

**“STINGRAYS RUN TO VICTORY IN SEASON OPENER.”**  
**ROUND 1 MATCH REPORT**  
**BY MITCH BROWN**

The Dandenong Southern Stingrays staved off a dogged Gippsland Power outfit to emerge victors by twelve points on a cool Saturday afternoon in Traralgon.

Boasting thirteen debutants and only a handful of regulars from last year's TAC Cup campaign, the Stingrays' fresh new squad led for most of the day, but a determined third quarter from the Power threatened to derail the Rays' best-laid plans, before the cool-headed Stingrays came home strongly in the fourth quarter with a 13.9 (87) to 10.15 (75) win.

AFL Victoria TAC Cup veterans Myles Pohlke, Tommy Glen, Thomas Jok and Josh Battle all led from the front, collecting plenty of disposals and having a widespread impact.

Equally impressive were the efforts of first-gamers Sam Fowler, who finished the day with four goals and gave the Rays plenty of run through half-forward, and Hunter Clark, whose silky efficiency across half-back created many rebounds for his teammates to capitalise on.

Down back, 17 year old Oscar Clavarino and the much improved Ryan Gains were pillars of defence, standing firm against Gippsland's worthy forward line.

Both Dandenong and Gippsland announced themselves as attacking, fleet footing running teams for the 2016 TAC Cup, resulting in a well-matched and entertaining contest to kick off what is sure to be an exciting season.

“The game really could have gone either way for most of it, we were fortunate enough to get across the line today, and that gives the boys some confidence, that hard work in the off-season pays off.” Stingrays' senior coach Craig Black said post-match.

“Through our training and pre-season, we wanted to set really high standards, and if we can achieve them, like we did today, we'll set ourselves up well for the year.”

“We know we're in for a tough encounter in Round 1 each year, Gippsland are always tuff at home...they also play a brand of football similar to ours.”

The first quarter saw both sides come out and attack immediately, with Danny Allsop's clever snap opening the scoring within the first 2 minutes. Both

teams tried to run and use the corridor, but were foiled by poor disposal in certain areas of the ground.

Sam Fowler's three first-half goals set the tone for the attacking Stingrays, who looked dangerous when they committed to their run-and-carry style of play.

Gippsland had the benefit of cleaner disposal, but in front of goal were unable to capitalise, going into the half-time break down 3.8 (26) to 6.5 (41).

Gippsland looked ready to run away with the match in the third term, with Ben Ainsworth unloading not one but two quick goals in the early stages to bring the margin to within a kick. The Power was allowed to use their pace a lot more in this quarter, as the Stingrays' composure went out the window. Panic started to creep in as Gippsland kicked their way to a three point lead at the last change.

Dandenong needed their leaders to stand up in the face of the Power momentum – and the likes of Sam Fowler, Josh Battle and Myles Pohlke did just that.

Fowler added his fourth goal after a blitzing run through the forward line; Josh Battle converted two set shots at key moments to keep team morale at a high; and Myles Pohlke was simply everywhere in the last quarter, popping up for a goal of his own while collecting disposals throughout the midfield.

After a disappointing third quarter, the Rays managed to recover, get to the footy before their opponents and manufacture scoring opportunities – which puts them in good stead for the season to come.

GIPPSLAND	3.2 (20)	3.8 (26)	7.10 (52)	10.15 (75)
DANDENONG	3.2 (20)	6.5 (41)	7.7 (49)	13.9 (87)

Dandenong Goalkickers: Josh Battle 4, Sam Fowler 4, Danny Allsop, Aaron Darling, Thomas Glen, Daniel Hughes, Myles Pohlke

Dandenong Best: Josh Battle, Sam Fowler, Hunter Clark, Myles Pohlke, Thomas Glen, Oscar Clavarino