



Advertisement with NZME

Home / Bay of Plenty Times

Basketball: Tauranga-based Whai men's team to join NBL, Matt Lacey revealed as head coach

By Sandra Conchie
Multimedia Journalist, Bay of Plenty Times - Bay of Plenty Times
22 Oct, 2023 04:04 AM 4 mins to read

ADVERTISEMENT

WHAT'S ON BAYCOURT
WHERE THE ARTS COME ALIVE

TRIBUTE
DION PRIDE SINGS THE SONGS OF HIS FATHER
Date: Fri 04 April
Time: 7pm
[BUY TICKETS](#)

Advertisement with NZME

Save Share



Whai Men's National Basketball League team head coach Matt Lacey (centre) flanked by Whai co-founder John Miller (left) and Whai's director of coaching Alex Stojkovic at the launch party to announce Lacey's appointment.

Tauranga is set to have a Whai men's basketball team join the National Basketball League (NBL) next year - the only North Island club to have a men's and women's professional team competing at the sport's top level in New Zealand.

Whai Basketball director of coaching Alex Stojkovic said the Whai Basketball franchise had secured a licence to join the Sal's NBL competition after putting in a bid to join the league in 2021.

Matt Lacey's appointment as fulltime head coach of the men's team was revealed at an invitation-only event in Bethlehem on Thursday night.

Lacey is the current coach of Basketball New Zealand's Junior Tall Blacks team and begins his fulltime coaching role with the Whai Men's NBL team in February.

Whai Basketball also holds a licence for the Whai Women's elite team to compete in the G.J. Gardner Homes Taiuhi Basketball Aotearoa League.



Advertisement with NZME

Read More

- Basketball: Tauranga women's team Whai Basketball inspires ...
- New professional women's basketball team set to inspire ...
- Basketball: New NZ professional league 'a long time ...

Stojkovic said Lacey was their "number one choice" for head coach as he had a "wealth of experience" and a successful track record, including at Takapuna's Rosmini College, where he led the team to national championships over the past eight years.

Many of Lacey's junior players had gone on to excel in college basketball in the US and professionally, he said.

"Matt will coach the Whai national league team as well as develop pathway programmes for up-and-coming local players."

Latest from Bay of Plenty Times

Bay of Plenty Times • UPDATED

Watch: Surfers encounter orca
23 Mar 04:01 PM

Bay of Plenty Times

'Dangerous': Woman 'clawed' self-proclaimed warden during parking clash

23 Mar 01:00 PM

Bay of Plenty Times

Rising talent: Young skaters gear up for national spotlight



Advertise with NZME

City drop-off spaces set for overhaul

SPONSORED



Advertise with NZME

He said the Whai men's team will make Mercury Baypark their base for all 10 home games when the NBL season begins in late March.

Stojkovic said the league started in 1992.

He said it had been a difficult journey for Whai to achieve the NBL licence. Under the NBL's salary cap, they were able to offer one-year contracts to up to 10 players, including three overseas imports, but could not sign any players until next month.

"It's quite an achievement as we are the only club in the North Island that has an NBL team and the Taiuhi women's team, and combined with our Whai Academy, that gives us a unique opportunity to help develop local talent. We provide equal opportunities for both genders," Stojkovic told the *Bay of Plenty Times*.

Stojkovic said he wanted to pay tribute to Whai Basketball co-founder John Miller, who was "instrumental in making this happen".

"Without him, we wouldn't be here. John and the other co-founders have invested tremendous resources to get us to this point," he said.

Stojkovic said the NBL season was only four months and most NBL coaches were only employed for that period of time.

"We want Matt to be here coaching and developing players year-round. We want to create pathways for up-and-coming players and we see the NBL as a good stepping stone on that journey."

In a written statement, Lacey said the opportunity to be involved with the Whai Basketball franchise was "hugely exciting".

"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 group and Alex's vision for basketball in the Bay of Plenty, I have no doubt the Whai NBL team is going to have a huge impact on the growth and development of basketball in the region," he said.

Miller, his wife Lorraine and two other families established the Whai Basketball franchise in 2021.

An excited Miller told the *Bay of Plenty Times* Lacey was the "obvious choice" as head coach.

He said the search to recruit the right players had started including looking in America, Australia and Europe, as well as in the Philippines and Indonesia where the growth of the sport had "gone crazy", since the 2023 Fiba World Cup.

"We plan to run some open trials for local players in the region and we are also looking for five development players," he said.

Miller said having both an elite men's team and elite women's players train and compete in Tauranga would help raise the regional profile of the sport and inspire young players wanting to pursue basketball professionally.

The word "whai" holds cultural significance, too - meaning stingray. In Māori mythology, whai are guardians of areas where shellfish can be harvested - the whai is an integral part of Tauranga Moana's history.

Sport Bay of Plenty's general manager of community sport and recreation Nick Chambers said "it was great" to see further development pathways emerging with the expansion of the Whai Basketball franchise.

Bay of Plenty Times' publisher NZME is a trusted partner of Whai Basketball.

Sandra Conchie is a senior journalist at the *Bay of Plenty Times* and *Rotorua Daily Post* and has been a journalist for 24 years.



Recommended for you

Refresh for more ↻



New Zealand
Trump's Government slashes \$51,000 funding for NZ scientists' trip to US



New Zealand
'How dare they': Protest erupts over puberty blocker regulation



New Zealand
'I'm done': Artist loses battle over copyright in landmark case with her ex



New Zealand
Afternoon quiz: The film *Tinā* takes place in which New Zealand city?



Hawkes Bay Today
Pirate outplay impatient Texans

Paid promoted content

Latest from Bay of Plenty Times



Watch: Surfers encounter orca

▶ 23 Mar 04:01 PM

Two surfers encountered a pod of orcas off Arataki Beach on Sunday morning.



'Dangerous': Woman 'clawed' self-proclaimed warden during parking clash

23 Mar 01:00 PM



Rising talent: Young skaters gear up for national spotlight

23 Mar 06:00 AM



Once-a-day milking a winning choice for King Country couple

23 Mar 05:00 AM



SPONSORED
The Kiwi businesses leading the way in workplace wellbeing

Paid promoted content

The New Zealand Herald



NZ HERALD

- About NZ Herald
- Meet the journalists
- Newsletters
- Classifieds
- Help & support
- Contact us
- House rules
- Privacy Policy
- Terms of use
- Competition terms & conditions
- Our use of AI

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

- Bay of Plenty Times e-edition
- Manage your print subscription
- Manage your digital subscription
- Subscribe to Herald Premium
- Subscribe to the Bay of Plenty Times
- Gift a subscription
- Subscriber FAQs
- Subscription terms & conditions
- Promotions and subscriber benefits

NZME NETWORK

- Bay of Plenty Times
- The New Zealand Herald
- The Northland Age
- The Northern Advocate
- Waikato Herald
- Rotorua Daily Post
- Hawke's Bay Today
- Whanganui Chronicle
- Viva
- NZ Listener
- What the Actual
- Newstalk ZB
- BusinessDesk
- OneRoof
- Driven CarGuide
- iHeart Radio
- Restaurant Hub

NZME

- About NZME
- NZME careers
- Advertise with NZME
- Digital self-service advertising
- Book your classified ad
- Photo sales
- NZME Events



© Copyright 2025 NZME Publishing Limited



Access New Zealand's best journalism From \$1.50 per week

Subscribe now

