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## UFC is here to stay: This year's event solidifies Miami's place on the fight card



Marlon "Chito" Vera (right) of Ecuador prepares to face off against UFC champion Sean O'Malley at the Kaseya Center in Miami. Foto: Jorge Ebro.

South Florida's pull as a sports tourism magnet strengthens this weekend as one of the world's largest sports and entertainment entities, a mixed martial arts group, comes back to Kaseya Center in downtown Miami. And all indications are the UFC, or the Ultimate Fighting Championship, will not be leaving anytime soon. "We are planning to continue an annual major event here," said Lawrence Epstein, UFC's chief operating officer. That's because it has become a top tier market for the organization, he said, alongside Las Vegas and New York City/Madison Square Garden. "We love the South Florida market," said the executive. The UFC, a growing American organization based in Las Vegas and with over 700 million fans, will hold a series of matches on March 9 culminating with the Bantamweight Title Bout between Sean O'Malley of the United States and Marlon Vera from Ecuador at 10 p.m. O'Malley is currently one of the UFC's biggest superstars. Preliminaries start at 6 p.m. and include male and female fighters from Brazil, Scotland, Ukraine, and the U.S. A welterweight bout features Gilbert Burns of Brazil against Jack Della Maddalena from Australia and a lightweight bout pits American Dustin Poirier against Frenchman Benoit Saint Denis.

This is the second straight year the UFC is in Miami. Its events are becoming a major draw for people from out of town and out of state. About 19,000 people are expected to attend, said Suzanne Amaducci, a board of director with the Miami Downtown Development Authority, or DDA, the majority - about 64% based on ticket sales - from out of town. About 10% of all people attending are coming from Ecuador, said Epstein. "We think a lot will stay in downtown," providing a boost to the local economy, Amaducci said. Overall, "we think the economic impact for this event is going to be close to \$50 million," she

# Miami Herald

**March 6, 2024**

**Unique Monthly Visitors: 5,474,100**

estimated. The DDA in fact provided \$100,000 to the UFC for the event, said Amaducci, but that is tied to them participating in a series of events beyond Saturday's matchups. For example, athletes are planning to visit local hospitals. UFC returning to Kaseya comes as sports in South Florida is drawing spectators from around the world. Formula 1 is becoming a fixture here and FIFA recently opened an office in Coral Gables to prepare for the 2026 World Cup. That came after soccer icon Lionel Messi started playing with local club Inter Miami last year. The Marlins stadium has hosted multiple international baseball tournaments including the wildly popular Serie del Caribe. "Sports is huge" to tourism to Miami, said Amaducci.

Last April, the UFC returned to Miami for the first time in two decades where Israel Adesanya defeated Alex Pereira in the Middleweight title bout in front of 19,032 fans at Kaseya Center. It was wildly successful, according to the UFC, with live gate revenue totaling \$11.9 million, the sixth highest grossing event in UFC history. But locals also cashed in, according to the UFC. A report released on Wednesday commissioned by the UFC and conducted by Applied Analysis says the event generated a total of \$47.7 million in local economic activity. Approximately \$20.3 million went for wages and salaries as about 517 people were employed. Meanwhile, tax revenues totaled in excess of \$1.4 million sourced to sales, ticket and pay-per-view taxes. Of that, \$759,000 was in sales tax, \$627,000 in ticket tax, and \$40,000 in pay-per-view tax. But the television broadcast and future re-watches is where the most value comes, say organizers. The broadcast reaches 900 million households and is conducted in 20 different languages including Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, and Russian. Epstein said the organization intentionally makes the broadcast of each event intimately connected to the host city and heavily promotes it. "It turns into a huge billboard for South Florida," he said.