Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

After two strong wins in the previous rounds of the TAC Cup, the Loy Yang B Gippsland Power had good reason to view their clash with the Eastern Ranges with a justifiable degree of confidence. Unfortunately for the boys, the competition administrators at AFL Victoria incredibly decided to throw a spanner in the works for the country teams playing in round nine of the season.

To put it succinctly, they set two different sets of conditions on the boys involved in next week’s national under-18 championships. One of the decision makers decreed that all of the players selected for the Victorian Country side must miss their respective round nine matches to rest up before the critical opening game of the championships. As a management decision it made perfect sense as the demands of the championships have traditionally placed the boys under great physical and mental stress and their long term welfare is of prime importance.

However, the Victorian Metropolitan squad members didn’t have the same restriction on them as their management left it up to the boy’s club to make the call again a sensible strategy. The upshot of this variation in approach was that the Ranges allowed their Victorian squad members boys to play while the Power were not allowed to select Dyson Heppell, Tim Northe, Jed Lamb or Tom Bugg. It was akin to Geelong going into last week’s clash with the Pies without Gary Ablett, Jimmy Bartel, Joel Selwood and Cameron Ling and still remain competitive.

To be perfectly honest the Power lost the game against the Ranges due to their inability to convert their inside fifty entries but it would have been interesting to see what would have happened if the “rested” boys had played. We all realise that the TAC Cup competition is all about development and not winning but the playing field for the teams should be even for all teams at all times. A win over the Ranges would have been very important for the development of the boys in the side as they continued to work on developing confidence in themselves, each other and the team’s game plan.

Hopefully in future the decision makers will talk to each other before deciding on variable policies for the state squads. This should be possible as they work in the same office each day. It doesn’t matter which one they choose, both make undeniable sense, but just pick one and let the sides compete fairly. For the Power team the loss is a step backwards in terms of the season but it was largely of their own making after they butchered over 15 more forward fifty entries due to poor options, sloppy skills and lazy finishing.

Despite missing key engine room members the Power did have some positives going their way as two quality players made their first appearances for the 2010 season. Classy defender Michael Ross came into the team after ankle surgery at the end of 2009 while youngster Danny Butcher made his long awaited debut after shoulder surgery. Both teams started slowly and were missing gettable scoring opportunities. The Power finally broke the ice when Dale Hoghton combined with Shaun Marusic and they went to the first change an unconvincing eight points up.

The Ranges scored first in the second quarter after a costly fifty metre penalty against the Power but some strong pressure by Ben Edwards allowed to snap a clever goal. The Ranges then scored two easy goals on the rebound after punishing the Power for turnovers due to a lack of cohesion in their play. Some much needed poise by Damien Hector and Shaun Wyatt resulted in an important goal to Simon Deery but once again the Ranges were allowed to seize the initiative after more turnovers and they went into the long break seven points up.

Things didn’t look much better for the Power early in the third term when the Ranges scored another easy goal as a result of the Power’s lack of purpose. An astute switch of play from defence resulted in tall forwards Marusic and Deery combining to provide Eddy with another for the side and then Deery scored another courtesy of a free kick and fifty metre penalty. All too predictably, the Ranges were able to score another easy goal on the rebound to regain the momentum. The Power were trying very hard but too often their efforts were individual rather than as a cohesive unit and the resultant turnovers were killing them on the scoreboard.

The Power were dominating play for large amounts of time but were missing goals at critical times and once again the Ranges made them pay for their wastefulness with yet another simple goal against the run of play. It took a strong mark and goal by Marusic late in the term to reduce the Ranges lead to five points but the Power had had five more scoring shots than the Ranges and were under the pump as a result.

It was the Power who scored first early in the last quarter when Ross cleverly set the ball up to allow Hadyn Hector to score a clever goal off the pack. With the game in the balance it was the Ranges who were cooler under pressure and they scored the last two goals of the game to run out seventeen point victors. Final scores Eastern Ranges 11 goals 11 behinds 77 points defeated Loy Yang B Gippsland Power 7 goals 18 behinds 60 points. Goal kickers Ben Eddy, Shaun Marusic and Simon Deery 2, Hadyn Hector 1.

The much anticipated return of Michael Ross proved t be well worth the wait as he found his best from straight away. He won his many possessions with strong and disciplined play and then used them with great poise and purpose. His silky skills will be critical to the sides prospects of further success over the coming weeks. Hadyn Hector has been a consistent and increasingly important member of the Power midfield all season and was once again in the thick of the action when it mattered most for the team. His work rate was incredible throughout the game and he wasted few of his many possessions.

Key defender Pat Jones once again went about his work with a minimum of fuss but with a maximum impact. His discipline play allowed him to totally nullify the influence of opponents but, importantly, he had the confidence to win his own ball and generate drive off the backline.Ben Eddy’s season started later than most due to injury but he too has been steadily finding his feet and made his most significant contribution in this game. He led strongly all day and competed hard to keep the ball in the forward line. His aerial skills were to the fore and he looks set to play a key role in the forward structure for the rest of the season.

Half back Shaun Wyatt was another who stuck to his task despite being under considerable pressure. He too kept opponents under pressure but had the ability to back his judgement and create options with his willingness to run and carry the ball. Simon Deery is another youngster who has begun to make an important impact after an injury interrupted pre-season. His ability to take strong contested marks as well as be highly competitive in the ruck were a highlight of his excellent performance. Damian Hector is other making up for lost time due to injury and he too made an important contribution in and around the packs. He won many contested balls with his strength and courage and worked hard to get the ball moving to the side’s advantage.

The next test for the Power comes with an appointment against the Bendigo Pioneers. Both sides will be without their state representative for the match so it’s a level playing field. The many positives from the Ranges game will give Damian Carroll a lot to work with as he prepares the boys for the challenges involved. Their intensity and endeavour were excellent but the lack of cohesion and inability to capitalise on scoring opportunities will not be so simple to address.

It will need more boys to step up and fill the leadership void left by the absence of quality midfielders like Dyson Heppell and Tim Northe if the Power are going to get the true reward for their hard work in the contested issues over the ground. The talent is definitely there, it’s more that some of the boys don’t have the confidence to use their hard won possessions with purpose. Developing that self-belief takes time but their work ethic and commitment are excellent and it will give Damain plenty to work with at training on Wednesday night.