Gippsland Power Media Release

By Bryan Mitchell

After staking a claim for a position in the 2017 TAC Cup finals series with a solid win against the Bendigo Pioneers last week, engie Gippsland Power, consolidated their place with a stunning victory over the Western Jets. Going into the match, both sides were attempting to get the last place in the top eight and had close to their best possible sides selected. Injuries to Will Leslie and Kyle Reid stopped them playing while Grady Cocksedge was rested to give him a chance to recover after a stunning series of games in his rookie year.

On a positive note for the Power, talented under sixteen player, Sam Flanders, returned after elite basketball commitments and joined his young mate, Caleb Serong in the big time. There was a strong westerly wind blowing across the Morwell ground that would have a significant impact on the match as both sides struggled to take full advantage of hard-won scoring opportunities.

It was the Jets who opened the scoring after both sides had wasted scoring possibilities due to intense pressure being applied. The Power hit back to nullify the Jets forward thrusts but were struggling to get the ball into attack with purpose and precision. They were unable to enter their forward fifty zone for over ten minutes but the defence were able to withstand consistent pressure during this time.

Once again the Jets kicked vital goal late in the term but the Power upped their effective work rate and began to maintain forward pressure on the Jets. As a result of this ability to win vital contests, Will Stephenson kicked a crucial gaol on the siren and reduced the Jet’s lead to ten points at the first change. Coach, Leigh Brown was pleased with a lot of the he had seen from the boys with the abundant pressure in the tightest contests but some of the finishing had lacked the vision and skill to convert this to scoreboard pressure.

Early in the second term, the Power built on their effectiveness from the latter moments of the first quarter and, once again, Stephenson was able to snap truly to reduce the Jets lead to less than one goal. Unfortunately, this was to be the Power’s last major score for the rest of the term as they missed seven very gettable possibilities. In stark contrast, the Jets kicked two goals and increased their lead to thirteen points by the end of the quarter.

Despite demonstrating their traditional hard-nosed style of football, the Power had suffered once again from making sloppy use of the ball when it mattered most, kicking goals. It was a case of “if only” as the line-coaches and Leigh attempted to draw positives from what had been a disappointing return for a lot of hard work. However, the result of the Pioneer’s game, and the wonderful play in the second half that caused it, was the key to what they asked the boys for in such a vital match.

It was the Power who took the early initiative and Caleb Serong’s long and direct forward thrust enabled Austin Hodge to kick a great goal to get the scoreboard ticking. Not to be outdone, the other ”boy wonder” Sam Flanders, took full advantage of some wonderful forward pressure by the old boys and the Power were back in the game. Half-way through the quarter, the Jets kicked a vital goal and then, even better, were “gifted” a second after sloppy ball use by the Power.

Going into the last break, the Jets led by thirteen points and seemed to have the answer for whatever the Power were able to throw at them. Yet again, the all-important forward fifty conversion rate, was the statistic that was so costly for the Power. They had only kicked one goal from eight entries in the match and, this was nowhere near effective enough to get the reward that they deserved after such hard work to get there.

Before the match, Leigh had talked about the club’s trademarks based on unity and working hard for each other and those around them that mattered. He had challenged the boys by asking for them to reward all of the Power “family” with the sort of team football under pressure the he believed that they were capable of. He “reminded” the side about his faith in them at the last break and it didn’t take long to see that they were ready to repay his trust in them individually and as a unit.

In the opening minutes of the last quarter some highly effective ball use from defence gave Hodge the chance to have a one-one-one battle and he capitalised on it with another goal. It seemed as if the Power had taken the initiative all over the ground and the Jets were under so much pressure that they couldn’t get any team play started. Some more of the Power’s traditional pressure up forward allowed Irving Mosquito to use his spectacular pace and skill to kick a fine goal and it was game on.

The ball was in the Power half nearly all the time and, when it did “escape,” it came back immediately. Some very strong play by Serong won him a free kick and he converted it positively to give the Power the lead at the most important time in the match. The Power’s Sale “mafia” Cody Henness, Nick Hogan and Stephenson combined as a slick unit and suddenly the side was two kicks ahead with minutes to go.

