

LATEST NEWS

Home / Tauranga Whai / Straight Shot: The Whai Need to Be Entertainers



Posted on Monday, March 11th, 2024

STRAIGHT SHOT: THE WHAI NEED TO BE ENTERTAINERS

Photo credit: Monica Toretto

The inaugural season for the Whai promises to be an exciting journey as men's professional level basketball finally comes to Tauranga on a permanent basis. Sky Sport commentator Justin Nelson thinks the ride will be anything but smooth for the newcomers, but the wins will come if they swing hard and fear nobody.

Ahh, to be at the starting line with few outside expectations and a chance to build from the ground up. No inherent culture problems, no stale old ways of doing business. Just a chance to be new, fresh and exciting.

The Whai have turned the light switch on to their men's team and will soon open the front doors to fans, sponsors and viewers as they set about building a life, and a history, in the Sal's NBL.

No doubt the wheels of the Whai business are spinning frantically right now as bringing these things to life is no easy task, rather it is very hard work. Tireless hours, surprises around every corner and the relentless chase for commercial partners – like I said, hard work.

So, what can we expect from the Whai in their inaugural season?

To be fair to incoming fledgling coach Matt Lacey, as well as an administration and ownership that is still wet behind the ears despite running a Tauhi team for two seasons, I would advise the Whai to break their KPIs and aspirations into two parts – on court and off court.

Up until a week ago I was feeling optimistic with big Sam Mennenga holding down the middle for the Whai, but a European out-clause in his contract has been triggered and presently the best outcome for the Whai looks to be a mid-season return for the powerful young big.

Jayden Bezzant needed a fresh start from the Bulls and will have every chance to excel with the Whai, Phillip Carr is an American forward with an impressive playing resume in the NBA G League and a number of Euro competitions, but from there we are looking at a roster filled with youngsters without a ton of experience.

Two more imports are still to come, and the just announced signing of Kruz Perrot-Hunt brings another Kiwi guard with reasonable experience and some untapped potential still, Mennenga's absence is a massive blow.

Big Sam was the star recruit, but such is life in basketball where global opportunities are plentiful.

If you're being realistic with your on-court ambitions, the best you can hope for with a slowly developing squad is to see them step on court and take a free swing every game. No hype, just be competitive and bring a hard edge. Play up-tempo and get all over the ball. Be hungry.

If the Whai can bring a gameplan that revolves around work ethic and electric transition, they may catch a few teams by surprise. If the Whai come with a complicated gameplan and try to outsmart the opposition, I can see an uncomfortable ride.

The time for complex X's and O's, and a thick playbook, might come down the track, but for their first season with a team that as of right now looks to be lacking genuine star quality compared with most others, I'm a fan of throwing the kitchen sink at all comers. Have a crack, keep it simple.

Find a way to get Bezzant open and hope he can return to the form we saw from him in 2020 and 2021. The young veteran can play, and shoot, and given the way he was shuffled backwards at the Bulls he must be eager to get back to being a leader on the court.

Let the likes of Jayden Boucher, Te Tuhi Lewis, Jett Thompson and newest recruit Maxim Stephens be a group of swarming pests, harassing opponents to make mistakes, and then hope the final two import signings are top shelf additions who can complement Carr.

A trio of the right combination of star imports, if they stay healthy and buy-in to the mission, can definitely cause damage in the Sal's NBL – remember the Taranki Ais in 2022?

When it comes to off-court ambitions, which is where in season one the Whai might make the most impact, there needs to be fun, entertainment, engagement, and inclusiveness at every turn.

In the Sal's NBL the home team stays on court to meet the fans for a minimum of 15 minutes after every game. My advice to the Whai – stay on court for at least half an hour. Be with your fans, show them the value of being connected and included where coming to a game means you belong.

Be entertainers!

The Whai must be fan-friendly and prepared to get their supporters as close to the team as possible. Hold open training sessions, incorporate on and off court activities at games, and reward fans and members who bring along newbies to games with them.

Be entertainers!

Hi-five the fans and partners sitting courtside when you get a chance, give a chest pump or flex after nailing a three, let the players bring personality to the court, encourage them to learn the names of fans and sponsors.

Be entertainers!

Go find partners who are prepared to give sample products and prizes away. Fans love being the centre of attention on game night. When it comes to this level of sport, if you don't have fans - you don't have teams.

In 2024 the best outcome on court for the Whai is to take 20 free swings and hope the blows land more often than not, and then everything else should be about building a fan base by being the ultimate entertainers.

Like 3.9K Share

QUICK LINKS

Basketball New Zealand
Tall Blacks
Tall Ferns
Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa
Girls' Cup Games

FOLLOW US

Facebook
 X (Twitter)
 Instagram

CONTACT US

Ranchhod Tower, Level 6, 39 The Terrace, Wellington 6011
Email: leagues@nz.basketball
Postal: PO Box Z31, 7 Waterloo Quay Pipitea, Wellington 6011
Phone: +64 4 498 5950

SEARCH THE NZ NBL SITE HERE

Type search term here ...

