

2025047

SPORT

# The boys bring it home; Nelson's number 1



PHOTO / EVENING POST  
Nelson Giants captain Phill Jones acknowledges the crowd after receiving the Sprite NBL Trophy on behalf of the team. Jones finished his six seasons with Nelson on a high note as he is due to begin a playing career in Europe next month.



PHOTO / EVENING POST  
Nelson forward JD Huleen and North Harbour centre Chris Ensminger take the tipoff to start Saturday's Sprite NBL final.



MAIL PHOTO / CLIFF RIORDAN c49324  
"All right, big guy!" Nelson Giants forward JD Huleen high fives fan Tagan Paul on the team's return to Nelson yesterday.

## Giants fans show capital how to party

Maybe it was the cumulative effect of a few too many Sprites.

Or a giddiness brought on by air thick with hearty maleness.

Or the prominent displays of blue, white and gold plumage on T-shirts, rosettes, even in the hair of some of the elders of the species.

Whatever the reason, Wellington didn't know what hit it when the ASB Bank Giants brought their basketball party to town on Saturday.

Strange sights became commonplace.

At 201cm apiece Peter Pokai (with champagne) and North Harbour's Konrad Ross made unusual dance partners. When injured Canterbury centre Robert Hickey (211cm) joined in, it became surreal.

JD Huleen spent the night toting a victory cigar, unlit because he doesn't smoke, but firmly clenched between his fingers like a taller and slimmer Winston Churchill ... or Bill Clinton.

Richard Harding's face was frozen in a Cheshire Cat grin which only faded away 12 hours later when he shuffled out of the last club in town and onto the plane home.

Even the vanquished joined in. Beaten North Harbour coach Ben Berlowski was conducting clinics on defence in the men's room, double-teaming the urinal and rotating to the handbasin.

"See, if you hedge here (the hot tap), the lane is open for this guy (the hand-drier) to get all the way to the hole (the hole.)"

And 300 Nelson fans got jiggy like there was no tomorrow.

Unfortunately, there was.

- by Pete McNae

## Cool, calm, collecting

Giants player-coach Nenad Vucinic was the calm at the centre of the Nelson storm on Saturday.

Despite making just one field goal all weekend - a three-pointer during a Nelson run in the second quarter of the final - Vucinic had his hand on the steering wheel through both games, settling Nelson late in the semifinal and setting the defensive standard on Saturday.

The 33-year-old said this season's title campaign had more significance than the 1994 victory.

"It's been four years since we last won and I wanted this one because I'm running out of years," he said.

"We won it in defence. We struggled in offence against the zone - they have a very big and mobile zone - and we couldn't do much inside against their big players. But we had them in defence. Tony Bennett (32 points) tried to light it up but no one else contributed much on offence."