GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

In idyllic conditions at Healesville, engie Gippsland Power got back to their best form with a resounding victory over the Eastern Ranges. It took the Power one half of the match to finally reward themselves on the scoreboard but, when they did follow all aspects of the expected game plan, they made highly effective use of their forward forays to record a fifty-six point win.

Key players, Xavier Duursma and Sam Flanders returned to the side while Levi Munns and debutant, Zach Skinner were bought in to share the big man duties. Missing were Rylan Henkel, Harvey Neocleous, Alex Young and Josh Wykes so the balance and structure of the side were maintained. The Ranges side had made an indifferent start to their season and, on paper, didn’t represent a huge challenge to the Power if they were on task.

However, the game against the Knights had proved that what appeared to be a winnable match on paper requires an effective system of forward play and the Power needed to get this right if they were to match expectation with actual form. Early in the match it appeared as if they hadn’t learned this lesson from the Knights and again wasted several hard-won entries into their forward line with inept finishing.

It took some excellent forward pressure to create the first goal for Nick Lowden but they once again missed very gettable opportunities. The Ranges then rubbed salt into this self-induced wound with a relatively easy rebound goal. A rare quick, long and direct forward thrust created a chance for Mitch Bentvelzen to snap truly and then, more of Power’s trademark forward pressure by captain, Xavier Duursma and Benveltzen resulted in a clever goal by Tyrone Hayes.

Seemingly the Power were now on the right track but an unforced turnover gifted the Ranges with a simple goal to undo a lot of this good work. To make things even worse, the Power the over used handball, seven in twenty metres, to give the Ranges another so that the Power only led by four points despite dominating much of the play during the quarter. They had created twice as many forward fifty entries as the Ranges but had wasted most of them with the sort of errors that had been so costly the week before.

It was blatantly obvious what Leigh and his assistants would highlight at the first break but, in the opening minutes of the second quarter, they were even more ineffective at converting their hard work via the scoreboard. To make this issue even more crucial, the Ranges kicked the first of the term and then neither side played the sort of football that is necessary to reward themselves for the hard work in contests in defence and the midfield areas.

Noah Gown took a mark deep in the forward pocket after a rare QLD thrust and then kicked a stunner to get the lead back for the team. From the resultant centre bounce, Riley Baldi created a great clearance and Josh Smith kicked a clever goal. It appeared as if the Power had finally “got the message” and some more forward pressure by Irving Mosquito gave Smith another chance to add to his goal tally.

By the long break the Power led by fifteen points but, importantly, had been far more effective up forward for the latter part of the quarter. They still further scope for more effective conversion but, Leigh wold have been much more satisfied as he prepared them for the vital third quarter. They were in attack for much of the first five minutes of the quarter but didn’t trouble the scoreboard attendant.

Some outstandingly efficient ball use from defence resulted in two fine goals for Gown but the Ranges reminded them that they still represented a challenge as they converted their first forward fifty entry. The Power hit back with their up-market form of ball use and this time Sam Flanders was on the receiving end of this positive play. Youngster, Benveltzen then kicked an incredible snap after he applied some excellent forward pressure and Gown snapped yet another after some fine QLD ball use from deep in the side’s defence.

In the dying moments of the term, the Power again made excellent use of the ball from defence and Duursma finished it off with a terrific goal on the run. After dominating play for over forty minutes it appeared as if the Power had finally got their right game going. However, the Ranges weren’t ready to allow this to happen and reminded the Power that they needed to be on track all the time as they created unnecessary turnovers due to poor decisions and skills.

The Ranges then converted these “freebies” to rebound goals and reduced the Power lead to thirty four points at the final break. After a gentle “reminder” by Leigh and his assistants, the Power wet QLD rom the centre via Mosquito and Gown and Baldi was able to finish their skilled ball use where it mattered. Noah had been the side’s major goal kicker but now became the provider as he went QLD to enable Baldi to rove creatively off the resultant pack and kick his second.

As if inspired by his new role, Gown did it again and this time Bailey Patterson finished it off with his own brand of forward pressure. The Power were dominating all aspects of the game and, once again used the ball with stunning efficiency to allow Smith to kick his third for the match. In spite of this, the Ranges capitalised on rare opportunities to reduce the Power’s now comprehensive lead, but they still had time to add to their impressive score. Outstanding ball use from defence, and then the midfield, created an uncommon chance for Bailey Beck to kick a goal and he did so with great relish.

