

City Council President Ron Salem, Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan, and Michael Corrigan, the CEO of Visit Jacksonville, are pictured at Wednesday's press conference for the Jacksonville Sports Foundation launch.

Conference on the move: [ASUN is moving its conference headquarters to Jacksonville this summer. Here's why](#)

"The foundation came about because when we started looking at the NCAA championships and trying to decide which one we want to bid on, we realized that there wasn't a central organization that could work on this from all different areas," said Michael Corrigan, president of Visit Jacksonville, the city's tourism and visitors agency.



Michael Corrigan, the CEO of Visit Jacksonville, addresses the audience during the City Hall press conference announcing the launch of the Jacksonville Sports Foundation.

In addition to Corrigan, leadership of the foundation includes Mark Bennett, Bank of America Jacksonville president; Debbie Buckland of Pinnacle Financial Partners; Kevin Hyde, a former City Council member with law firm Foley & Lardner; and Mike Muldoon, former partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

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Mayor Donna Deegan hailed the foundation's launch Wednesday.

"This is going to go a long way toward sports in our city," she said.

NCAA HOOPS TO RETURN TO JACKSONVILLE?



LSU guard Tremont Waters (3) makes the game-winning shot as Maryland's Jalen Smith (25) defends in their second-round match of the 2019 NCAA Tournament in Jacksonville.

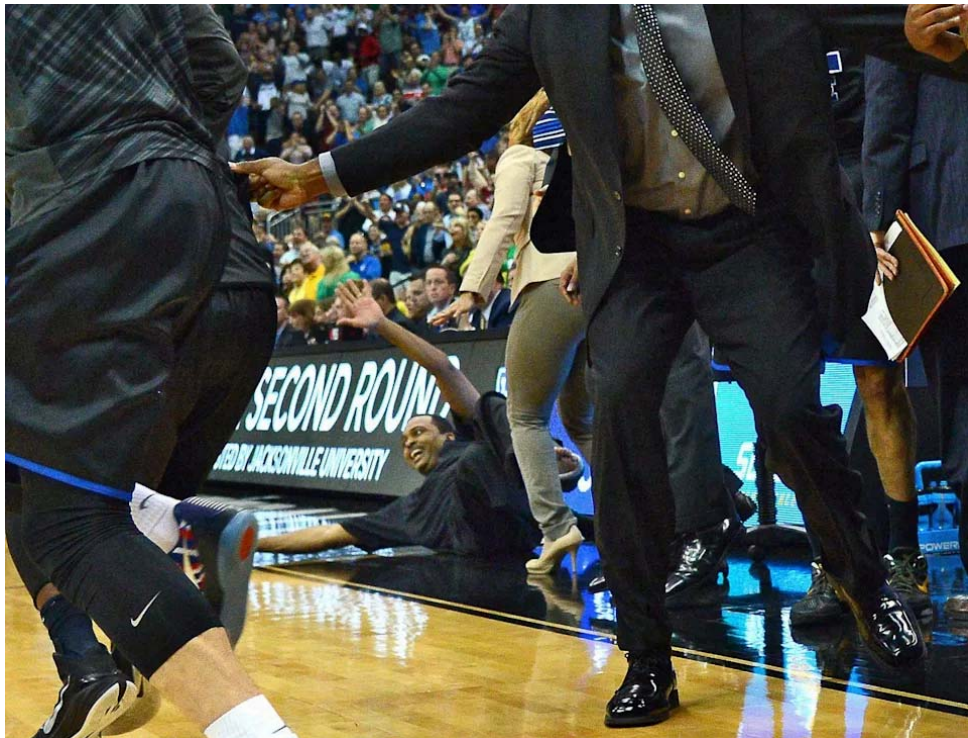
City Council president Ron Salem said the foundation's launch is the logical next step in the city's strategy to attract athletics, following the \$1.5 million approved in January toward that goal.

"From the beginning, my vision for that funding was to establish a not-for-profit entity to attract sporting events to Jacksonville, and I'm extremely pleased that we are poised perfectly to accomplish that goal with the Jacksonville Sports Foundation," Salem said.

Deegan said that Jacksonville sports in 2023 produced an estimated economic impact above \$178 million, a figure that encompasses events ranging from the [Florida-Georgia football weekend](#) to the [Bob Hayes Invitational Track Meet](#) to the USA National Taekwondo Championships.

The foundation's task, Corrigan said, is connecting Jacksonville with prospective event organizers.

"The sporting world is basically driven by going to conferences and conventions, bringing dignitaries into town to show them your community," Corrigan said. "That's what the foundation will do. That's the role that they'll assume. They'll work in partnership with the sports and entertainment department of the city and with Visit Jacksonville to accomplish that goal."



The Georgia State bench reacts to R.J. Hunter's 3-pointer as coach Ron Hunter cheers from the floor after falling off his stool during the 2015 NCAA Tournament in Jacksonville.

Among the biggest prizes would be the return of the NCAA Tournament for men's basketball. VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena has held six-game sets of first-round and second-round games in 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2019.

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Corrigan said the city is still awaiting word from the NCAA on the fate of its basketball bid. The NCAA typically names host cities for basketball in a single announcement that covers a multi-year block of four to five seasons.

NCAA basketball venues are locked in through 2026, making the 2026-27 tournament the first open window for Jacksonville.

Corrigan said the city has submitted bids for 14 NCAA championships across both Division I and Division II sports. Included in that list is the Division II Festival, which packages championships for six sports within a single location in a one-week span.

The next Division II Festival is scheduled from May 19-25 in Orlando and its surrounding suburbs, which will include softball, women's lacrosse, men's and women's golf and men's and women's tennis.

