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Basketball: World history made in Tauranga



Kendell Heremaia. Photos: Roshan Uleese.



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A sold out crowd, including NBA star Steven Adams, witnessed basketball history this week when The Whai took on Northern Kahu in a top table clash in Tauranga.

This game is the first women's contest in professional sport in known history where the female athletes are paid the same as the men and it's happening in Tauranga.

Adams was at the game to support his sister Gabriella Adams-Gavet.



John Miller, left, and Steven Adams.

Heading into Tuesday night's game at the Queen Elizabeth Youth Centre. The Whai's co-founder John Miller was confident in the team's chances.

The game got off to slow start, with the Kahu leading 10-9 at the end of the first quarter.

Local player Kendell Heremaia, who's recently back on the court from injury, played a pivotal part and, aside from being the second highest scorer, was on fire defensively.

The second quarter ended with The Whai leading 29-25.

The third quarter saw great plays from The Whai's two US players, Kyra Lambert and Sheniqua Greene, who both contributed with points and defense.

The third quarter ended with Northern Kahu leading 44-39.

The final quarter ended with Northern Kahu closing the game out and an impressive performance by another US player, Madison Wolf.

The Northern Kahu won by 16 points- 61-45.

"We were sold out in Tauranga, a city that has never had professional women's basketball. This is a first for New Zealand," says Miller.

"The fact that you can sell out an arena in the middle of a week in Tauranga with a brand new team shows that people want to come and watch."



Kendell Heremaia shooting free throws.

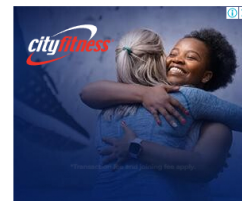
Although disappointed by the loss, Whai player Kendell Heremaia is positive about moving forward and believes more accountability is needed.

"To make a fist it takes five fingers - if one person's out it affects the whole



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team."

Kendell is very pleased about the pay parity, which came into effect on Tuesday night.



"I think it's cool and it's been a long time coming. It's great that we're also being recognised as a strong league."

Northern Kahu player Madison Wolf describes what enabled the Northern Kahu to get the job done.

"We really refocussed as a group. We knew what we came here with and tried to execute our gameplan. In the second half we really came back together as a team and just connected," Madison says.

Madison is also positive about the pay parity between men and women basketball leagues in New Zealand and believes this is only just the start.

"I think it's great that women are getting the recognition they deserve, and I think that although this is just one league this can be spread out globally and tonight is just a steppingstone," she says.

Bay of Plenty Stingrays director of coaching Alex Stojkovic sees positives in the Whai's loss but fatigue is showing.

"At the start our execution was good. We shot the ball well in the first half," Alex says.

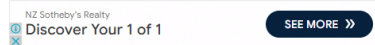
"So in the second half we started to look a bit tired. We played on Sunday and with the injuries we're carrying we definitely got a bit fatigued in the second half and allowed them to score some easy points. We just didn't have enough in the tank in the fourth quarter," he says.

Stojkovic is also happy about the pay parity in New Zealand.

"I think it's a long time coming. To have pay parity in New Zealand is amazing for the girls. If you look at the crowd it effectively sold out tonight.

"To have such strong support and the girls getting paid salaries for an eight-week season is amazing and well-deserved.

"It shows the next generation of girls running around here that it possible to follow your dreams, play basketball and get paid to do it," he says.

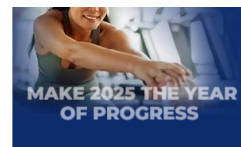


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