

Mr. Jai Alai

with Todd Sorensen



by Todd Sorensen

The wrath of hurricane Charley left many in Florida in its wake, including the Jai-Alai industry. The Orlando Jai-Alai fronton was devastated by the storm, leaving the building's roof with a gaping hole above the playing court and auditorium.

The fronton sustained serious damage in the storm, including to the scoreboard and the playing surface itself. Structural engineers have surveyed the damage and come up with a plan for repair. Hurricane Charley was allegedly destined to hit the Tampa Bay area before a last minute turn spun it towards the Punta Gorda area and eventually to Orlando. The Orlando region didn't experience the 145 mile per hour sustained winds they did in Punta Gorda, but Charley was still fierce when it hit the fronton located in Fern Park.

Orlando Jai-Alai officials have currently re-opened the simulcast area with the blessing of the fire marshal. That side of the building didn't receive any visual structural damage, and the engineers have assured its safety for the public.

But the live Jai-Alai season is another matter entirely. Slated to start play on December 2nd Orlando Jai-Alai officials hope to do just that. Right now they are optimistic that they will be ready to go some time in November, and at this point in time everyone hopes that will be possible. It would be quite a rebuilding effort to have the facility ready to go by that time. First on the agenda will probably be the roof. Thankfully for them the underlying structure remained mostly intact, but there's a hole that seems to be almost 30 feet by 30 feet. Then will come the scoreboard and the wiring that goes with it. Orlando officials say it was destroyed by Charley.

And, finally the Orlando Jai-Alai cancha, or court. If there is damage to the side wall, which at this time there appears not to be, it will take some good masonry to get it ready to go. The wood that covers the outside ten feet of the court was ruined by flooding and must be replaced. Then everything needs to be resurfaced and prepped for the upcoming professional season.

After the storm Orlando Jai-Alai showed it's commitment to the community. In an area hard hit by Charley Orlando Jai-Alai owner Hort Soper quickly let county health, power, and fire officials convert the fronton parking lot into a local staging ground for operations. This allowed local officials to better coordinate efforts to restore power and ensure public safety, as well as kick start the clean up efforts. Only after doing what he could to help area residents, did Mr. Soper turn his sights to his own facility, which at this time is believed to have been hit by a tornado during the hurricane.

A storm like Hurricane Charley only comes along every once in a very long while. Here's to hoping that Orlando Jai-Alai does open it's 2004-05 Winter season on December 2nd.

DANIA JAI ALAI

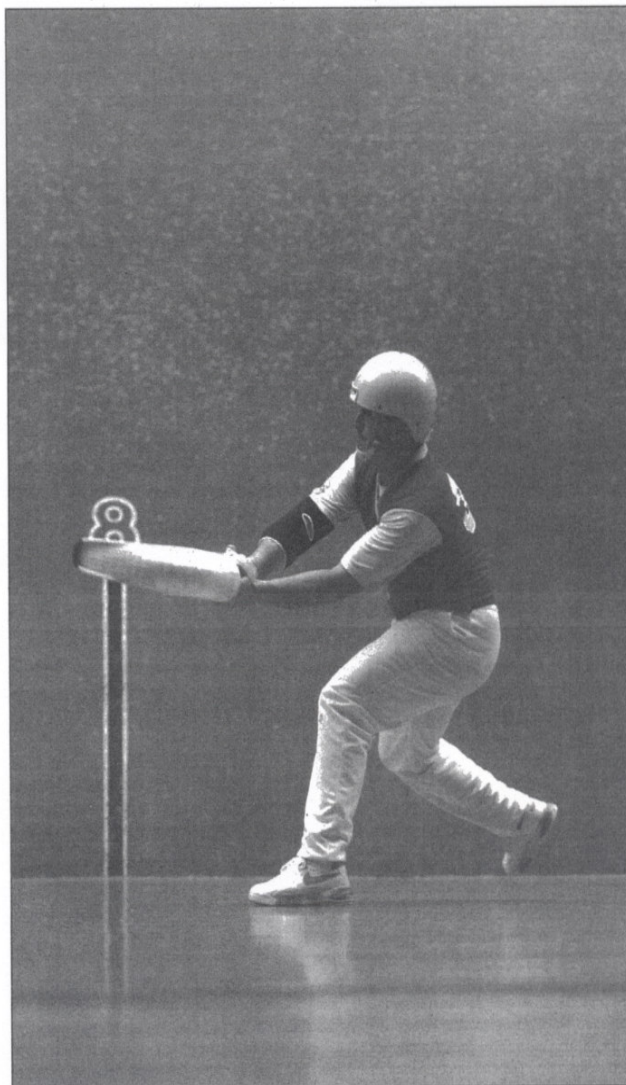
Zen Calls it a Career

Intensity. Ask anyone in the Jai-Alai industry about Asier Cenarruzabeitia, who from now on we'll call Zen,

