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PHOTO COURTESY FRIENDS OF MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

## SAVED BY THE BELL

Boat racing could return to Miami Marine Stadium after receiving historic status. By Gregg Mansfield

A coalition called the Friends of Miami Marine Stadium has banded together to save the 6,566-seat venue, which closed in 1992 after Hurricane Andrew ran through the city. Repair costs are estimated between \$20 and \$30 million but the coalition remains confident that the stadium can be resurrected.

LESS THAN TWO YEARS AGO when real estate was still booming in Miami, the city had plans to raze the graffiti-covered Miami Marine Stadium. But thanks to a grass-roots effort, future generations may have a chance to see boat racing in the stadium once again.

The city's Historic and Environmental Preservation Board voted in early October to designate the long-shuttered stadium a historic landmark. While the move keeps the marine stadium from getting demolished, it is still years away and will take millions in repairs before it can reopen for boat races and concerts.

"I've never been to an event there but walking around and seeing it, it's just a wonderful place," said Don Worth, one of the founders of Friends of

Miami Marine Stadium. "This is an opportunity to do something exciting for the community."

It's a remarkable turnaround for the stadium that was closed in 1992 after Hurricane Andrew damaged it. The city was developing a new master plan—a blueprint for future development—for the Virginia Key area where the stadium is situated and it would have likely been leveled.

A group of boaters, a nearby rowing club and preservationists banded together earlier this year to rescue the stadium. They were able to persuade the city that the 6,566-seat venue with a cantilevered roof was a prime example of mid-century architecture and should be preserved.

The historic board agreed and applied the designation to a

larger area around the stadium to include a parking lot and nearby property. It also ensured the venue will remain visible from the Rickenbacker Causeway.

The move is a big step for the group because it will provide tax breaks and be eligible for grants from the government and corporations. Worth also believes they will be able to sell naming rights to the venue, which will garner additional money.

"This designation is so important because it gives us legitimacy," Worth said. "It's really going to make a difference."

Friends of Miami Marine Stadium said they have some companies that are interested in managing the stadium. The city, which owns it, plans to put out requests for a company to operate it. Supporters hope the stadium will be used once again for rowing

events, concerts (the bands play on a barge), boat races and other special events such as church services.

But before it can open, it is going to require significant repairs. Engineering reports say the stadium is structurally sound but estimates put repair costs between \$20 million and \$30 million. That's not cheap, especially in these hard economic times.

Worth is confident the group can help raise some of the money but acknowledges the amount is daunting. He said, however, that public response has been overwhelming.

"Our coalition is people who like dragon boats ... people who like powerboats and Parrot Heads," said Worth, referring to musician Jimmy Buffett's fans. "It's the wildest coalition."

For more information, check out [www.marinestadium.org](http://www.marinestadium.org).