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# New professional women's basketball team set to inspire young Tauranga players



By Emma Houpt

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Tauranga couple John and Lorraine Miller. Photo / Supplied

"You have to see it to be it."

That's the catchphrase driving the first Tauranga-based professional women's basketball team hoping to inspire younger generations of players.

Whai - which translates to stingray in Māori - will represent the Bay of Plenty, Gisborne and Waikato in the new women's National Basketball League (NBL).

Basketball New Zealand says the league will give women's basketball more exposure with players receiving equal pay to male players.

Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa is made up of five regional teams representing North, Mid North, Central, Upper South and Lower South regions.

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Tauranga couple John and Lorraine Miller run co-founded Whai and the NBL men's team the Stingrays late last year.

The Tauranga-based men's team was set to join New Zealand's NBL in 2024.

John Miller said having "elite" female players train and compete in Tauranga would raise the regional profile of women's basketball and motivate young players.



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"It's about young people and giving them a new horizon of what's possible. Kids will see this and it will inspire them to play the game, get fit, eat better, train harder and learn how to be in a team," he said.

"For the first time, young women in our region are going to actually see the best New Zealand has ever produced."

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Sport Bay of Plenty's active young people team leader Calvin Buttimore said the establishment of the team signalled growth in the women's game and increased visibility of female basketballers.

"Having a mix of home-grown and international talent right on our doorstep is not only an inspiration for young players in our rohe, it also means wahine in our region will be able to see themselves represented at the top level of sport," he said.

He said local young players would now be able to see a clear development pathway for them in the game and would not feel the need to leave the region or country as they seek opportunities to develop skills.

The women's competition was set to tip off from June 29, with a final series scheduled for August 26 at Nelson's Trafalgar Centre. All games will be broadcast on Sky Sport.

## New basketball facility and youth academy planned for region

Miller said right now there were not enough facilities in Tauranga, with many basketballers struggling to find space to train and play.

He said to address this problem, a warehouse in the city was being converted into a three-court basketball facility. It was set to open between October and December.

A youth academy would run within the 1200sq m facility giving people the chance to train alongside the NBL teams. It would also employ 23 full-time staff once fully operational.

"It's about getting to be in the same building as these elite players when they are training."

He said it would "develop young people through the sport of basketball" and offer pathways to national and college teams overseas.

It also meant those looking to pursue basketball professionally could stay in Tauranga rather than move to other regions or countries.

In the past talented young people typically had left the Bay of Plenty for such opportunities, he said.

The couple, who worked alongside two other local families to establish it, felt it was their way of giving back to the city after living here for more than 25 years.

The idea for the academy came about last year after the couple visited friends who run the Mainland Eagles Basketball Academy in Christchurch.



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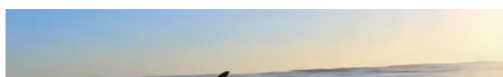


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