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Posted: 02:00pm Fri 01 Jul, 2022

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Whai to start season in Tauranga



The Whai team will play in the first season of professional basketball ever in Tauranga, in the new national league. Photos: Roshan Uleese - @roshysportfolio.



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When The Whai take to the court July 5 in Tauranga, they will be changing the face of women's basketball in New Zealand as part of a movement to elevate the sport for Kiwi females young and old.

The Whai team – which represents the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and Gisborne – is one of five regional teams in the new-look women's national basketball league for 2022.

The aim of the new league, named GJ Gardner Homes Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa, is to elevate the game of women's basketball in Aotearoa.

This is the first ever season of women's professional basketball in New Zealand – and, on top of that, it's the first season of professional basketball being played in Tauranga.

"This is great news as these women athletes will have pay equity with the men's league and the chance to play the game they love around their families, friends and communities," says partnerships manager Shaun Neems.

Formed last December, Shaun says the Whai is made up of professional basketballers from around New Zealand, including Tall Ferns and three talented imports from America.

"Whai means 'stingray' in Te Reo. This represents guardianship of our area; they are seen as protectors – so come and support the Whai as we protect home court."

The Whai take on Mainland Pouakai next Tuesday, July 5, at the Queen Elizabeth Youth Centre from 7pm in their first home game of the season.

The team is putting out the call to Bay of Plenty people come out en masse to support The Whai – and get behind professional women's basketball in Aotearoa with females now getting the chance to showcase their skillset at the highest level.



"Come and support our girls as they protect home court on July 5 against the Mainland Pouakai."

With Whai's motto: "See it, to be it", captain and point guard, Texan 25-year-old Kyra Lambert, hopes the Bay of Plenty backs her team in the national league – particularly young women.

"I'm really hoping that for young women especially, is that they can see not only the talent, but the level of basketball being played and can see themselves in our shoes hopefully one day," says Kyra.

Shaun says young Kiwi female basketball players now have something to look up to. "This national league allows them to see what the established pathway [to an elite or professional career] looks like."

Show your support for The Whai and NZ women's basketball July 5 from 7pm at the Queen Elizabeth Youth Centre. Tickets from \$12 at: stingrays.basketball



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