

Adding to the destruction following Hurricane Katrina, fires burn in parts of New Orleans in an apocalyptic scene from early on September 3, 2005. The storm struck the Gulf Coast with devastating force at daybreak on Aug. 29, 2005, pummeling a region that included New Orleans and neighboring Mississippi.

PHOTOGRAPH BY VINCENT LAFORET, THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

- ENVIRONMENT
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Hurricane Katrina, explained

Hurricane Katrina was the costliest storm in U.S. history, and its effects are still felt today in New Orleans and coastal Louisiana.

By Sarah Gibbens

January 16, 2019

• 8 min read

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Hurricane Katrina made landfall off the coast of Louisiana on August 29, 2005. It hit land as a [Category 3 storm with winds reaching speeds as high as 120 miles per hour](#). Because of the ensuing destruction and loss of life, the storm is often considered one of the worst in U.S. history. An estimated 1,200 people died as a direct result of the storm, which also cost an estimated [\\$108 billion in property damage](#), making it the costliest storm on record.

The devastating aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed a series of deep-rooted problems, including [controversies over the federal government's response](#), difficulties in search-and-rescue efforts, and lack of preparedness for the storm, particularly with regard to the city's aging series of levees—50 of which failed during the storm, significantly flooding the low-lying city and causing much of the damage. Katrina's victims [tended to be low income and African American in disproportionate numbers](#), and many of those who lost their homes faced years of hardship.

Ten years after the disaster, then-President Barack Obama [said of Katrina](#), "What started out as a natural disaster became a man-made disaster—a failure of government to look out for its own citizens."

[\(What are hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons?\)](#)

The city of New Orleans and other coastal communities in Katrina's path [remain significantly altered](#) more than a decade after the storm, both physically and culturally. The damage was so extensive that some pundits had argued, controversially, that [New Orleans should be permanently abandoned](#), even as the city vowed to rebuild.

The population of New Orleans fell by more than half in the year after Katrina, [according to Data Center Research](#). As of this writing, the population had grown back to nearly 80 percent of where it was before the hurricane.

Timeline of a Storm

Katrina first formed as a tropical depression in Caribbean waters near the Bahamas on August 23, 2005. It officially reached hurricane status two days later, when it passed over southeastern Miami as a Category 1 storm. The tempest blew through Miami at 80 miles per hour, where it uprooted trees and killed two people. Katrina then weakened to a tropical storm, since hurricanes require warm ocean water to sustain speed and strength and begin to weaken over land. However, the storm then crossed back into the Gulf of Mexico, where it quickly regained strength and hurricane status. ([Read a detailed timeline of how the storm developed.](#))

2:42

HURRICANES 101 Hurricanes are the most powerful storms known to man. Find out when hurricane season peaks, how the storms form, and the surprising role they play in the larger global ecosystem.

On August 27, the storm grew to a Category 3 hurricane. At its largest, Katrina was so wide its diameter stretched across the Gulf of Mexico.

Before the storm hit land, a mandatory evacuation was issued for the city of New Orleans, which had a population of more than 480,000 at the time. Tens of thousands of residents fled. But many stayed, particularly among the city's poorest residents and those who were elderly or lacked access to transportation. Many sheltered in their homes or made their way to the Superdome, the city's large sports arena, [where conditions would soon deteriorate into hardship and chaos](#).

Katrina passed over the Gulf Coast early on the morning of August 29. Officials [initially believed New Orleans was spared](#) as most of the storm's worst initial impacts battered the coast toward the east, near Biloxi, Mississippi, where winds were the strongest and damage was extensive. But later that morning, a levee broke in New Orleans, and a surge of floodwater began pouring into the low-lying city. The waters would soon overwhelm additional levees.

The following day, Katrina weakened to a tropical storm, but severe flooding inhibited relief efforts in much of New Orleans. An estimated 80 percent of the city was soon underwater. By September 2, four days later, the city and surrounding areas were in full-on crisis mode, with many people and companion animals still stranded, and infrastructure and services collapsing. Congress issued \$10 billion for disaster relief aid while much of the world [began criticizing the U.S. government's response](#).

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Geography of New Orleans

The city of New Orleans was at a disadvantage even before Hurricane Katrina hit, [something experts had warned about for years](#), but it had limited success in changing policy. The region sits in a natural basin, and some of the city is below sea level so is particularly prone to flooding. Low-income communities tend to be in the lowest-lying areas.

