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Whai complete incredible turnaround with Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa championship triumph

Stuff sports reporters

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At Queen Elizabeth Youth Centre, Tauranga: Whai 90 (Morgan Yaeger 19 points, McKenna Dale 16, Lara McSpadden 14, Ashley Joens 11, Jade Kinisome 10) **Queens 71** (Lou Brown 19 points, Jihyun Park 17, Jordan

The Tauranga Whai have won their first Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa championship.

And they have done it in emphatic fashion, destroying the pre-season favourites, Wellington's Tokomanawa Queens, 90-71 in a one-sided grand final on Sunday.

The 19-point victory completed a remarkable turnaround for the Whai under coach Alex Stojkovich.

The hosts dropped four of their first five games and suffered a record 33-point defeat against the defending champion Northern Kahu in round five.

The Whai dominated both ends of the floor in the final to secure their first title at the third time of trying, celebrating in front of their home supporters.

The game was effectively all over after two quarters.

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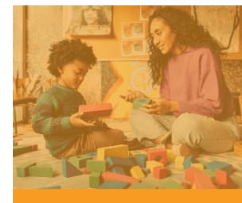


Whai players celebrate after winning the 2024 Tauhi basketball final. DJ MILLS / PHOTOSPORT

Back-to-back threes and a Morgan Yaeger lay-up saw the Whai race out to a 20-point halftime lead.

Yaeger, who fought back from a broken wrist suffered two minutes into the first game, spearheaded the Whai with a team-high 19 points, four assists and three steals in a finals MVP performance.

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But the Australian guard had plenty of support too, with five Whai players hitting double digits and their bench outscoring the Queens' 24-3 in a genuine team effort.

Lara McSpadden contributed 14 points and didn't miss a shot, while long-range shooters Ashley Joens, McKenna Dale and Jade Kirisome regularly punished the Queens from beyond the arc.



Whai's Morgan Yaeger takes on the Queens defence.
DJ MILLS / PHOTOSPORT

Lou Brown was the best in a losing effort for the Queens, matching Yaeger with 19 points and pulling down a whopping 17 rebounds.

The Queens' WNBA star Jordan Horston scored 13 points but left plenty out there too, shooting five from 20 from the floor.

The Queens have been involved in all three Taiuhi finals but the wait continues to add to the championship they won in season one.

They just couldn't find a way back into the game after going into halftime 20 points down.

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