GIPPSLAND POWER MEDIA RELEASE

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In its last TAC Cup game for the 2015 season, GDF SUEZ Gippsland Power found itself in a very familiar, if not desired, situation. They lost the game against the Northern Knights by one point after looking more than capable of recording a well-deserved victory for about ninety nine percent of the match. Despite suffering such a morale sapping loss, the Power’s finals series situation didn’t change as they still play the Oakleigh Chargers in an elimination final. However, their all-important self-belief could be impacted at the most important time in the season.

Going into the match, things looked positive for the Power as they regained gun forward Tom Papley after his most recent game with the Casey Scorpions in the VFL. Adding to the confidence was the fact that Aloysio Ferreira also returned after he was a late minute withdrawal last week after suffering from the impact of kidney stones. The only downside after selection was the loss of one of the side’s most important and hard-nosed on-ballers, Connor Ambler, who had not come up from a minor injury.

In the opening moments of the first term, the Power controlled much of the play but were unable to convert this to scoreboard pressure. It took some trademark forward pressure for Tom Papley to kick the first goal and finally reward their hard work. A more direct forward thrust allowed Papley to exhibit more of his skills as he roved the pack cleverly. The Knights hit back relatively easily after some poor Power defence and once again they were back in the contest.

Some typically hard forward pressure by the Power enabled Ben McKay to take advantage of an opportunity to move up forward and he then combined with Papley to kick another fine goal. Late in the term he earned a free kick by putting himself right into the contest and gave the side a twenty six point lead by the first change. It was an impressive quarter of football once they started to go more direct but, the early wasted opportunities kept the Knights closer than they deserved to be based on general play.

If the first term opened ineffectively, the Power were more wasteful in the opening minute of the second term. To add to the impact of this inefficiency, the Knights kicked the first goal and put themselves right into the contest, It took the ability of Ben McKay to use his aerial skills to get them going on the scoreboard and then his brother Harry joined the party to extend the side’s lead.

Once again the Power’s ability to apply intense pressure on opponents created a scoring possibility and this time Harry McKay roved skilfully to kick his second. Considering the fact that he’s two-hundred centimetres tall, it was a stunning display of agility at ground level. Mid way through the term it appeared that the Power had taken control of the game but were starting to overuse handball and create unnecessary turnovers as a result.

Like any good team, the Knights began to exploit these “gifts” and kicked the last three goals of the quarter. The Power went to the long break twenty-three points up but, by any assessment, could and should have been at least five goals further ahead. In the early minutes of the third term the Power went directly into attack through great ball use by Jackson McMahon and Tom Hobbs and once again Papley finished it off perfectly.

Yet again, they looked likely to finally start to put the issue beyond doubt but, the knights were far from done with. They kicked the next three goals after Power turnovers made it far too easy for them with costly turnovers. Captain Josh Dunkley showed how it was done with a well-directed delivery to the forward line and Hobbs capped it off with a clever snap. As if inspired, Ben Ainsworth and Harry McKay used excellent team work to allow Dunkley to put his side twenty two points up at the last change-over.

Given this scenario it was clear that the Knights were still in the game and they really upped the ante with the opening goal of the quarter. Further defensive faults gave them a second goal and suddenly the Power seemed to be unable to get the ball anywhere near their forward fifty area, let alone get scoring opportunities to regain the momentum. Another goal by the Knights put them within one goal of the Power.

More sloppy manning up by the Power put the defence under pressure again and the Knight had a narrow lead with only minutes to go. Inspired by this, the Power finally found their way back into their scoring area but they then missed two gettable scoring chances and lost their sixth game of the season by under one goal and their third after leading with only a few minutes to go.

The absence of Connor Ambler and Nash Holmes from this match was probably the key to the loss as they are the key to the side’s ability to put intense and consistent pressure on the opposition’s ball players. Between them they have over fifty possessions per game but, far more importantly have over twenty five tackles. Despite the fact that the other on-ballers stepped up fill the roles that they play, they didn’t make the same sort of stunning impact to make it hard for them to break down the Power defence.

Without this support, even the best defenders have to concede scoring opportunities and the Knights stayed too close to the lead due to the Power’s wastefulness of some really easy chances to put the issue beyond doubt. Based on his positive approach to getting the boys to learn from such situations, Leigh will use the next training session and individual time with them to focus on the Chargers and what’s needed to get to the next stage of the 2015 finals series.

Final scores; Northern Knights 12 goals 7 behinds 79 points defeated GDF SUEZ Gippsland Power 11 goals 12 behinds 78 points. Goal kickers Ben McKay 4, Tom Papley 3, Harry McKay 2, Tom Hobbs and Josh Dunkley 1.

With the defence under extreme pressure all day they needed leadership and Christian Bukyx-Smith stood tall and totally shut down the impact of the Knights best forwards as well as winning important possessions himself. He took many strong contested marks as well as winning vital possession when the ball was at ground level. Fellow defender Ben Dessent is renowned for his consistent ability to use a brand of hard-nosed defence. He combined the ability to apply intense pressure to win the ball in tight contests as well as his skill in applying crunching tackles on even the biggest opponents.

Midfielder Todd Beck has been a consistent contributor all season and once again applied himself to a variety of tasks within the team’s game plan. He won and effectively used many contested possessions as well as using pressure to stop his opponents from making any significant impact on the match. Ben Mc Kay has made a stunning adjustment to the demands of this elite competition as part of his very steep learning curve. He has been a key member of the Power defence but showed with amazing contested marks and long and accurate kicking that he can be significant contributor in attack as well.

Young defender Will Leslie was another who was under pressure all day and he too worked very hard to keep the impact of opponents to a minimum. Rather than see this as his only task he backed his judgement to generate attacking pieces of play with his uncanny pace, ball skills and willingness to take opponents on. Fellow bottom-ager Kade Renooy has been an important member of the team all season and has shown that he can adjust to the demands of many positions in his debut year. His ability to win the ball in tight contests and then use pace and skill to generate drive was again impressive.

Leigh will now work very hard to ensure that the boys have the self-belief required to play the sort of football that will make them highly competitive in the business part of the season. They have showed, in impressive wins over top-four sides that they can cope with the demands involved but have also lost games when everything said they should have won. The return of Holmes and Ambler will be critical as they will ensure that the Chargers on-ballers will never win easy possessions.