



## **General Manager Annual Report 2020**

What a year 2020 was. Firstly, I would like to say a huge thank you to the entire Otago basketball community for pulling together, pitching in to help, and just getting on with what needed to be done as best as possible under the circumstances we had to deal with in 2020. On the back of that great attitude, Otago basketball was able to turn a year of enormous challenge and potential disaster into a year of really great success. Across the board we achieved major success, including our financial outcomes, our schools participation, our club leagues, our Otago Rep teams, and our NBL teams.

### **Finance**

Thanks significantly to COVID-19 relief funding, Basketball Otago was able to achieve a substantial end of year surplus in excess of \$100,000. With our season severely impacted at the start of the season, and uncertainties throughout the following months as to whether we would get some or any of a basketball season, the financial approach was to plan for and operate around the potential worst case scenarios to maximise all available income streams and minimise all non-essential expenditure, including Basketball Otago staff taking voluntary reductions in salary. The loss of most or all of the season would have been financially devastating to Basketball Otago.

As things eventually turned out over the following months, we got almost all best-case outcomes. Through adapting and with support from the basketball community, we were able to achieve close to a full basketball season, albeit some major events were unfortunately lost. Our sponsors adapted with us and stuck with us, and our grant funders were able to bounce back quickly and still support us more or less as normal in the end. Sport NZ gratefully came to the rescue of the Women's NBL to fund the historic inaugural Women's NBL with the 18in18 event in Auckland in November which allowed Basketball Otago to hold on to some of the funds we had set aside if that NBL opportunity arose. We also had an increase in both club and schools teams entering which provided additional income.

These factors all combined to result in a substantial end of year surplus. A significant portion of that surplus is now being set aside and ring-fenced as a 'COVID Contingency Fund' in case 2021 is also hit by further COVID challenges. Alongside that, Basketball Otago will make careful plans in consultation with the basketball community around best long term use of our financial reserves.

### **Competition**

We had a great season of club basketball with the number of teams increasing from 38 to 41. Congratulations to Ajax who won the Women's title over South Pac Magic, and congratulations to Magic A who once again won the Men's title with a win over Magic Lions in an all Magic final for the first time.

In the schools competition it was great to see so many teams line up to play despite the COVID challenges and we saw an increase in schools teams from 298 to 309. Basketball was one of the few sports in Otago to show growth in schools participation in 2020. Congratulations to Waitaki Boys High

School who won the Boys Premier title in the final against Otago Boys High School, and congratulations to Otago Girls High School who won a nail biting final against Kavanagh College.



Also congratulations to Otago Boys High School who qualified for the Schools Nationals, but unfortunately the Nationals had to be cancelled due to COVID. Thank you to Nicki Paterson and the Otago Secondary Schools Sports Association for their help and guidance through all of the various competitions and events.

## Representative

The representative season was unfortunately badly impacted by COVID. The Under 13, Under 19, and Under 23 events unfortunately were not able to go ahead. However, the Under 15 and Under 17 events were able to be held and Otago achieved some great results. Top of the list was our Girls Under 15 team who lost only one game all tournament (to the eventual champions Waikato) and prevailed in a dramatic over-time win to grab the Bronze Medal.



Our Girls Under 17 team also did exceptionally well to make the semi-finals, and these results bode well for the future of women's basketball in Otago. The Boys Under 15 team also played strongly to

make the quarterfinals. A huge thank you to all the coaches, managers and everyone else who helped to make that happen

## **NBL**

What a year it was for Otago in the NBL! Huge congratulations to the Otago Nuggets franchise who were not even supposed to be playing NBL in 2020. On the back of COVID, a unique opportunity arose out of the blue and the Nuggets franchise worked at record pace to be able to pull together plans and finances to allow the Otago Nuggets to be reformed after 5 years out of the NBL, and to enter into the modified 'Sal's NBL Showdown' in Auckland. What a return to the NBL it was for the Nuggets! The Nuggets captured the hearts of Otago and the whole country with what was a fairy-tale sporting story as they surged into the Grand Final and then pulled out that epic nail biting win to clinch the Nuggets first ever NBL title.



Congratulations to the Nuggets board and to General Manager Angela Ruske who worked so hard to pull it together at such short notice. Congratulations also to Head Coach Brent Matehaere whose style, passion, and expertise was tailor made for the circumstances. Congratulations to the rest of the Nuggets support team, and of course congratulations to the team who held firm under white hot pressure to deliver one of the great moments in the history of Otago sport.

