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Posted on Friday, October 20th, 2023

WHAI NAME MATT LACEY HEAD COACH FOR INAUGURAL SEASON

Photo credit: Cameron Walker

The Sal's National Basketball League (Sal's NBL) is excited to share that the Whai Men's Basketball team based in Tauranga have announced Matt Lacey as the Head Coach for their inaugural 2024 season.

Matt will commence his role with the organisation in the new year and is looking forward to joining the Whai to continue building on a successful track record of developing talent while winning two national schoolboy championships at Rosmini College and as the current Junior Tall Blacks Coach.

Since being awarded a franchise license in December of 2021, Co-Founder John Miller and a committed group of investors, volunteers and employees have been working towards the 2024 season to deliver top-notch family entertainment to fans while developing the next generation of basketball players from Tauranga and the wider region.

With the Whai joining their sister franchise, who feature in the G.J. Gardner Homes Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa competition, the ownership group are committed to providing pathways for developing talent in the local communities while doing their part to ensuring that basketball thrives at the grassroots level regionally. Lacey will also head the Whai Basketball Academy with aims to strengthen the pathway for a thriving local basketball community in the Bay of Plenty.

"The opportunity to be involved with Whai Basketball is hugely exciting," said Lacey.

"To lead the Whai in the Sal's NBL, as well as help drive the Whai Academy and other youth development programmes Whai has planned is an opportunity I couldn't turn down. After learning more about the ownership groups and Whai Director of Coaching Alex Stojkovic's vision for basketball in the Bay of Plenty, I have no doubt the Whai are going to have a huge impact on the growth and development of basketball in the region."

Director of Coaching Stojkovic is thrilled to have Lacey on board to lead the inaugural season.

"When we applied for an NBL license in 2021, Matt was our number one choice to coach the team. We are glad that we managed to convince him to be part of this project, and we look forward to seeing him take charge of the Whai.

"Matt embodies all the characteristics we seek in a Head Coach - excellent communication, tremendous work ethic, high emotional intelligence, and a proven track record of team success. He has also demonstrated his ability to develop players for the next level," said Stojkovic.

The Whai will be the 11th team to join the Sal's NBL during a phase of immense growth for the game in participation levels, on broadcast with partner Sky Television, over social channels and within stadium attendance.

General Manager of Leagues Maree Taylor is excited about the addition of the Whai and the current trajectory of the league.

"The Sal's NBL is excited to welcome a franchise that will represent their community to their fullest and is not only dedicated to the game at the professional level, but also committed to building pathways for young athletes in the region, growing the game of basketball and all the positives that come with it."

The Queenstown Yeti were initially tapped to join the league in 2024 as a 12th franchise, but that entry for has been delayed for at least two years while awaiting developments on upgrades required for the franchise's planned home venue.

Queenstown Lakes District Council, the Yeti Ownership group and the Sal's National Basketball League are committed to NBL basketball in the Central Otago region and an update can be expected in the new year.

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