

# New 'Magic City Hustle' Documentary Brings Jai Alai Back To Life

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*Billy Corben's newest documentary "Magic City Hustle" will premiere at Freedom Tower at Miami Dade College as part of the Miami International Film Festival.*  
MAGIC CITY HUSTLE / COURTESY

A new documentary centers around the largely forgotten sport of Jai Alai, whose history is tied to the Miami of the 1980s. At that time thousands would fill arenas to watch players use cestas to launch balls at over 100 miles per hour, making Jai Alai known as one of the fastest sports around. Today, arenas in Miami struggle to sell tickets and the game is viewed as "a dying sport."

The documentary ["Magic City Hustle"](#) evolved out of an idea to bring together former [University of Miami](#) athletes, from sports like football, baseball and

track, and turn them into Jai Alai players. The film was directed and written by Miami filmmaker Billy Corben of Rakontur Films, also behind [The U, Part 2](#), and [Cocaine Cowboys](#). Corben spoke to Sundial about the lost sport and the documentary.

The film will premiere Saturday, March 2, at the Miami Dade College's Tower Theater as part of the [Miami International Film Festival](#).

**WLRN: It's about former U.S. athletes -- football players, baseball players -- becoming Jai Alai players? Where did that come from?**

Corben: As I recall I first read about it in the [Miami Herald](#) who had covered it very early in 2018. Then I was talking to a friend who works at the casino who said: 'Did you hear about this? And are you interested in meeting the guys?' I said yes but I didn't know if it would make a very good documentary to tell you the truth. I came in and met the players and started watching them at North Miami Amateur Jai Alai where they were training, some of them world class athletes. Some of them went on to play professionally in baseball, football track and field... they had never played Jai Alai before. On July 1, 2018, ready or not they became professional Jai Alai players.

**Whose idea was this, to bring former U.S. athletes together to make them into Jai Alai players?**

My understanding is it was the CEO at Magic City Casino (which growing up we all knew as the Flagler Greyhound track), [Scott Savin](#). He thought: we've given a lot of money to the school (University of Miami) so why don't we try to do something for the former athletes?



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**How much of it was to help the former athletes and how much of it was [to] get some former local celebrities and jackpot?**

I think there were a lot of reasons why they were doing it. Listen, the main reason the movie's called Magic City Hustle is because this thing's a hustle for everybody. Make no mistake. It's not just the players, it's the owners of the casino, it's the denizens of the casino who come in there to try to get a jackpot every day. And it's wild because it's a local casino, which is a funny scene because it's like the people there are not tourists. All the *abuelos* and *abuelitas* all convene there and it's like *Calle Ocho* in a casino.

**Hustle... that word has really so many layers in this movie. I really love how at the beginning we don't jump into Jai Alai. Instead we follow some of these guys' lives. They talk about the 'Miami hustle.' Why?**

Well just a few weeks ago, the [United Way](#) released its study that showed that 60 percent of Miami-Dade County residents cannot make ends meet. At least 19 percent living in poverty. The working poor who are working their butts off but cannot cover just the basics in life because of cost of living, rent, groceries, transportation to and from work and school... so this is a sneak preview I think of where the rest of the country is going.

And you know everybody calls it now the gig economy. You know we call it the hustle economy here in Miami and this is the ultimate hustle town. No one can get by with just one job. You have these guys who had a series of side hustles. You know they're doing one, two, six things some of them and then all of a sudden they get this e-mail that says you can win up to \$400,000, plus a salary, plus dental plus medical... And really it's not about Jai Alai. That's why it's called Magic City Hustle. Miami is a case study in the gig economy.

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