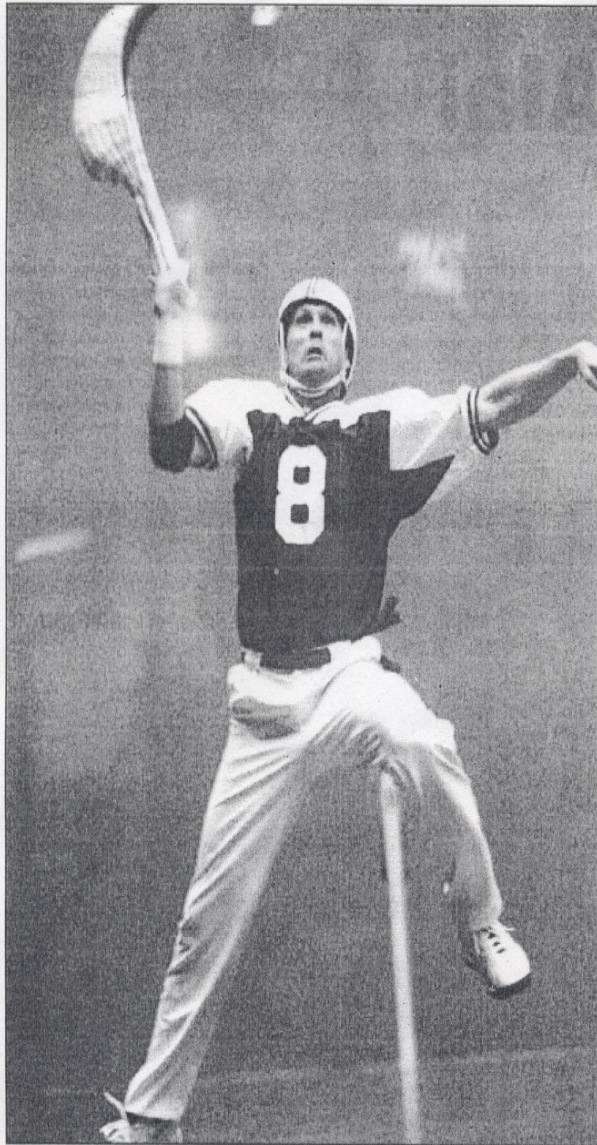
understandably. That is one word that will come out of their mouths. Zen, one of the top Jai-Alai players in the world has decided to call it quits at the end of October.

The two-time Triple Crown winner plays the game with fervor. In a day and age in sports where the intensity of an athlete is usually tied to how much they flap their upper lip, it's refreshing to see a guy like Zen who does it in so many other ways.

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Zen bends his knees to get some power into this rebote, which is a ball that has bounced off the back wall.



Daniel keeps his poise as he leaps up for the pelota. Daniel was enshrined in immortality earlier this year when Miami Jai-Alai made him a Bobblehead.

From his fiery eyes, that seem like they can see right through you to his posture, shoulders hunched, head straight ahead like a man on a mission, Zen goes about his business of being the best in the business the old fashioned way, he's earned it. From the day he started playing professionally, Zen has made an impact all the way on his run to the top. From his playing days overseas, to a stint in Mexico, and finally to the United States, he's left an impression of ferocity wherever he has played. Zen started at Dania Jai-Alai in the Winter of 1995, as an early gamer at the bottom of the roster. He finished his first season with some unspectacular numbers, winning just over ten percent of his games. The man with the silent stare of fury had just begun on the big stage, though.

By his third professional season Zen was doing the unthinkable. In the 1996-97 Dania Jai-Alai Winter Season Zen won an all-time record 246 games, a number still unmatched to this day. The closest competitor in

over fifty years of Jai-Alai at Dania came in 2000, when Arriaga won 216 games. It is highly unlikely that Zen's 246 victories in a season will ever be reached.

Zen's crowning achievement for his career came this past April, when he was awarded his 2nd Triple Crown. Given to a player who wins the Singles Championship, Most Overall Wins Championship, and their positional Championship (either frontcourt or backcourt), the Triple Crown is the highest achievement a Jai-Alai player can attain.

On October 31st of this year, Zen will take his final walk onto the cancha. He'll retire after that Halloween night at the top of his game and the apex of the sport. At 31 years of age, he is at the peak age for a Jai-Alai player. But, for Zen it's not an injury, age, or failed drug tests that have sparked his retirement, it's his family.

Zen's wife just gave birth to their first child in August, and they've made the tough decision to return

to Vizcaya, Spain to raise the child. Gone will be the crowds, the competition, and the dried out goat skin. They'll be replaced with a caring father, quiet community and lots of dirty diapers.

"It was an extremely tough decision to make, I mean I really love playing Jai-Alai," said Zen, who still has a chance to win his 3rd Triple Crown in his final season. "But in the end, it's my family who had to come first."

