

## **Willie Bryant**

Willie started playing basketball, originally for the Central Baptist Church back in the early 1970's at the local YMCA.

He started refereeing shortly after this, under the tutelage of Elaine Fern.

In the mid to late 70's Willie played for a Pacific Island bible team in the Auckland competition.

By the 1980's Willie was elected onto the local committee, he was also elected onto the Basketball Referees Association of New Zealand where he was the Treasurer for 2 to 3 years.

It was in the 1980s that the YMCA closed and the Palmerston North Basketball Association began operating.

The late 80's saw Willie and his family move to Temuka where his love of the sport continue, playing and refereeing in the local league.

When he and his family moved back to Palmerston North in the 1990's Willie hung his played shoes and focussed on coordinating and training the local Palmerston North Basketball Association (PNBA) Referees as part of the PN Referees Association until it ceased operation several years later.

Along with Bev Page, Willie continued to train the local league referees, mainly focussing on the older Referees while Bev's focus was on the new young ones. These two were also responsible for coordinating the referee appointments in the Wednesday and Friday night leagues run by PNBA.

During this time Willie also regularly travelled to Wellington to assist with Referee training down in that area.

In the late 1990's Willie was appointed as a National Basketball League Referee Evaluator.

All of the above work was carried out as a volunteer as Willie as studying for a degree in Teaching.

He worked at St Matthews School in Marton, coaching basketball and the starting a local league that went for the next 15 years.

Willie started working for the then PNBA in 2003 where he undertook a multitude of roles; not only coordinating and running the local league as well as referee training, but also coaching his daughter's basketball team. He also coached teams in several schools, Carncott, PNGHS, Awatapu College, St Peters and PNBHS.

Willie continued to work for PNBA for eight years, however even after his resignation he has continued to train, educate and coordinate Referees.

In 2015 Willie was approached and asked if he was interested in being a part of the Sports Chaplaincy group (a role he continues to do today). Initially starting a Sports Chaplin for St Peters Football squads he now undertakes the role for Cornerstone Christian School, the Manawātū Jets NBL team and Basketball Manawātū.

At a national level, for a number of years Willie has been a Referee Evaluator for most NBL games in the Lower North Island, a role he undertook for more than 10 years.

He has also undertaken Referee's trainers roles at multiple National Age group events, going back 20+ years.

Willie's contribution to basketball was recognised by Basketball Manawātū when they made him a Life member of the association in 2014, an honour further awarded to him for his contribution to Refereeing when he received a BBNZ award in 2018

Highlights for Willie include:-

- Being a referee coordinator at the Under 19 World Basketball Champs that were held in Auckland.
- Watching Referees go from being nervous and shy to their being confident and engaging, after working with them over a 6 -8 week period is just so fulfilling.
- Travelling the countryside and knowing people who, no matter what their background is, have since become friends over the years of involvement with them as Basketball Referees.

***"I love the game, doing what I am doing the people involved. Basketball has given me so much"***

Willie Bryant