In the Women's game it was a watershed year for women's basketball in New Zealand, and an outstanding performance by the Otago Gold Rush. For the first time in NZ basketball, the women's national competition was elevated to full NBL status alongside the men as part of an overall Sal's NBL, and featured on live, prime time television. It was a huge breakthrough moment for women's basketball in NZ. Like for the Nuggets, COVID provided a positive opportunity for the Otago Gold Rush. When a young and inexperienced squad began training in February for an April campaign, they probably were not quite ready to compete strongly enough at that level. But COVID turned a 6 week preparation into a 9 month long preparation. It was exactly what the squad needed at that time. Post lockdown they continued to train and prepare every week through to the modified 18in18 format in Auckland in late November, and they turned up fit, focussed, and fired up.

The Gold Rush embraced the breakthrough moment this was for women's basketball and on the back of consecutive wins over Wellington, Auckland, and Canterbury, the smallest franchise in the NBL surged into the semi-finals. Despite leading for almost all of their dramatic semi-final against the Waikato Wizards, unfortunately the game just slipped away from the Gold Rush in the final seconds.

However, like the Nuggets, the Gold Rush captured the hearts of those watching the inaugural Women's NBL and the Gold Rush scooped the Women's NBL Awards. Congratulations to Zoe Richards who was named in the NBL All Star 5, Gavin Briggs who was named NBL Coach of Year, Te Arora Sopoaga who was named NBL Young Player of the Year, and the Gold Rush also won the NBL Social Media Award.



A huge thank you to our Gold Rush supporting partners Firebrand, Target Accounting, and Otago Community Trust who all stuck with the Gold Rush through 2020 despite great uncertainty about what would be happening and despite the Gold Rush not having any home games.

In an exciting development in NZ basketball, 2020 saw the introduction of the Schick 3x3 Cup. An exciting, fast and furious brand of basketball which was also a big hit on live prime time Sky Sports as 10 men's teams and 10 women's teams from across the country gathered in Invercargill for a 3 day 3x3 shoot out. It is basketball's equivalent of T20 cricket and 7s rugby with 10 minute games of fast, furious, and physical action. The Nuggets and the Gold Rush both entered teams and performed well. The Gold Rush making the semi-finals where they lost narrowly to Harbour, and the Nuggets finishing strongly to finish 5<sup>th</sup>.

## **Partners & Supporters**

Once again I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who supported and helped Otago basketball to survive and thrive in 2020. Thank you to our sponsors, Firebrand, Target Accounting, Stirling Sports, and Finance NZ. Thank you to our grant funders for sticking with us; Otago Community Trust, Bendigo Valley, Lion Foundation, Southern Trust, Air Rescue, and CERT, as well as Sport Otago. Thank you also to Basketball NZ who took some significant financial hits on behalf of the Associations to help keep the Associations afloat when things were looking the most bleak.

As always, a huge thank you to all of our volunteers and helpers who pitched in to help organise teams and events. Without this help from our volunteers we would not have a sport.

One partner who deserves a special thank you and an enormous thank you from everyone in Otago basketball and Otago sport for 2020 is the Edgar Centre team. Blair Crawford and his team had an enormously challenging year in 2020 to try to keep sport going at the centre as best as possible under hugely challenging circumstances. To keep sport going at the Edgar Centre right through Level 2 conditions through the back half of the basketball season required a military operation from the staff. The easy solution would have been to say it's too hard, but they committed to finding the required solutions that allowed sport to continue the way it did at the level it did. It is what saved our 2020

basketball season and also allowed our positive financial outcome, and the whole Edgar Centre team went way above and beyond to make that happen. So a very big thank you to all the Edgar Centre team from Basketball Otago. A very big thank you also to the Basketball Otago board and staff who also had to go above and beyond and make sacrifices to make it all work.

## **Looking Ahead**

2020 was a year of great challenge and great achievement for Otago basketball. Looking ahead we need to keep embracing positive change and development. We want to embrace technology more as way of improving the delivery of basketball and improving the basketball experience and engagement. We need to develop and offer different basketball formats and options that work for the current market demands. Further developing the 3x3 format is a major part of those plans. As our player numbers continue to increase we need to grow and better support our referee workforce, otherwise we won't have a game to play. We also have to continue to better develop and professionalise our overall administration infrastructure for what is now the biggest sport in Otago and NZ.

**Peter Drew**

**General Manager – Basketball Otago**