"I've been away from home for 15 years now, between Mexico and the US. My wife and I really wanted to raise our child in Spain. I'm going to miss playing Jai-Alai tremendously, but I've accomplished a lot in my career and I'll always be proud when I look back and see what I've been able to do."

When asked his intentions upon returning home Zen said, "I'm going to work in the family owned hardware store." Gee, from the Jai-Alai floor to the hardware store, now that's intense.

MIAMI JAI ALAI

#20 Daniel forges on with his steady play in the feature games. This American born star from Clearwater, FL continues to impress with his resiliency and uncanny catching ability. Now eighteen years into his professional career, Daniel may be the best American backcourter to ever play the game.

That he continues to play at this high a level against some of the top talent in the world is inspiring, especially considering he's closing in on 40 years of age. Daniel will turn forty this November, but don't expect to see him drop the ball just yet.

Daniel has started off the season with a .104 win percentage and .359% in the money. Those aren't overwhelming numbers, but they are far from shabby when you have to bump heads with players like Elizegi and Irastorza on a daily basis.

What Daniel lacks now in agility, he makes up with positioning. What he lacks in power, he makes up with placement. And the glove is just as good like it's always been, like a shop vac. Miami's number twenty rarely makes a mental mistake, either.

Philip Daniel Love started his professional career in 1986 at the Fort Pierce Jai-Alai fronton. He made waves his first season there taking home Rookie of the Year honors. He quickly ascended to the top of the sport and by 1989 he won his first Triple Crown at Tampa Jai-Alai.

In the World's Fastest Ballgame there isn't a title that Daniel hasn't won at some point in his illustrious career. Two National Championships, two Citrus Invitational Championships, and a slew of partido titles from Mexico all rest in his collection.

The Jabi/Tevin battle heats up

The struggle for frontcourt domination has only gotten closer in the last month, with Jabi and Tevin duking it out for supremacy. Jabi's turned the tables in the last month, starting four games behind Tevin, but now up by one.

The squeeze for the frontcourt Title has only gotten tighter as Lejardi has charged into contention and is now



only two games behind Jabi. Lejardi is a legitimate shotmaker in the frontcourt, especially from the left side.

He seems very quiet and steady at times, but when the time comes for him to dish out a kill shot, whether it be a remate, cortada, carom, or costado, Lejardi usually comes up huge. A native of Markina, Spain Lejardi made his professional debut in Mexico City in 1992 at the age of 19.

He now spends his time wreaking havoc on opponents in the Miami late games. Lejardi came up with the biggest finish of his career earlier this year when he teamed with Wayne to take 3rd in the 2004 Dania/ Miami Jai-Alai Challenge X.

PREPARATIONS FOR AMENDMENT 4

South Florida's Dania and Miami Jai-Alai's are keeping an eye on the Nov. 2nd elections this year, as Amendment 4 will be voted on by Floridians throughout the state. Amendment 4 is a statewide referendum on the right of residents of Broward and Dade counties in South Florida to decide if they would like slot machines at 7 South Florida facilities.

The statewide Florida referendum would not authorize slot machines, it would only allow both counties in question, Dade and Broward, to vote on the issue themselves. It would then take another local election before slot machines would be authorized in either county.

In turn, tax money generated by said slot machines would go to fund schooling throughout the state of Florida, likely to exceed 500 million dollars per year.

Writers of the amendment guaranteed that tax revenue generated can only supplement existing funding. This is to ensure there isn't another incident like the lottery debacle, where education funds were replaced instead of added.

Any time a gambling issue hits the ballot it's sure to provoke some lively debate. Banter about the same old arguments like morality will flood the landscape. But this much is undisputable, casino style gambling, with all the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas, is alive and well in the state of Florida.

There are millions of tourists and residents each year that spend hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars annually at Indian-operated casinos and casino boats. And, not one penny is paid in state taxes.

Only the people of Florida will never really know what they are getting from these gambling enterprises, like the 20 plus ships that leave Florida ports twice daily. These ships, commonly known as "cruises to nowhere" go just far enough off Florida's coast to skirt around gambling laws and avoid taxation and regulation by the state.

This is one of the main reasons proponents of Amendment 4 back the bill. They are tired of seeing unlicensed, unregulated and untaxed facilities like the brand new \$300 million Hard Rock and Seminole Indian Casino of Hollywood slowly squeeze the life out of existing, tax paying facilities like Dania Jai-Alai and Miami Jai-Alai.

They point to the fact that gaming is already popular in South Florida, and say that it would be better for the state and the gambler if there was regulated gaming. It's much fairer to the bettor because they know the odds of the game before they play, and are assured of payouts when they win. It's also much better for residents throughout the state to get much needed tax money for the future of their children.

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