It was inspiring team oriented play that denied the Stingrays so well and youngsters like Brock Smith, Leo Connolly and Ryan Sparkes were at the forefront of this stunning defence.

Leigh again had many positives to focus on but, the ineffective ball use when attacking had again proved to be very harmful where it mattered most, the scoreboard. Things were made even worse early in the last term when the Power‘s short and inefficient ball use gifted the Stingrays a goal and squandered their own chance. Some more individual skill and vision by Josh Smith and Hodge resulted in another Mosquito stunner but thing then went sour for the Power.

In the next ten minutes the Power defence was finally unable to limit the Stingrays goal kicking and they were able to score four unanswered majors after continuing to exploit further Power turnovers despite being under little or no pressure at the time. It took some excellent ball use and pressure by Flanders, Mason McGannon and Jake Van der Pligt to give Harvey Neocleous an opportunity to kick a typically clever goal.

However, the Stingrays added insult to injury by kicking a goal on the siren to extend the final margin to twenty four points. It was a game when footballing pessimists would be concerned by the number of goals that the Power “gifted” the opposition and, even more so, the times that they squandered so many of their own hard-won chances.

Thankfully, the Power coaching panel and footballing optimists will be far more positive based on the typically hard-nosed pressure applied by the boys in contests all over the ground. Considering the relative inexperience of the Power team, there is enough good “stuff” to focus on in coming weeks for the coaches and they will ensure that they finish off their hard work more efficiently.

Final scores, Dandenong Stingrays 11 goals 10 behinds 76 points defeated engie Gippsland Power 8 goals 4 behinds 52 points. Goal kickers Irving Mosquito and Josh Wykes 2, Sam Flanders, Josh Smith, Fraser Phillips and Harvey Neocleous 1.

In his second TAC Cup match Brock Smith again dominated as a defender in terms of soundly defeating dangerous opponents and having the skill, confidence and strength to win over twenty possessions as well as taking six crucial, contested marks. He set a stunning example to his fellow defenders as well as team mates further up the ground. His fellow bottom age defender, Ryan Sparkes was another who built on an outstanding debut to be almost as dominant as Brock. He too thrashed opponents one on one but had the self-belief to become a generator of many attacking passages of play via twenty five possessions, nine marks and eleven tackles.

Another Power defender to put in another “blinder” was Matt McGannon who was the “elder statesman” amongst the youngsters. He too had impressive statistics with over twenty possessions and seven critical marks but where and how he won them was the telling factor. He took on and beat difficult opponents and also became a vital playmaker for the team. On baller, Boadie Motton is renowned as a vital cog in the Power’s mid-field unit with his uncanny ability to win the ball in the tightest situations and then have the poise, skill and vision to ensure that he effectively uses his twenty plus possessions each game.

The Power’s captain, Xavier Duursma, led by telling example again with a combination of hard-nosed play in the tightest situations as well as uncanny aerial ability against taller opponents. He ensured that he was a vital generator of attacking play with his characteristic work ethic and focus on team oriented football. Up forward and around the midfield, Irving Mosquito used his unique combination of pace, ball skills and reading of the play to win the ball and then create “magic” from the slightest opportunity. He not only kicked stunning goals but also was a crucial element in the development of many passages of attacking play.

The Power now travel to Bendigo where the TAC Cup has all country based teams on show in both the under sixteen and eighteen competitions. If the Power get back to the sort of positive ball use that they displayed so well in round one, they will really trouble their opponents, the Bendigo Pioneers. However, the sort of approach that was so costly against the Stingrays will be punished and Leigh will be intent on making sure that the “lesson” has been learned.