Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

In ideal football conditions at Shepley Oval in Dandenong, engie Gippsland Power managed to score an important victory over the Geelong Falcons, the competitions best country team since the TAC Cups inception in 1992. Both sides went into this vital match well under full strength due to the fact that they had key players missing due to national championship commitments.

After a strong start to the season, the Power were without senior players, Xavier Duursma, Kyle Reid and Matt McGannon but also had brilliant bottom agers, Caleb Serong, Sam Flanders and Brock Smith in the squad of twenty five. While this was a great honour for the club, it meant that the team had to manage without key defenders, play making midfielders and the teams’ best forward. Only injury robbed Irving Mosquito from his place in the state team, so it could have been an even bigger challenge for the Power.

This scenario will continue to have an impact on the Power for the next four weeks so the selectors will have plenty of opportunities to have a look at some of the players who haven’t had the chance to get into the side due to the amazing form that the team has displayed so far this season. They were able to bring back Alex Young and Fraser Phillips who had already been in the team this year while top-ager, Will Broadbent made his 2018 debut.

Rounding off the major alteration to the team was the inclusion of debutants, Mason McGarrity (Warragul), Burkeley McFarlane (Morwell) and Zac Hurley (Sale). Despite the unavailability of such important players, the coaches were very confident that the Power had the right combination of players to cope with the pressure of playing the Falcons. The on-field leadership from key players such as Bailey Beck, Austin Hodge, Rylan Henkel, Noah Gown and Boadie Motton guaranteed excellent support for the new-comers as they quickly adjusted to the intensity of TAC Cup football.

Early in the match, neither coach would have been pleased with the way their side was using the ball and, scoring was almost non-existent for the first half of the term. It took some traditional Power forward pressure from Boadie Motton to set up Harrison Pepper for the opening goal. Things looked even better when some more direct, long use of the ball by Zac Hurley and Alex Young allowed Will Broadbent to give the Power a ten-point lead at the end of the term.

In the opening minutes of the second term, more direct play by Ryan Sparkes and Bailey Beck resulted in a goal to Noah Gown as the result of a free kick. Instead of building on this positive use of the ball, the Power began to be less direct as well as making poor decisions to squander chances to extend their lead. The Falcons were in attack more as a consequence but the Power defence’s strength and composure under pressure limited them to points rather than goals.

Some quick and precise play by Beck and Austin Hodge set up Gown for his second but, once again, the Power were wasting hard-won possessions as they went forward. Towards the end of the quarter, some more positive ball use by Burkeley McFarlane and Josh Smith led to a goal from Rylan Henkel after another free kick. By the end of the quarter, the Power had extended their lead to twenty-three points and crucially, had prevented the Falcons from kicking a goal.

The Power defence was under intense pressure early in the third term but, withstood it manfully. Midway through the quarter, Motton and Hodge set up some excellent play and it allowed Pepper to kick a crucial goal. Almost against the run of general play, the Falcons kicked their first goal on the sixteen minute mark but the Power hit back after more forward pressure and Beck took a strong mark and goaled late in the term. It meant that the Power’s lead was twenty five points with one quarter to play.

It was obvious that the Power leaders were doing what was needed to secure victory but, even more pleasing, was the fact that several of the bottom agers had accepted the challenge to take greater responsibility as well. A strong contested mark by Pepper gave the Power the first of the last term and then Riley Baldi took a cunning intercept mark and kicked truly to further extend the lead for the side.

The Falcons scored their second goal mid-way into the last term but it seemed to inspire the Power to get back on to their productive track. Long and direct ball use by Gown and Broadbent allowed defender, Bailey Patterson, to kick a rare goal on the run but the Falcons rallied a scored the last goal of the match. The final winning margin was thirty-four points but, for the Power what was really important, was the way in which they got back to some effective ball use up forward in the second half.

Final scores, engie Gippsland Power 10 goals 5 behinds 65 points defeated Geelong Falcons 3 goals 13 behinds 31 points. Goal kickers, Harrison Pepper 3, Noah Gown 2, Riley Baldi, Bailey Patterson, Bailey Beck, Rylan Henkel and Will Broadbent 1.

Midfielder, Bailey Beck has been in outstanding form recently and, once again rallied for the side when they needed him most. He was a constant avenue to attack for the side as well as being a vital cog in the contested issues. His twenty five possessions and seven marks indicate how hard he was prepared to work for the full one hundred minutes. In a stunning debut, Zac Hurley slotted in as a key defender and took on, and soundly defeated, the Falcons best forwards. He had the confidence, skill and poise to win nearly twenty possessions, take six marks, have five tackles and nine spoils in a wonderful display. His experience with Sale seniors was an obvious factor and he looks ready to play a major role for the rest of the season.

Bottom age defender, Tye Hourigan, is another of the youngsters who has quickly adjusted to the physical and mental demands of TAC Cup football. He too has been given the responsibility of the opposition’s better forwards and was able to totally nullify them with his disciplined and committed approach. The fact that he had five contested marks meant that he could be a key prime mover for the team. His fellow young defender, Ryan Sparkes has also made an extraordinary start to the season and appears to have the skill, class and confidence of a mature footballer. His statistics of thirty-three possessions, six marks, four tackles and nine spoils indicate how much an influence he was able to have as a defender and generator of attacking play.

Amongst all the youngsters in defence veteran, Bailey Patterson, has stepped up to support them in all aspects of play. He too nullified the impact of dangerous opponents but it was his reading of the play to find the time and space to be a play-maker was even more important. Over twenty possessions and five marks reflect how big an influence he had on the game. Another of the veterans who is thriving on the extra responsibility is Austin Hodge. He has always been a vital cog in attack and the on ball brigade, but seems to have lifted his game to even greater heights in 2018. He has won the respect of the young blokes because of his positive attitude and the continual support he provides by actions and his voice.

The selectors were very pleased by the way that the senior players responded to the challenges that emerged due to the loss of so many vital players. What was even better in terms of the long-term future of the side, was the fact that some of the youngster who had already impressed took their games to even greater levels when under such intense pressure. The performances of debutants, Burkeley McFarlane and Mason McGarrity was the icing on the cake as they made significant contributions to the team’s response in such an important game.

The large crowd at Dandenong contained many past plyers from a variety of eras in the clubs history. Last year’s best and fairest, Callum Porter, now an AFL player with the Bulldogs and Will Stevenson, now at Casey, were well known to the boys in the current team and relished the chance to catch up with their mates.

Going further back, Tom Muir, Sean Marusic and Lee Sheehan enjoyed watching the current boys and catching up with the many staff members who were still involved. However, the most pleasing old boy story was the fact that former captain and member of the first team, Jason McFarlane was also present. His son, Burkeley made his debut in the game and it meant that he was the Power’s first Father and son combination in the side’s twenty six year history in the TAC cup.

In stark contrast, the club was shocked to hear of the fate of recent player Christian Buykx-Smith. He has played successfully at Williamstown in the VFL in the past three seasons but suffered a serious illness as the result of a seemingly harmless accident whilst at work. The end result was several operations and having to be an induced coma for several days but, vitally he has begun to recover and has regained some of his trademark sense of humour despite having such a long way to go for complete recovery. All at the club wish him the best on his road back to full health.

As the result of the national championships, the side has the first of three byes in the next five weeks. Leigh has the onerous task of keeping the boys focussed as they cope with this scenario and will ensure that they keep themselves fit, both mentally and physically. Victories in the games between the breaks are crucial at the end of the season and the match against the Calder Cannons in two weeks will be gone into thoroughly.