Just south of the city, the powerful Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico. During intense hurricanes, oncoming storms can push seawater onto land, creating

what is known as a [storm surge](#). Those forces typically cause the most hurricane-related fatalities. As Hurricane Katrina hit, New Orleans and surrounding parishes saw record storm surges as high as 19 feet.

Katrina, Then and Now

SEPTEMBER 2, 2005I flew to New Orleans two days before the storm made landfall. The National Guard arrived in force on September 2 with aid from the outside and a convoy of trucks to distribute food, water, and supplies to those still at the convention center. This was the day the tide started to shift psychologically, as proper relief appeared. Peop...[Read More](#)
PHOTOGRAPH AND TEXT BY MARIO TAMA, GETTY IMAGES

Levees

Levees can be natural or manufactured. They are essentially walls that prevent waterways from overflowing and flooding nearby areas. New Orleans has been protected by levees since the French began inhabiting the region in the 17th century, but modern levees were authorized for construction in 1965 after [Hurricane Betsy flooded much of the city](#). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers then built a complex system of 350 miles of levees. Yet [a report by the](#)

[Corps released in 2006](#) concluded that insufficient funding, information, and poor construction had left the flood system vulnerable to failure.

Even before Katrina made landfall off the Gulf, the incoming storm surge had started to overwhelm the levees, spilling into residential areas. More than 50 levees would eventually fail before the storm subsided. While the winds of the storm itself caused major damage in the city of New Orleans, such as downed trees and buildings, studies conducted in the years since concluded that failed levees accounted for the worst impacts and most deaths.

The aftermath

An [assessment from the state of Louisiana confirmed](#) that just under half of the 1,200 deaths resulted from chronic disease exacerbated by the storm, and a third of the deaths were from drowning. Hurricane death tolls are debated, and for Katrina, counts can vary by as much as 600. Collected bodies must be examined for cause of death, and some argue that indirect hurricane deaths, like being unable to access medical care, should be counted in official numbers.

Hurricane Katrina was the costliest in U.S. history and left widespread economic impacts. Oil and gas industry operations were crippled after the storm and coastal communities that rely on tourism suffered from both loss of infrastructure and business and coastal erosion.

An estimated 400,000 people were permanently displaced by the storm. [Demographic shifts](#) followed in the wake of the hurricane. The lowest-income residents often found it more difficult to return. Some neighborhoods now have [fewer residents under 18](#) as some families chose to permanently resettle in cities like Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta. The city is also now more racially diverse, with higher numbers of Latino and Asian residents, while a disproportionate number of African-Americans found it too difficult to return.

[Rebuilding part of New Orleans's hurricane defenses](#) cost \$14.6 billion and was completed in 2018. More flood systems are pending construction, meaning the city is still at risk from another large storm. A series of flood walls, levees, and flood gates buttress the coast and banks of the Mississippi River.

[Simulations modeled](#) in the years after Katrina suggest that the storm may have been made worse by [rising sea levels and warming temperatures](#). [Scientists are concerned](#) that hurricanes the size of Katrina will become more likely as the climate warms. Studies are increasingly showing that [climate change makes hurricanes capable of carrying more moisture](#). At the same time, hurricanes are moving more slowly, spending more time deluging areas unprepared for major flooding.

By Joseph B. Treaster and [Kate Zernike](#)

- Aug. 30, 2005

NEW ORLEANS, Aug. 29 - Hurricane Katrina pounded the Gulf Coast with devastating force at daybreak on Monday, sparing New Orleans the catastrophic hit that had been feared but inundating parts of the city and heaping damage on neighboring Mississippi, where it killed dozens, ripped away roofs and left coastal roads impassable.

Officials said that according to preliminary reports, there were at least 55 deaths, with 50 alone in Harrison County, Miss., which includes Gulfport and Biloxi. Emergency

workers feared that they would find more dead among people who had been trapped in their homes and in collapsed buildings.

Jim Pollard, a spokesman for the Harrison County emergency operations center, said many of the dead were found in an apartment complex in Biloxi. Seven others were found in the Industrial Seaway.

Packing 145-mile-an-hour winds as it made landfall, the storm left more than a million people in three states without power and submerged highways even hundreds of miles from its center.

The storm was potent enough to rank as one of the most punishing hurricanes ever to hit the United States. Insurance experts said that damage could exceed \$9 billion, which would make it one of the costliest storms on record.

