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# Kiwi women's basketball league Tauhi Aotearoa doubles salaries in significant makeover

 Marc Hinton

April 4, 2024

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Tokomanawa Queens and Tall Ferns player Stella Beck has been a regular in Tauhi Aotearoa.  
CHRIS SYMES / PHOTOSPORT

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In a groundbreaking move being heralded as a global first, New Zealand's national women's basketball league is undergoing a significant makeover that will see player salaries doubled, the season shift its time-frame and international expansion on the cards.

Most significantly, with confirmation of a major salary infusion courtesy of broadcasting partner Sky Television and chief commercial partners, the women of Tauhi Basketball Aotearoa will now earn more than their male counterparts for the 2024 season.

That, said Sky Sport's head of commercialisation and fandom Justin Nelson, was a move that made this Kiwi womens league a trailblazer in global sport.

"It's groundbreaking in many ways," Nelson told *The Post*. "First and foremost the player payment is significant right around the world to show there is increased commerciality coming into women's sport. As that happens it provides us with opportunities to further invest in players and ensure they're able to continue to progress along that elite level pathway.

"To be in a position entering the third season where our athletes in the women's game are earning more than the men is quite remarkable and hopefully sends a real message across the world that these things are possible."

The Tauhi makeover includes as its pillars the doubling of player wages (it's understood players will now earn as much as \$3000 a week), targeting expansion for 2025 to include two international teams and shifting the league into an October-December slot that sees it go head to head with Australian equivalent the WNBL.

*The Post* understands Tauhi's willingness to move into a time-frame heavily favoured by the broadcaster led to the significant cash injection. Nelson refused to comment on other sports in the picture for the partnership, but sources have indicated netball turned down the opportunity to move the ANZ premiership from its existing April-July season..



Tahila Tupaea has been a key presence for the champion Northern Kahu side in Taihi.  
CHRIS SYMES / PHOTOSPORT

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Nelson said investment from Sky, naming rights sponsor GJ Gardner and key hoops backer Sal's Pizza had underpinned this significant investment in women's basketball.

"A real centrepiece to Taihi when it was launched in 2022 was pay parity," said Nelson. "Now the player payment has been doubled. That's off commercial interest and investment, not just from our current partners, but a raft of new partners as well."

And though the new time-frame will see the league going head to head with the WNBL for Australasian talent, Nelson is confident salary levels now in play will enable the league to pick up its fair share of high-level local players.

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The new three-month season also dovetails nicely with the world's top league, the WNBA, and will enable players to springboard out of Taihi into potential late-season opportunities in Europe and Australia.

Nelson said an "uncluttered" slot on the sporting calendar would lend the league maximum exposure and further strengthen its growing fan and viewership base, while there was massive upside in attracting players post the WNBA season which wraps up in October.



The Wellington-based Tokomanawa Queens won the 2022 Taihi title.  
CHRIS SYMES / PHOTOSPORT

"This allows some of the very best players in the world to come here. We had nine WNBA-connected players last year, and this is going to open the door to a lot more.

"Going head to head with Australia is a bold and courageous statement by basketball in New Zealand. We think we've got a really good model. The shorter season is better for players and the pay now is at the level of Australia. We're saying, 'hey, we're right here if you want to come play in a competition with great media coverage and great levels of fandom."

Nelson also confirmed the league was well advanced in talks to bring two international expansion teams in for 2025 to join the existing five teams: defending champs the Northern Kahu, the Tauranga-based Whai, Wellington's Tokomanawa Queens, Christchurch's Mainland **Pouakai** and Dunedin's Southern Hoiho.

The league has been in talks with organisations from Australia and South East Asia and expect to announce successful bidders soon, with a strong possibility there could be an Australian team participating in a Kiwi national league.

"It's very possible," added Nelson. "We've identified those markets as places we think we can grow women's basketball. You'll see a couple of teams from those territories running around in 2025."

And Nelson said the Tauhi upgrade now put women's basketball on a level playing field with netball in New Zealand.

"The option for players to earn good money is now here in New Zealand. Basketball is a truly global game, and the opportunities to expand into global athletes are higher than ever before.

"The increased commercialisation and innovations like rapid league, like our TikTok partnership, we believe are cornerstones that will help propel the Tall Ferns into a top-10 nation in the world. We're doing all we can to support that at Sky."

Kiwi WNBA trailblazer and Basketball NZ board member Megan Compain, a staunch advocate for parity in women's sport, lauded the Tauhi league's makeover.

"The players receiving a significant pay boost will financially put the teams ahead of many international leagues and really puts Tauhi on the map in a game that is played right around the world," she said.

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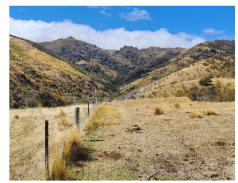
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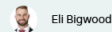
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