

New Zealand Olympic Ambassador

Paora Winitana

Olympian number:

974

Discipline:

Basketball

Position:

Guard

Paora Winitana was born in Hastings in 1976. When he was 14 years old, some friends invited him along to the local church's youth activities. Paora had spent his childhood playing rugby, but at the small church, he learnt how to play basketball and fell in love with the game.

In 1994, he played his first game for the Hastings Boys' High School A team. He scored an impressive 96 points, a New Zealand secondary school record. This record-breaking score made a lot of people take notice of the young basketball player.

Paora played for the Church College of New Zealand team in 1995 when they won the national secondary school championships. In 1996, he was selected to play for North Harbour Heat in the New Zealand National Basketball League (NBL). In his NBL debut year, he won the Rookie of the Year Award.

After demonstrating his world-class potential in the NBL, Paora was offered several opportunities to play basketball in the United States, including a full scholarship to the University of Wisconsin. But he turned them down to go on a two-year mission for the Church

Quick facts

Favourite food: Pasta and salads

Favourite movie: *Braveheart*

Favourite music: Slow jams

Childhood heroes: My mum and Michael Jordan

Current favourite athletes: Kobe Bryant, Lebron James and Usain Bolt

Most rewarding moment in sport: Being named to the 2004 NZ Olympic Team.

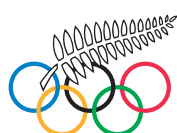
Talents other than sport: I love being a husband and father. I enjoy graphic design and art.

Biggest injury: Bone bruising to my cuboid bone (16 months).

Biggest sacrifice: Time away from my wife and sons.

Job outside sport: Co-Director of my own Basketball Academy, I also provide leadership workshops for schools.

Other fun facts: I like salsa dancing, art, reading a great book and play wrestling with my 4 sons.



of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The mission also meant that he missed out on the chance to represent New Zealand at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

Paora returned to basketball in 2002, and was selected for the Tall Blacks, making his international basketball debut for New Zealand. He played for the Tall Blacks in the 2002 FIBA World Championships where they came fourth – New Zealand’s highest ever placing. They didn’t do so well at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, coming tenth out of twelve teams. However, Paora thoroughly enjoyed his Olympic experience and was thrilled to meet some of the world’s best athletes, not just basketball players. In 2006, Paora was part of the Tall Blacks team when they won Silver at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Paora is incredibly passionate about playing basketball – he always puts in 100 per cent during training and games. However, Paora’s faith is at the top of his priority list. In 2005, he was ordained as a bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Ever since his mission, he has not played basketball on Sundays, which has seen him sit on the sidelines in some major games.

Paora has had great success throughout his NBL career. He has alternated over the years between the Hawke’s Bay Hawks and the Christchurch Cougars NBL teams. As captain of the Hawks, he led the team to an NBL Championship in 2006. He has also won multiple NBL awards, including most valuable player in the 2002 and 2004 finals, and most valuable player in the 2007 championships. He gained further professional basketball experience by playing in Australian National Basketball League for both the Adelaide 36ers and NZ Breakers.

Paora believes in giving back to the game. He is an active role model in New Zealand’s basketball community. In 2012, Paora founded a Basketball Academy alongside long-time NBL and international teammate Paul Henare. Based in Hastings, Flaxmere and Napier, the academy is a 24-week mentor programme for 36 student basketball players aged 12 to 18. Paora and Paul focus on providing the players with an inspiring and multicultural environment where they have the opportunity to realise their full potential and achieve their goals and dreams.

Paora is part of a group of professional New Zealand athletes that participates in the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) Athlete Support Development Programme. This programme gives athletes opportunities to contribute and add value to athlete

performance while learning skills for their own career development. In 2012, Paora was named a New Zealand Olympic Ambassador.

Paora is currently based in Hastings, where he lives with his wife and sons.

Career highlights

- 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games: Basketball (Silver)
- 2006 New Zealand National Basketball League Championship (Grand Champions)
- 2004 Athens Olympic Games (Tenth)
- 2002 FIBA World Championships (Fourth)

Honours

- 2012 All-Star Five, NBL
- 2007 Kiwi Most Valuable Player, NBL
- 2006 All-Star Five, Kiwi Guard of the Year, Guard of the Year, Outstanding Guard, Most Valuable Player, NBL
- 2004 Most Valuable Player, NBL

Links

Paora Winitana’s Olympic Museum profile:
<http://imuseum.olympic.org.nz/museum/athlete/profile/25209>

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