

Mary-Jane Ararora - Waikato Bay of Plenty Magic



Mary-Jane Ararora's entrance to coaching was a baptism by fire. She was the captain of the Shore Rovers team when their coach, Yvonne Willering became coach of the Silver Ferns.

Ararora had a high influence in the team, and when she fell pregnant with her son, her transition from player to coach started.

"Needless to say, it was one of the most defining moments of my life," she says.

"I went in quite naive I guess around what it took to actually mobilise a team, motivate a team and inspire them to perform."

Her coaching journey has seen her coach various teams and franchises, including Aotearoa Māori netball, the New Zealand Secondary Schools team and the Waikato Bay of Plenty Magic, first as assistant coach to Amigene Metcalfe, and now head coach for the past three seasons.

Taking the reins of a team that has 25 years of history, including being the only New Zealand team to win the trans-Tasman ANZ Championship isn't something that daunts Ararora, it's something that she can lean on.

"We're always borrowing the legacy, and every new team that comes in, you are creating a different type of legacy but you're always mindful of the people before you," she says.

"I'm not going to lie here, it has been a massive challenge since I've stepped in as head coach."

With the effects of Covid, and financial challenges, the Waikato Bay of Plenty zone has been hit hard since Ararora took charge.

"Some real eye-openers there, and just trying to navigate ourselves through it all, while still trying to stay united and keep the culture of Magic still going through those challenges," she says were some of the biggest obstacles.

"I see those first two years as our building and developing years and this year, I truly believe we've got the right team, we've got the right set of energy within the team and this has got to be our year.

"And like I say to the girls, why not, we've earned this and we've been through many challenges, and we have overcome, so let's just go."

Being able to watch athletes she's coached as high schoolers go on to play in the ANZ Premiership and even the Silver Ferns is a highlight for Ararora. Current Magic players Saviour Tui and Georgie Edgecombe were coached by Ararora at New Zealand Secondary Schools level.

"To see them return and be back in Magic colours, it is somewhat quite an achievement, to see them that they're still in the game, but also see their growth from back then," she says.

"A real sense of pride that in some small way, I've had some influence in their development of netball and their passion to still be wanting to play."

Nurturing the Magic culture is very important for Ararora.

"That's pretty much number one for us as a collective this year, is the unity, the kotahitanga, the whanaungatanga," she explains.

"That has been the Magic way, that is something that's been super important for us is to maintain that whānau mentality, that whānau culture and family first identification of ourselves, and that is also the part of the legacy of the Magic."

In this day and age, Ararora admits there's so much more to manage than just the on-court coaching.

"Running a team, you are managing people, and especially in this era, our athletes are different, they're different from when I played and there's so much more out there for them to contend with," she says.

Ararora leans on her support team around her, including the expertise of CEOs and people in the high performance systems.

"When I'm talking to my mentors, it's just around relationships and people, how do I drive the best out of them and how do they do that," she says.

"And a little bit of my own self care, asking am I taking my own time out, how do I refresh myself."

The holistic approach is very important for Ararora, and ensuring her players feel understood.

"We look after our people and then the player comes second, so if we know who they are and we know how they tick, then hopefully we are getting the best out of them."