The Power were attacking relentlessly through the corridor and Tom Murray went long and hard to allow Henness to take another strong contested mark. He too kicked truly and by the final siren the Power had scored a gutsy and morale boosting sixteen point victory that reflected exactly what Leigh had relied on in his pre match address. The forward fifty stats were the key to the finish of the match as they kicked five goals from seventeen entries while limiting the Jets to four unconverted scoring chances.

Final scores; engie Gippsland Power 9 goals 13behinds 67 points defeated Western Jets 6 goals 15 behinds 51 points. Goal kickers; Will Stephenson 3, Austin Hodge 2, Irving Mosquito, Cody Henness, Caleb Serong and Sam Flanders 1.

The Jet’s best player Cameron Rayner is tipped to be a top four draft pick and Leigh asked Power captain, Aidan Quigley, to “run with” him as part of the team plan for the match. Not only did he stop him from kicking a goal as the Jet’s key forward but was able to apply pressure via eight tackles that minimised any impact he had on general play. To finish off a stunning match Aidan had nearly twenty possessions himself in what was a real “captains” performance.

Another member of the Power’s midfield unit to excel was Nick Hogan, who played yet another wonderful game after missing matches due to injury. He was in the thick of the tightest contests with over a dozen tackles and then had the pace, skill and vision to win many contested possessions and use them effectively through the corridor. His leadership in the second half was critical in the Power regaining the momentum and dominating general play.

Callum Porter again showed why he is so highly rated in all of the TAC Cup’s key competitive statistics with another key contribution to a win. He won many contested possessions, clearances and had ten tackles when his side needed then most. The key to much of his work is the fact that he can create time and space in the tightest situations and generate many positive passages of attacking football.

Boadie Motton is a bottom-ager who has learned quickly and effectively from his hardest team mates and has now deservedly won a place along-side of them. He too applies intense physical pressure in contests with strong tackles and, like Callum and Kim Drew, is able to quickly and cleverly get the ball moving, especially by hand. His team orientation is outstanding and he is now more than worthy of inclusion in the Power’s hard-nuts, the Bruise Brothers.

In the total team game, Will Stephenson obviously had a huge impact on the scoreboard with three vital goals under pressure. However, this is only a part of his contribution as he won many contested possessions all over the ground and used his ability and pace to generate many positive passages of play. Rounding off his all-round impact on the match he too applied pressure with many crunching tackles.

As if the side needed any more mid-field grunt, Kim Drew joined the play-makers with his own brand of pressure football. He was often at the bottom of the biggest packs handing the ball to the umpire as well as having the skill, self-confidence and strength to win contested possessions and then using them quickly to initiate attacking football. His twenty five possessions and many tackles reflect his impact on the win.

The “boy wonders” Caleb and Sam once again showed that they have the poise and skill under pressure to be important contributors in the nation’s best junior football competitions. This isn’t surprising as the have already done so in the highest levels of other sports and seem to have the ability and confidence to do stunning things in the tightest situations on the football field.

At the other end of the age spectrum Sean Masterson, Austin Hodge and Cody Henness stood tall early in the match and then really excelled in the second half when the side needed them most. They were important when the Jets had the momentum going their way as the helped to stop many scoring opportunities. Their aerial skills under pressure enabled them to take telling contested marks in the second half and then they’d back themselves to use the ball positively by hand and foot.

The next challenge that Leigh will give the boys comes in the last game of the season against the Murray Bushrangers at Victoria Park next Sunday. Leigh will be relying on the sort of football that the boys have played in the second half of the last two matches to keep the momentum going but also has another key positive factor to use in the build up to this match.

In three vital matches against top four TAC Cup sides, Sandringham Dragons, Geelong Falcons and Dandenong Stingrays, the Power have had the skill and confidence to not only be competitive but beat them in the process. The selected side in each game was nowhere near the strength of the current team and there is a chance that the side’s injury list will be shortened and top players might be available. The Bushies represent another such tough challenge for the Power and they must continue to have unshakable self-belief if they want to continue their role as the competition’s ground breakers.