



by Todd Sorensen

MIAMI JAI ALAI

A Sit Down with #27 Jon

I ran into Miami Jai-Alai's Jon in the trainer's room warming up for his matches and he was gracious enough to sit down and have a quick question and answer session for the Northern Star.

Q: What is your full name?

JON: My full name is Jon Mugartegui

Q: That is Atain's surname, are you related?

JON: Yes, but not by much. Alai is a distant relative of mine. My uncle Iriondo was a very successful pro, but he's not the one that played in Miami a couple of years ago.

If first impressions are of any relevance, Jon has an attitude that could light up a room. A soft natured, mild mannered fellow, he has a smile that seems locked in place and that stretches almost all the way around his head.

As our conversation would go on I realized that not only was Jon's enthusiasm for life genuine, but it's about as infectious as the Atkins Diet. For some reason I kept getting an urge to hum show tunes and skip around the locker room, but I'll probably save that conversation for my therapist.

Q: Can you tell me about learning to play Jai-Alai in the Basque country.

JON: I was born in Berriatua, Spain which is in the Basqueland. I started playing Jai-Alai when I was twelve years old at the town's amateur fronton. It was about half the size of a full playing court and was used mainly for training pelotaris. I did a lot of my training on my own, but two teachers who did have an impact on my play were Andres Jauregui and Roberto Lecue, who is the father of the Lecue who plays at Dania Jai-Alai now.

Q: What about your professional years, where have you played?

JON: I started my professional career at the Bridgeport fronton in 1993. I was fortunate to play there for two years. At the end of 1994 I went back to Spain and played partidos until Milford Jai-Alai signed me in 1995. I spent six wonderful years at Milford before the fronton closed its doors. From there, I played one season at Fort Pierce Jai-Alai, and then I moved to Miami Jai-Alai where I am proud to play today.

Warming up in the trainer's room Jon removed the hot pack from his shoulder and began his stretching routine. For many Jai-Alai players, just like many professional athletes, it's the warming up and cooling down routine that enables them to compete at a high level day after day after day.

Hit the gym in the morning or afternoon, use heat packs or massage to loosen muscles before play, and follow it with an array of stretches to keep everything limber. Then after the performance, the stretching routine continues followed by an ice pack or a soothing dip in the hot tub or sauna.

Q: Did anything surprise you when you started playing at Miami Jai-Alai?

JON: Yeah, I was awed. Everyone tells you how



good the roster is at Miami Jai-Alai, but I don't think you can understand it until you actually play here. Everyone here is a great player, the competition is definitely better than I thought it would be before I came here.

Q: How did the closing of Milford Jai-Alai affect you?

JON: It was shocking, and a tough adjustment. After getting picked up by Fort Pierce I was just happy to be playing Jai-Alai again.

Q: Can you compare the Milford and Miami courts some?

JON: Miami Jai-Alai has a very natural surface. You get very nice bounces off the Miami floor. Milford was a bit faster, and more unpredictable on the bounce.

Q: What about playing conditions?

JON: I loved the atmosphere at Milford, and the guys I played with there. I'd say the biggest thing was the weather. The colder and drier weather at Milford is tough on the cesta.

Cesta upkeep is much tougher the colder and drier the air gets. The baskets are stored in a humidifier to help keep the moisture in. But the northern air dries out the cesta more quickly, and makes it more prone to breaking.

Q: How's life in the big city?

JON: I've grown fond of life here in Miami. I like the warmer weather, and I do like playing in the afternoon. Miami plays mostly matinees, whereas Milford played mainly at night.

Jon would encounter me several times to make sure I understood he loved the Milford area and

fronton, too. He didn't want to slight all of his friends and fans from the area, but as we spoke a little more I found a big reason for his zeal towards life in South Florida.

Her name is Monica, and Jon met her shortly after moving to the area. If his smile couldn't grow any bigger, the flash in his eyes when Monica came into the conversation said it all. Jon and Monica have had a fruitful relationship and now live with each other.

You can see the contentment in Jon's very being. As I said earlier he has a lot of pep, and it's crazy how a twenty minute chat can give you a look inside a person. Jon just loves life right now and is living it to its fullest. He has the job that he's wished about since he was a small child, and has found a life full of friends and Monica that makes him excited to get out of bed every morning.

Q: If you were a scout, what would you say your strengths and weaknesses are?

JON: On the good side I am a consistent player. I think I have pretty good court sense and I play hard every day. I think things that I could work on are my rebote to start. I also think at times I could make better decisions when throwing the pelota.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to say to the Jai-Alai fans out there?

JON: Enjoy the game as much as you can. I love the sport of Jai-Alai. I'm living my dream and I'm happy to be able to go out every day and perform for you. In many ways the future of the sport is up to the fans, and I would like to give everyone a big thanks for coming out to support us.