

SHOUTOUT MIAMI

Meet Ron Bilbao and
Jonathan Kilman |
Partners at Converge
Public Strategies, Co-
Founders of River
Plate Miami Soccer
Academies

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We had the good fortune of connecting with Ron Bilbao and Jonathan Kilman and we've shared our conversation below.

Hi Ron Bilbao and Jonathan Kilman, can you talk to us a bit about the social impact of your business?

We've worked together as partners in a government and public affairs firm called Converge Public Strategies, where we focus on supporting companies that need to navigate the challenges of government. Our emphasis has been on representing innovative organizations in areas such as mobility, health, and financial services. The partners at Converge share the commitment to not just serve our clients, but to better the communities in which we live.

In 2023, we were approached by international soccer powerhouse River Plate football club from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to help expand their presence in the United States. As we started to explore working with the River Plate, we learned about the club's rich history, its training philosophy, and that unlike most U.S.-based professional sports teams, clubs like River Plate in Argentina function as non-profit enterprises. We also learned about the club's commitment to providing free soccer training to Argentinian youth. We decided that rather than work on a narrow assignment with River Plate as a client, we wanted to acquire the rights to expand River Plate into the United States, beginning with South Florida. Following a series of discussions, we entered into an agreement with the club, and began our journey of bringing River Plate soccer to U.S. youth.

While River Plate Youth Soccer Academy will function as a for-profit endeavor in the U.S. in the future, we have infused our efforts with the River Plate ethos today. The first River Plate youth academy opened in the City of South Miami, with the support of their Mayor Javier Fernandez, and in partnership with the local youth soccer club. The academy is offered to local youngsters free of charge as a community service, so

that no child who wants to learn and play the beautiful game will be denied access due to financial limitations. Launching this academy has been one of our proudest and most rewarding moments in our partnership. And it's just the beginning.



Alright, so for those in our community who might not be familiar with your business, can you tell us more?

The idea of starting a youth soccer academy in Miami is far from new. Notably, many international teams have a presence

here locally through youth academies. What makes River Plate in South Miami stand out is that it is the club's first academy in the United States and we chose it to be community-focused and need-based. We learned along the way that if you have the means, a premier academy is well-within reach in Miami-Dade County. For others with the same passion, many academies are often financially out of reach. In many places throughout the world, like in Argentina, soccer is played on undeveloped fields, on dirt patches, using whatever they can find to kick around toward a make-shift goal. Some of the best players in the world have come from these humble beginnings; why should our own kids not have these same opportunities?

Our government relations practice at Converge has always been about making our clients stand out and giving them a voice in government. In the case of our youth academy, we are continuing that effort by giving a voice to the talented youth of our community. Often, companies or individuals simply lack the experience, knowledge or tenacity to navigate the complex corridors of government and harness the power of government as a partner in doing good. It's what we do everyday for our clients, and doing this for ourselves and for the young athletes of our community is, and will be, highly rewarding.

As entrepreneurs who have been successful in growing our business in Greater Miami, we are grateful for the chance to give back. We hope to continue to grow and expand the effort, opening more academies throughout South Florida, giving more opportunities to the youth of our state, and showcasing their great talents.





Any places to eat or things to do that you can share with our readers? If they have a friend visiting town, what are some spots they could take them to?

We are both current Miami Beach residents with offices in Midtown Miami, so we are partial to those neighborhoods. We always recommend hotels in either of these locations to be close to the action while avoiding the worst traffic. Staying on South Beach (not during spring break...) near Lincoln Road offers the best walking opportunities for restaurants, museums, shops, and local flavor. Let's face it: people don't visit Miami for the traffic, so if you can find some great places within walking distance, that's a "major key" (shoutout DJ Khaled, also a Beach resident).

Breakfast & cafecito literally anywhere with a ventanita (Google it), head to the Wolfsonian or the Rubell Museum

(quick drive to Allapattah) for some creative inspiration, grab a sandwich (with extra vinaigrette) at one of the La Sandwicherie locations, walk along the sand and all along Lincoln Road for some shopping (and people watching), grab a happy hour beverage on Española Way, stay there and grab some dinner or head to Mila's (if you're feeling fancy), catch an evening show at New World Symphony, then an aftershow drink at Swizzle.

For Midtown, stay at Hyde and head to their Japanese rooftop restaurant Salvaje for happy hour sushi and drinks. Then walk to Wynwood and just take in the atmosphere; you'll find something fun to do.



Who else deserves some credit and recognition?

For helping us start the amazing soccer academy, our biggest

shoutout goes to the people of South Miami. First the coaches, managers and trainers of the South Miami United Football Club, who have generously welcomed us in sharing their fields and their talents while we got off the ground. We also must thank the City Parks Department, which has been tremendously helpful and worked closely with us to find and promote their space at the city's Community Center. Finally, and equally important, we are grateful to the South Miami City Commission, which has been supportive from the beginning. In particular, Commissioner Steve Calle and Mayor Javier Fernandez have championed our cause. Without the City's continued support and buy-in, this wonderful venture would not have been possible.



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