



**Te Kōhao
Health**

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Master carvers return Black Ferns taiaha to team, reconnecting World Cup legacy

Kirikiroa master carvers return a taiaha steeped in Black Ferns history and gift a new taonga to the team, reconnecting today's players with those who came before them and the legacy they carry forward.

The taiaha were carved for the Black Ferns' 2010 Rugby World Cup campaign and one has been returned to the team by a group of master carvers from Te Kōhao Health's carving programme in Kirikiriroa.

The original taiaha was presented to the Black Ferns in 2010 and named Hiahia by Maniapoto kaumātua Grey Henry. After 16 years, it will now be retired and housed at NZR headquarters at Sky Tower in Auckland, preserving its place in Black Ferns history.

Leading the kaupapa with more than 40 years' experience was Rei Mihaere who has taught Te Kōhao Health's carving programme since it began in 2010 alongside fellow carvers Hakopa Palmer, Pene Campbell, Steve Rankin and Wiremu Tonga.

The presentation was more than the return of a historic taonga and gifting a new one. It was about reconnecting the Black Ferns with their whakapapa, the wairua of those who wore the jersey before them, and the legacy they carry forward.

Alongside the return of Hiahia, the carvers have gifted the current Black Ferns a new taiaha. It was presented to current Black Ferns captain Ruahei Demant. The new taiaha is yet to be named by the current team.

For the current Black Ferns, the taiaha provides a tangible connection to a team that was at the height of its dominance in women's rugby. It also provides a benchmark for the current generation: a reminder of the standards, mana and wairua that come with wearing the Black Ferns jersey.

"It's an incredibly special moment for the Black Ferns to have our history, our legacy, our whakapapa come to life through Ray's taonga that he's gifted us," said Whitney Hansen, the current Black Ferns Head Coach.

"It'll be more to us, I think, than what we know, and will come with us and be a part of the legacy now of the Black Ferns forever."

The kaupapa also reflects the wider role of traditional Māori carving in connecting people, place, history and future generations explained Dr Toiroa Williams on behalf of Matua Rei.

"When you think of a team and you think of their legacy, it's all about the wairua you bring, but also the wairua that was there before you," he said.

Matua Rei's work through Te Kōhao Health has extended well beyond the Black Ferns. Through the carving programme, he has helped pass mātauranga and carving skills to successive generations, while producing taonga for the Waikato community.

The programme continues to contribute to the community, with upcoming kaupapa including carving graduations for the Tipu Ake school programme, a waharoa blessing and the unveiling of a pou for Hospice in Hillcrest.



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For the Black Ferns, the return of the taiaha is a reminder that their achievements belong to a much bigger story. The legacy of the jersey is built not only through what happens on the field, but through the whakapapa, relationships, mana and wairua carried from one generation to the next.

“New Zealand Rugby, we’ve all got work to do as a community to make sure that we can match this kind of mana and this kind of wairua that we’re seeing with our champions here today,” said Peene Henare, Kaihautū Māori for New Zealand Rugby.

The taiaha will now travel forward with the Black Ferns, carrying the memory, mana and wairua of the generations who helped build the team’s legacy and connecting them with those still to come.

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