GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

BY BRYAN MITCHELL

The engie Gippsland Power’s 2018 TAC Cup season ended in an undignified and very, undeserved manner, when they suffered an absolute thrashing at the hands of the Oakleigh Chargers. After being highly competitive against the very best during the year, the Power were outplayed by the Chargers who had all of their players available for the first time for the season. No matter how well the coaching panel prepared the boys for such a challenge, the “unknown” factor was insurmountable.

Adding to the difficulties faced by Power because of this scenario, was the fact that they were without important players due to injury. Key defender, Kyle Reid and impressive youngster Jake van der Pilgt had minor injuries after the match with against the Geelong Falcons. However, on a far more serious note, Mitch Benveltzen had suffered two fractured vertebrae and was still in the Monash Hospital as they attempted to address the intense pain that he was suffering.

Leigh and his assistants knew that to remain competitive in such a situation, the Power needed to apply their trademark intense pressure in contests all over the ground. The other vital component of their game plan was the ability to make good decisions when in control of the ball and to do so with precise ball use by hand or foot. When they did these things against the Falcons they had controlled the match and had a well-deserved win.

A strong breeze was blowing down the Ikon oval and the Chargers had this advantage in the first quarter. It didn’t take long for them to assert their dominance in the game and they showed that they were ready, willing and able to exploit any deficiencies in the way that the Power applied themselves to Leigh’s challenges. Poor decisions and application of skills by the Power set the Chargers up and they capitalised on these chances with stunning pace skill and precision.

By the end of the term, the Chargers led by thirty-four points and had kept the Power totally scoreless for the quarter. Not only had the turnovers been so costly, the Chargers had dominated the contests at ground level, a vital component of the Power’s best form. Like the boy with the wheelbarrow, the Power had a huge job in front of them and seemed to be more effective than in the first term. With the advantage of the wind, the Power went forward but missed very gettable opportunities to hit back where it mattered most, on the scoreboard.

Late in the term, the Chargers regained the initiative and kicked four more goals as the Power began to squander the ball and then get clinically punished on the rebound. By the end of the quarter, the Chargers led by fifty-seven points and had limited the Power to two points from their twenty-five forward fifty entries during the first half. It was by far the worst performance by a Power side in many seasons and, in no way reflected their qualities individually or as a team.

The third quarter was more of the same with the Chargers scoring two early goals and then the Power upped their work rate to make better use of hard-won possessions. They minimised the Chargers scoring but were unable to open their own. Once again the Chargers went into overdrive and they scored three more goals with their stunning use of the ball no matter how much pressure the Power applied. With one term to go, they led by ninety-one points and had set the Power up for a humiliating defeat.

In the opening minutes of the last quarter, the Power responded to Leigh’s call to get back to the requirements of the game plan and went forward directly and positively. Xavier and Noah Gown combined their endeavour and skill to set up Mason McGannon to score the team’ first goal for the match. As if inspired, the Power started to win vital centre clearances due to Gown’s determination and Caleb Serong scored another after a hard-won free kick.

For the first time all day the Power were playing like Leigh knew they could and were winning the ball all over the field as a consequence. A strong tackle by Matt McGannon resulted in free kick and this time Gown was able to finish it off with another goal. They continued to keep the Chargers goal less for much of the term but were unable to maintain their own pressure on the scoreboard.

In the last three minutes of the match the Chargers scored three more goals and were able to extend their winning margin to ninety-four points. It was a huge margin in a match as important as a preliminary final but in no way reflected the Power’s qualities. The Chargers made few, if any, mistakes in their performance and will now go into the Grand Final full of confidence and the all-important self-belief that’s required.

Leigh and his assistants will now work with the boys who will continue on with the club in 2019. They will ensure that their levels of self-belief are maintained as, when focused, they proved to be one of the competition’s best sides. What is so exciting about these players is the fact that they were so impressive as bottom-agers all season and will form the nucleus of one of the club’s best ever squads in its twenty seven years in this elite competition.

Final scores, Oakleigh Chargers 17 goals 14behinds 116 points defeated engie Gippsland Power 3 goals 4 behinds 22 points. Goal kickers, Caleb Serong, Mason McGannon and Noah Gown1 each.

On a day when leadership was at a premium, Xavier Duursma did so by stunning example form the opening bounce until the final siren. He won the majority of his possessions in tight contests and really excelled when applying his trademark pressure via his fourteen tackles. Considering the fact that he carried an injury for much of the match, his contribution was exemplary.

Young defender, Ryan Sparkes has impressed with his discipline and determination when nullifying the impact of top quality opponents. Once again he faced this sort of challenge and responded with his usual poise and skill. He used tackles, spoils and intense body pressure to keep his opponents out of the match but also had the self-confidence to win, and effectively use his own possessions.

As he has all year, Bailey Beck was able to be a highly effective midfielder by applying intense pressure in contests as well as providing the team with an avenue to attack. He shut down the impact of opponents with his disciplined play as well picking up and effectively using his many possessions for the whole match.

Bailey Patterson is another top-ager who has taken his game to a higher level during the 2018 season with a combination of hard work and importantly, his willingness to go beyond his comfort zones. He was very competitive when in defence and helped the side even more when moved into attack during the second half. His ten possessions, many contested marks and nine tackles reflect his team-focus.

Noah Gown was once again challenged by Leigh to play a vital role as the team’s main avenue into attack and he responded with his typical strength and hard work. However, when moved on ball he had a greater impact by winning key aerial contests and minimising the impact of the opposition. It was Noah who initiated the positive attacking play in the last quarter with this level of application.

Brock Smith has been one of the bottom-agers who has easily coped with the high levels of competitiveness in the TAC Cup. He has been a key member of the second best defence in the league and once again made a major impact against the Chargers. However, when moved into the mid field he responded manfully to this new challenge and was vital in many positive passages of play.

The Power will now focus on their under fifteen boys and junior girls in the V-Line cup. This is where youngsters make their start to their Power careers and adjust to the increased intensity needed to be competitive. The time and effort that Leigh and Peter Francis put into this aspect of the club’s junior programs is a reflection of their importance and the major reason why the Power’s youngsters, like this year’s bottom-agers, so quickly adapt to the TAC Cup’s challenges.