GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

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Engie Gippsland Power went into their match against the Calder Cannons relatively confident despite having key players, Caleb Serong, Sam Flanders, Xavier Duursma, Matt McGannon and Kyle Reid missing due to State team commitments in South Australia. It was the second time that they found themselves in this scenario and had responded very well to the challenges involved individually and as a team against the Falcons in their most recent game.

However, this week it was a little more complicated as coach, Leigh Brown was also involved in the Victorian Country state team. His responsibilities were to be taken up by assistant coach, Rhett McLennan who still had the support of Scott McDougal, Peter Mongta and Alan Chandler. On a more positive note, outstanding youngster, Brock Smith was available after state duties and his Moe team mate Trent Baldi, joined his twin brother Riley for their first TAC Cup game together.

Early in the match, neither side was able to get flowing football started due to some poor decision making and some very dodgy skills. The Power were applying their trade-mark intense pressure but were squandering scoring opportunities with a lack of poise and vision. The Cannons scored the first goal of the game after about twelve minutes and it took a direct attacking move by Nick Lowden to allow Josh Smith to finally kick a goal for the Power.

At the end of the quarter, neither coach would have been impressed with their sides’ performance as they could only manage one gaol each from twenty three forward fifty entries between them. The Cannons led by four points at the break because they had at least scored five points as well as their single goal. Rhett would have been eager to get the boys back to their “normal” way of converting scoring opportunities as they had the advantage of the strong wind in the second term.

Some terrible decision making and even worse skills by the Power “gifted” the Cannons with the first goal of the quarter but they hit back quickly after some excellent forward pressure by Josh Smith resulted in a clever goal by Brock Smith. Brock then kicked another from almost fifty metres out but, the Cannons responded after a turnover by the Power. It appeared as if the Power had started to get their game right when a penetrating long kick by Bailey Beck was marked by Harry Pepper and his kicked accurately.

Once again the Power attacked effectively and with their normal intense pressure as Ryan Sparkes went long and direct to find Austin Hodge who kicked another long goal. The Power were seemingly back on track after a very ordinary first term and this time Hodge was the provider for Josh Smith who took a fine contested mark before kicking his second goal. Austin was relishing his on-ball role and once again set up a team mate with clever ball use. Harry Pepper was on the end this time and he too took a very good contested mark and goaled again.

With only minutes to go, the Cannons took advantage of some slack work at the centre bounce by the Power and reduced their lead to sixteen points by the long break. It was a far more productive term by the Power but, and it’s a vital but, they were still giving the Cannons opportunities on the rebound. Poor defensive skills by some Power forwards allowed Calder to attack too easily and put the defenders under un-necessary intense pressure.

If the first term was ordinary for the Power, their third term effort was even more “iffy.” But for some excellent work by the defence in the opening term minutes of the quarter, the Cannons would have been well in front. Another rebound “gift” by the Power gave them their first of the term but, instead of reacting positively, they gave the Cannons two more easy goals. In what was probably the Power’s worst quarter for the year, they didn’t score a goal. When added to their first term stats, it meant that they had only kicked one goal from nineteen forward fifty entries.

Yet again they were behind at the end of the quarter but this time the margin was five points. If Rhett and his fellow assistants were expecting a turnaround by the Power at the start of the last quarter, then they were very disappointed as the Cannons again kicked a goal far too easily. It took some more of Hodge’s hard work to set up Josh Smith for a clever snap and then Rylan Henkel went long and direct to find Noah Gown who marked strongly and goaled.

The Cannons regained the initiative, again due to Power errors and it needed some more direct attacking play by Josh Smith to set up Hodge for a vital goal. It meant that the scores were level but Boadie Motton then gave the Power the lead with a long goal late in the term. Almost as if on cue, the Cannons attacked with seconds to go and were able to kick a goal to draw level at the final siren. It was one of those results that suited the game, as neither side had worked well enough to deserve a win but the draw seemed more appropriate.

Final scores, engie Gippsland Power 11 goals 6 behinds 72 points drew with Calder Cannons 10 goals 12 behinds 72 points. Goal kickers, Josh Smith 3, Austin Hodge, Brock Smith and Harry Pepper 2, Noah Gown and Boadie Motton 1.

The Power defensive unit stood up manfully against great odds and were led brilliantly by youngster, Jake Van der Pligt. He soundly defeated several opponents but, more importantly, was able to win twenty possessions in the tightest contests. His decision making with the ball meant that few were squandered. As stated earlier, Austin Hodge thrived with the responsibility of being an on-baller as reflected by his twenty five plus possessions. However, his contribution was far more relevant than simple statistics as he was a vital cog in setting up several scoring opportunities for team mates with his vision, strength and unselfishness.

Brock Smith has been outstanding in defence all season but, he too seemed to excel when moved into the midfield. His combination of aerial skills, hardness in the ground level contests and precise ball use meant that he won and effectively used many vital possessions. He will be very keen to spend time in this role later in the season. Bailey Beck has stepped up into a leadership role since moving into the midfield. He provides a consistently effective avenue to attack with astute reading of the play and the ability to back himself to take on and overcome opponents. His defensive skills add another key element to his team based contributions.

Noah Gown was another who has risen to the challenge of taking on more responsibility due to the absence of key players due to state duties. He combined hard work in contests as a key forward and some very effective efforts when moved into the ruck. He won most of these contests and ensured that the ball was put to the team’s advantage. On baller, Riley Baldi has made a stunning start to his TAC Cup career and once again was in the thick of the tightest contests all day. His thirty plus possessions represent how hard he worked and the way he sued the ball reflected his importance as a prime-mover for the team.

Tyrone Hayes is one of the nineteen year olds in the side and he, like Austin, has been a consistent contributor with his unique skills and ability to read the play with unerring accuracy. He too is relishing the responsibility of leadership and will be crucial for the ide at the business end of the season. Another highly effective member of the Power’s young defensive unit, Tye Hourigan, stood firm despite being under a lot of pressure. His disciplined, team-oriented paly was highly evident. When the team needed a target in key forward positions, Harry Pepper took on the challenge and did a fine job against taller opponents. He took vital contested marks as well as being able to apply tight pressure in contests at ground level.

The Power’s next challenge sees them up against the Bendigo Pioneers at Windy Hill. Once again both sides will be without state players but, the Power will need to learn the lesson so well taught by the Cannons in terms of un-necessary turnovers. They have proven how highly competitive they can be when the focus their attention on key elements of the game plan but the Pioneers will capitalise on the sort of slackness that was so evident in the Cannons game.