Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

Round four of the 2018 TAC Cup season saw engie Gippsland Power give their supporters a far too brief display of their better form but, importantly, for much of the match, their very worst. Going into the match against the Northern Knights, they were without four key players and then had a late withdrawal of one of the talented bottom-agers who had been so important in their positive start to the competition.

AFL Academy members, Caleb Serong and Sam Flanders missed due to national obligations in New Zealand, while captain, Xavier Duursma and “veteran,” Austin Hodge were unavailable due minor injuries suffered in the Vic Country practice matches last weekend. Meeniyan youngster, Brett Thorson was the late absentee, again, due to injury, so several opportunities were created for some of the squad to step up and lay claim for their place in the starting eighteen.

Coming into the team were experienced players, Tyrone Hayes, Bailey Patterson, newcomer Alexander Young and another prominent bottom-ager, Leongatha’s Mitch Bentvelzen. Leadership responsibilities fell upon the broad shoulders of Matt McGannon and Moe youngster, Brock Smith. Both had been critical contributors in each game and the “extra” importance of their roles was in good hands.

After a tight opening stanza, the Knights kicked the first goal but the Power then upped the ante to create scoring opportunities which were then squandered due to very “ordinary” finishing skills or decision making. To add insult to this unnecessary injury, the Knights showed how it was done with another goal almost against the run of play. It took some extraordinary individual skills, vision and coolness by Irving Mosquito to create the Power’s only goal for the quarter and, vitally, reduce the margin to four points at the first change.

Leigh and the zone coaches had some critical statistics to use during the break and the most obvious was the number of forward-fifty entries that were wasted. One goal from fifteen entries is a dismal return for a lot of effort further up the ground when one in four is considered the bare minimum for a winning side. On a very positive note, they had laid thirty plus tackles to keep the Knights under intense pressure in contests all over the ground and, vitally, limit the scoreboard damage after such poor forward conversion.

Early in the next term, it appeared as if the Power weren’t listening as they again wasted possible scoring opportunities and then watched as the Knights scored another with seeming ease. The Power were going sideways rather than Quick, Long and Direct, the system that had been so productive against the Pioneers. The only time they did go direct, Mason McGannon found Josh Smith and he kicked truly.

To make the inefficiency problem even worse, when they did go QLD other than this one time, their skills were so poor that unnecessary turnovers “gifted” the Knights with two more goals. By the long break, the Knights led by nineteen points had the Power well and truly on the back foot. As well as the poor skills they had handballed far too often and once again gave the Knights chances to paly rebound football. The only saving grace were another thirty plus tackles keeping the scoreboard damage to a reasonable level.

The wastefulness in attack continued early in the quarter but, finally they began to be more direct. Riley Baldi set the tone after winning a free kick and then some excellent forward pressure by Matt McGannon resulted in a goal that seemed to inspire teammates. Once again “Mossie” used his unique brand of football magic to use his pace and skills to score the sides’ third for the term.

Just when it appeared as if the Power were finally back on track, the Knights were “gifted” with two far too easy goals as a result of unnecessary turnovers that put the defence under too much pressure. Yet again it was the magic of “Mossie” that restored credibility when a stunning intercept mark and goal reduced the difference on the scoreboard to five points by the last change. They had played much better football but, and it was an important but, they still needed to adjust their

From the opening bounce of the last quarter, the Knights regained the initiative and put the pressure well and truly back on the Power. They responded immediately through Baldi and Bailey Beck and Tyrone Hayes goaled on the run. Fraser Phillips and “Mossie” combined to allow Josh Smith to kick his second and it was game on for both sides. The Power were again in attack but indecision and poor skills again meant chances were wasted.

Mason McGannon went QLD and ex-Stingray Alexander Young kicked a goal to give the Power the lead for the first time in the match. Once again the Power gifted the Knights with two goals as a result of terrible ball use and finally the Knights had the lead with only a couple of minutes to go. In the last seconds Kyle Reid and Young combined and “Mossie” did it again with a fine contested mark and brilliant goal from an acute angle.

The final result of a draw was really “larceny by stealth” by the Power when they had only played their best football for about twenty five percent of the match. They had seventeen more forward fifty entries than the Knights but had been incredibly wasteful of them in the first half especially. Things got much better in the second half when they kicked eight goals from twenty eight entries and this is the sort of return that guarantees victory if it happens for the whole match.

Obviously the Power midfield unit and defence were under enormous pressure but their ability to maintain positive focus in these tough situations kept the side in the game when, realistically, they should have been much further behind. The fact that the side had well over one hundred tackles for the game indicated how hard they had worked to win contested possessions and put the Power’s traditional intense pressure on opponents. On a day when they should have won by at least five goals based on these positives, the draw was almost a sign of “what if” rather than a true reward for their efforts.

Final scores engie Gippsland Power 10 goals six behinds 66 points drew with Northern Knights 10 goals six behinds 66 points. Goal kickers, Irving Mosquito 4, Josh Smith 2, Tyrone Hayes, Riley Baldi, Matt McGannon and Alexander Young 1.

If it wasn’t for the individual and team oriented skills of Irving Mosquito the side couldn’t have drawn this match. He used his incredible pace, aerial ability, competitiveness in the tightest situations and uncanny evasiveness to a stunning level that initially kept the side in the match and then allowed them to secure what appeared to be a most unlikely result. Defender Kyle Reid led his fellow back men by stellar example which saw him defeat the Knight’s best tall forwards with disciplined play. He had the skill and confidence to win about twenty possessions and take seven contested marks himself and worked very hard to use them effectively.

Inverloch youngster, Ryan Sparkes, continued his amazing progress in the TAC Cup with another exceptional display as a defender who backed himself to play two vital roles for the fourth time this year. Like Kyle he nullified opponents as well as consistently generating effective attacking play with over fifteen possession, six marks and eleven tackles. In his fourth game Jake Van Der Pligt also displayed the ability and self-confidence to respond to a challenge from Leigh to step up and play a key role in the mid-field. He did so to great effect and the statistics said it all. Nearly thirty possessions, seven marks and seven tackles were impressive but he did most of it under intense pressure.

Yet another member of the Power’s phenomenal bottom age group, Brock Smith continued to play the sort of assured football of someone with extended experience under extreme pressure. He too was outstanding as a defender but won many possessions a well as taking five contested marks and applying eleven crunching tackles. Matt McGannon led the midfielders with his silky skills under the most extreme pressure. He won many possession with his confidence to back his judgement and then used them intelligently with his precise and penetrating kicking. His eleven tackles reflected the team orientation of his all-round performance.

Leigh now has the task of getting the boys to focus on the ball use that was so important in their opening three matches of the 2018 season. They will travel to Healesville to take on the Eastern Ranges and will need to be on task. They have displayed the club’s trademark intensity in each contest but seemed to lack the finishing skills for much of the Knights match. Hopefully, Xavier Duursma and Austin Hodge will be available and their experience, poise and leadership would make a huge difference in the use of the ball in attack.