Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

The last match in the 2018 TAC Cup season for engie Gippsland Power resulted in another unconvincing and scrappy victory against the Eastern Ranges but, importantly, ensured that they will now have a week off as they prepare for the first round of the knockout final series. They went into the game without key players Austin Hodge, who played for the Bulldogs reserves in the VFL and Boadie Motton, who was unavailable due to injury.

This scenario enabled Matt Ryan to make his long-awaited debut after recovering from a broken collar bone while Caleb Serong was available after missing much of the season due to state and school football commitments. On paper, it appeared that the Power deservedly went into the match as hot favourites after assessing the opposition’s ladder position. However, as often happens at this stage of the season, such comparisons have little impact on the result of matches.

In the opening minutes of the match neither side could gain the ascendancy but gradually, the Power began to apply the intense pressure required to seize the initiative. It took some precise ball use by Riley Baldi to find Noah Gown who kicked truly. Not long after two more Moe team-mates, Wade Anderson and Leo Connolly combined and Leo kicked a “blinder” from deep in the pocket. The Power were dominating much of the play and, accordingly, the Ranges rarely went forward.

Some typically strong play by captain, Xavier Duursma, resulted in a hard-won free kick and he converted the opportunity perfectly and then, goal sneak Sam Flanders used his uncanny skills to score another for the team. By the first break the Power led by twenty-five points and had demonstrated why they had gone into the match as short priced favourites. They had kept the Ranges goalless due to hard work in the midfield and attack and it resulted in the fact that they had nineteen forward fifty entries compared to the Ranges four.

Early in the second quarter things looked even worse for the Ranges as Matt McGannon and Connolly combined to allow Gown to kick his second goal. The Power then missed a couple of gettable chances and then appeared to switch off and allow the Ranges to dominate much of the play for the rest of the term. It was just like days of old as the Power began to be sloppy with their ball use and the Ranges then punished them harshly on the resultant rebound. Eastern kicked three unanswered goals and went to the long break within thirteen points of the Power but, far more critically, had the momentum going their way.

It was really disappointing situation for the Power to be in as the intense forward pressure that was so obvious in the first term had disappeared and the Ranges had been able to go into attack far too easily. Leigh and his assistants had plenty to discuss with the boys during the long break as the two quarters of play by the boys couldn’t have been more different and it appeared to occur as the result of a lack of effort by the Power side.

Things looked even worse for the Power early in the third term as the Ranges continued to exploit even worse Power attacking play and had two more goals on the board as the result of clever rebound play. It took some rare, long and direct ball use by Josh Smith, Matt Ryan and Caleb Serong to allow Flanders to kick a vital goal but once again the Power were back to their wasteful best for the rest of the quarter.

The unnecessary turnovers resulting from poor ball use and a lack of forward pressure “gifted” the Ranges with three more goals. Against the run of play, a goal after the siren as the result of a free kick to Gown reduced the Power’s deserved embarrassment and the Ranges lead to four points at the last change. If Leigh was unhappy at half time, then his mood would have darkened even further at the last changeover as he attempted to calmly reinforce the message that they had not listened to earlier.

A hard-won free kick allowed Bailey Beck to skilfully find his captain, Xavier and he kicked truly. From the resultant centre bounce, Flanders took the opposition on and created a fine running goal to set the right example for his team mates. Seemingly inspired, McGannon and Jake Van der Pligt were able to allow Irving Mosquito to kick a typically “magic” goal and then Ben Maslen took advantage of some crucial forward pressure to kick a fine snapped goal.

The Ranges were able to kick the last two goals for the match but the Power had done enough to hang on and record nine point win. It was really a game of two halves for the Power as they dominated much of the play in the first and last quarters, while the Rangers had the momentum in the other two terms. The key difference was the ability of the forwards to keep the ball in the Power’s fifty metre zone as well as apply intense pressure on the Ranges when they attempted to initiate attacking play.

When the Power got it right in these two areas, they scored eight goals compared to the Ranges two but, in the other two they were outscored by eight goals to three by the Ranges. Obviously, the Power coaching panel has plenty of issues to address over the next two weeks as they prepare the boys for the challenge of finals football in Australia’s best junior football competition. The return of Austin and Boadie will make a critical difference for the team as their experience and ability to be hard in the tightest contests.

The boys will now work individually with Leigh and the line coaches to assess what each one will do during the week off. Many will be rested from local football commitments based on their intense work rates through the season and to help them to prepare mentally and physically for the requirements of finals football. If they are ready to follow the team focus they can have a huge impact on the finals campaign and Leigh will ensure that they have the mind-set required to do this.

Final scores, engie Gippsland Power 11 goals 11 behinds 77 points defeated Eastern Ranges 10 goals 8 behinds 68 points. Goal kickers, Noah Gown 4, Sam Flanders and Xavier Duursma 2, Irving Mosquito, Leo Connolly and Ben Maslen 1.

The strength and work rate of Bailey Beck was critical in the win as he was able to provide a positive avenue into attack all day with his skill pace and team focus. However his willingness to be defensive as well limited his opponent’s ability to do the same for their team and minimised the damage that they could do on the rebound. Key forward Noah Gown has been in stunning form recently and clearly demonstrated why he is now considered one of the best in the competition. He combined brilliant contested marking with strength and skill in one-on-one contests to win several opportunities to kick goals or, more importantly, set up team mates to do the same thing.

Once again Tye Hourigan took on and soundly defeated the opposition’s best key forward. His capacity to win every contest with his opponent was due to his disciplined ability to make the right decision in each situation. When he backed himself to win the ball, he made telling use of each possession by hand or foot. Defender, Bailey Patterson is another who can be relied on to nullify the impact of opponents as well as having the self-confidence, skill and poise to win many vital possessions and make highly effective use of them. When the side was not playing well his coolness under pressure was extremely important in minimising the damage on the scoreboard.

Youngster, Mitch Benveltzen, was another who rose manfully to the challenge when the side really needed him and combined discipline, skill, strength and self-belief to put himself in the thick of the action all over the field. He too was able to generate attacking play as well as being a tight, defensive player and did both things with a cool, minimum of fuss. When the side needed leadership, Xavier Duursma provided it when generating positive play or attempting to keep the Ranges under some form of control. His work ethic and unselfish use of his body in tight contests was amazing and, but for some bad luck could have taken two or three incredible contested marks as well.

The engie centre of excellence that is the boy’s training base, is regarded as the best facility outside the AFL due to the incredible vision and hard work of Peter Francis. One important element of the centre is the presence of life sized action photos of several of the Power’s most celebrated “old boys.” There are five AFL captains and several premiership players amongst the initial group but, recently five additions have been elevated to this situation.

The “new boys” are current headliners Anthony McDonald-Tippungwtti, Tom Papley, Sam Dougherty, Josh Dunkley and Tim Membrey. They are wonderful role models for the boys and girls who come through the clubs development programs and then the TAC Cup squads. Each one has a wonderful story behind their ability to have such significant impacts in the AFL and, on the development of the talented youngsters who are in each element of the Power’s structures.