By the final siren the Power had extended the margin to fifty six points but it was the way that they achieved it that was important. After a less than impressive first half, they had really hit the target in the second half where they kicked eleven goals from thirty three forward fifty entries. Four such entries per goal is seen as the required ratio and the Power had done even better for the first time this season for over half the match.

Analysis of key match statistics reflected the quality of the Power’s performance for much of the game. Obviously, the forward fifty entry conversion of seventeen goals from sixty-six entries indicated that the forwards had finally got their conversion process right. More importantly they had limited the Ranges to only thirty such opportunities to get the scoreboard ticking over.

This was achieved by the midfield unit being on task with the club’s trademark pressure as well as far more effective use of the ball than was demonstrated in the Knights match. When the ball did enter the Ranges forward area, the Power defence was also super-efficient and they initiated many of the effective attacking passages of play with the right decisions and more precise ball skills by hand and foot.

Adding to theses impressive stats was the fact that the Power had their lowest tackle total for a long time. Normally this would be a negative factor but closer analysis shows that it was a very positive reflection of their improved form. They recorded fewer tackles because they eliminated the need to do so by having the ball in their possession for much of the match. This was the result of far more effective use of the ball in terms of accuracy, direction and distance and was the major reason for Leigh’s pleasure at the end of the match.

Final scores, engie Gippsland Power 17 goals 16 behinds 118 points defeated Eastern Range 9 goals 8 behinds 62 points. Goal kickers, Noah Gown 4, Josh Smith 3, Riley Baldi and Mitch Benveltzen 2, Tyrone Hayes, Sam Flanders, Xavier Duursma, Bailey Patterson, Bailey Beck and Nick Lowden 1.

On a day when the Power defence was so effective when one on one, Kyle Reid led by stellar example. He took on and soundly defeated the Ranges best tall forwards in all aspects of play. He dominated aerial duels either by taking the mark or spoiling their chances of doing so as well as being equally as competitive at ground level. When he did win the ball himself, he made stunning use with the right decisions at the right times. Up forward Noah Gown played a similar game to that of Kyle. He too made excellent decisions in contests and backed his judgement perfectly each time. He was a constantly efficient avenue in attack for the team when either kicking goals or, importantly, setting them up. His sixteen possessions and nine marks as well as four goals reflect his impact on the match.

The return of captain, Xavier Duursma to the on-ball unit was critical for the side as he initiated many of the positive passages of play from defence or midfield contests. He led by making excellent use of his twenty plus possessions but also used his voice and his skinny body to encourage others to back their judgement to do the same thing as him. The youngsters in the Power defence have been outstanding this season and Tye Hourigan added his own impact in this vital area. His disciplined, team oriented play to minimise the impact of opponents was impressive but he also generated a lot of attacking play with sound ball use. His twenty possessions, ten marks seven tackles and nine spoils accurately reflect the quality of his contribution.

Fellow tyro defender, Ryan Sparkes matched Tyes’ stunning impact with his unique brand of confident and disciplined play. He took on and soundly defeated dangerous opponents with excellent judgement, and a willingness to put himself into the tightest contests. He amassed similar individual statistics to Tye and was equally effective in his use of them. On-baller Tyrone Hayes has always had the deserved reputation as one of the most skilled and creative players in each element of the TAC Cup’s development programs. Now that he has regained match fitness he is quickly returning to his most positive form and was a vital cog in the midfield unit from the opening bounce of the match.

Fellow on-baller Riley Baldi doesn’t have the same elite experience as Tyrone but he matched him in terms of winning crucial possessions and then generating positive play with the right decisions in terms of where and how to put the ball to the best spot his nearly thirty possessions and six marks reflect how hard he worked in the thick of the action. After a stunning performance against the Knights, Irving Mosquito attracted a lot of attention but still managed to have a significant impact on the match. His uncanny combination of pace, skill and freakish decision making under pressure were evident in his many possessions when he won contested ball and then used it to maximum advantage.

After making a stunning impact in each match this season, Brock Smith has quickly established himself as one of the competition’s best bottom age players. He again displayed the self-belief and skill to take on and defeat dangerous opponents as well as being a crucial prime-mover in many of the side’s positive passages of play from defence. He won every one on one contest as well as many in the tightest situations.

The Power now have another development weekend where the state squads will be in action and most other players will return to their home clubs unless Leigh believes they would benefit from a break. The sides’ next TAC contest will be against the highly rated Sandringham Dragons at Morwell on Sunday May 13th. Leigh will use this challenge to keep the boys focussed on the sort of positive ball use that was so important in their ability to effectively control much of the play against the Ranges.