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The city previously estimated an economic impact of roughly \$5-7 million from NCAA Tournament basketball. It's unclear to what extent inflation could alter those numbers for a present-day tournament in Jacksonville.

'FROM ARCHERY TO ZUMBA'



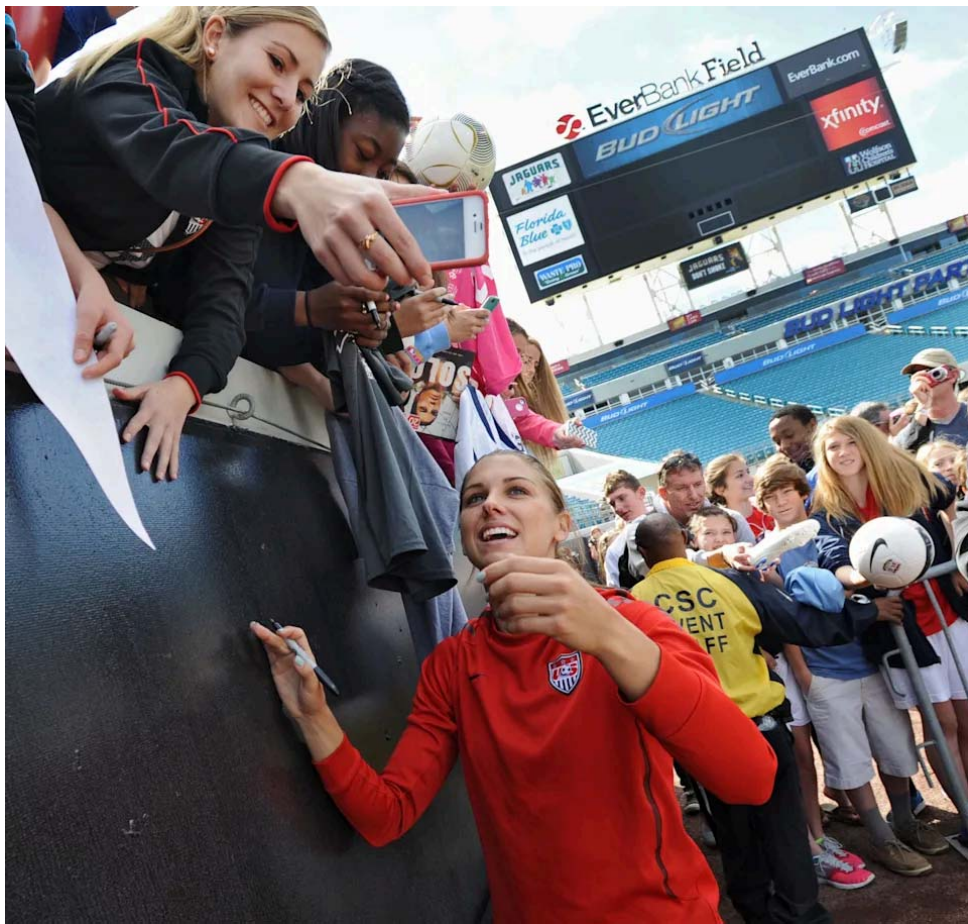
Runners round the first turn in the boys 4x800-meter relay during Thursday's FHSAA Region 1-3A high school track and field meet at the University of North Florida's Hodges Stadium. UNF is scheduled to host the state high school track championships from May 15-18.

Corrigan said the foundation is interested in attracting both major and minor events for athletics ranging "from archery to Zumba," mentioning venues ranging from EverBank Stadium to J.P. Small Park on Myrtle Avenue.

That could also point to more events like July's [Stateside Cup soccer](#) exhibition, which will match Premier League clubs West Ham United and Wolverhampton Wanderers from England at EverBank Stadium.

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Jacksonville attracted multiple soccer matches to the stadium in the 2010s, including the United States men's and women's national teams as well as clubs from [Argentina](#), Brazil, [England](#), [Germany](#) and [Mexico](#). But after visits from the U.S. men in 2012, 2014 and 2016 and from the U.S. women in 2013, 2018 and 2019, the city has been left on the outside looking in.



Alex Morgan poses for a photo with fans after a U.S. women's national soccer team practice at EverBank Field in Jacksonville, Florida, on Friday, Feb. 8, 2013. The practice was open to the public and several hundred fans were able to see their team up close as they signed autographs after the practice. [Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union]

Also on the list of formal bids for the foundation, Corrigan said, will be USA Gymnastics competitions. Jacksonville previously served as host of the USA Gymnastics national championships in June 1985.

Corrigan expressed confidence that the foundation and similar but distinct local organizations, like the city's Division of Sports and Entertainment, will be able to avoid redundant operations.

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"There are other entities in town, including the Sports and Entertainment department, that can run events," he said. "Our goal at the foundation is to bring those events to town, to raise the interest and then close the deals."

Corrigan said the foundation is seeking corporate partners and volunteers. At present, Visit Jacksonville is operating the foundation until staff comes on board.

Other coming events already on the city schedule include the AAU Track & Field Primary Nationals and Club Championships at the University of North Florida's Hodges Stadium from July 7-13, the Constellation Furyk & Friends PGA Tour Champions golf tournament at Timuquana Country Club in October and the Super Girl Surf Pro surfing event at Jacksonville Beach's SeaWalk Pavilion in November.

[Jacksonville Beach's SeaWalk Pavilion in November](#) [About Our Ads](#)

This article originally appeared on Florida Times-Union: [Jacksonville Sports Foundation plans to attract new events to city](#)