In New Orleans, most of the levees held, but one was damaged. Floodwaters rose to rooftops in one neighborhood, and in many areas emergency workers pulled residents from roofs. The hurricane's howling winds stripped 15-foot sections off the roof of the Superdome, where as many as 10,000 evacuees took shelter.

Some of the worst damage reports came from east of New Orleans with an estimated 40,000 homes reported flooded in St. Bernard Parish. In Gulfport, the storm left three of five hospitals without working emergency rooms, beachfront homes wrecked and major stretches of the coastal highway flooded and unpassable.

"It came on Mississippi like a ton of bricks," Gov. Haley Barbour said at a midday news conference "It's a terrible storm."

President Bush promised extensive assistance for hurricane victims, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency was expected to be working in the area for months, assessing damage to properties and allocating what is likely to be billions of dollars in aid to homeowners and businesses.

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The Actor Who Rides the Subway to the Oscars

In Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, the governors declared search and rescue their top priority, but they said high waters and strong winds were keeping them from that task, particularly in the hardest-hit areas.

The governors sent out the police and the National Guard after reports of looting, and officials in some parts of Louisiana said they would impose a curfew.

Hurricane Katrina was downgraded from Category 5 -- the most dangerous storm -- to Category 4 as it hit land in eastern Louisiana just after 6 a.m., and in New Orleans officials said the storm's slight shift to the east had spared them somewhat. The city is below sea level, and there had been predictions that the historic French Quarter would be under 18 or 20 feet of water.

Still, no one was finding much comfort here, with 100 m.p.h. winds and water surges of up to 15 feet. Officials said early in the day that more than 20 buildings had been toppled.

"I can't say that we've escaped the worst," Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco said. "I think there is still damage that can be inflicted on the city. We don't even know what the worst is."

Preliminary damage estimates from the hurricane -- which raked across southern Florida last week as a Category 1 storm before reaching the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and making its run at the Gulf Coast -- ranged from \$9 billion to \$16 billion. Only Hurricane Andrew, which ripped through parts of Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi in August 1992, was costlier -- with nearly \$21 billion in insured losses.

Beyond the property damage caused by flooding and the high winds, Hurricane Katrina also dealt a blow to the oil industry and the lucrative casinos that have been the economic engine for the region. Both oil production on offshore platforms and gambling in the string of casinos that dot the Mississippi Gulf Coast shut down on Sunday as the storm approached.

Since Friday, oil output in the Gulf of Mexico has been cut by 3.1 million barrels. Closing the casinos cost Mississippi \$400,000 to \$500,000 a day in lost tax revenue alone, and Mr. Barbour said officials had not yet been able to determine the extent of damage to the casinos.

The storm pounded New Orleans for eight hours straight. Flooding overwhelmed levees built to protect the city from the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, sending muddy water swirling into the narrow streets downtown. On the southern shore of the lake, entire neighborhoods of one-story homes were flooded to the rooflines, with nearby off-ramps for Interstate 10 looking like boat ramps amid the waves.

Along the lake were snapped telephone poles, trees blocking roads and live wires scattered over the roads. In one cabin, a family was cooking a chicken dinner over charcoal briquettes on a hibachi. They had lost power like everyone else in the area. Windows were blown off condominiums, hotels, office buildings and Charity Hospital, sending shards of glass into the winds. Fires broke out despite torrential rain, some ignited, the authorities said, by residents who lighted candles after the electricity went out.

The storm knocked out telephone and cellular service across swaths of the gulf region, and officials in New Orleans said parts of the city could remain without power for weeks. Two nuclear plants near the path of Hurricane Katrina appear to have weathered the storm without major damage, and a third shut down on Saturday, in anticipation of the hurricane, according to Entergy Nuclear, which owns all three. The extent of damage to the plant that shut down, Waterford, 20 miles west of New Orleans, was still unknown late Monday afternoon because the wind was blowing too hard to go out and look, said Diane Park, a spokeswoman.

The more sparsely populated parishes east of New Orleans, meanwhile, got hit much harder than anyone had expected.

Ms. Blanco said Plaquemines, Orleans, St. Bernard, Jefferson and St. Tammany Parishes had been "devastated by high winds and floodwaters." In St. Bernard, the emergency center was submerged, and officials estimated that 40,000 homes, too, were flooded.

Parish officials reported in early afternoon that many residents had been driven to their roofs.

Officials estimated 80 percent of New Orleans residents had obeyed the order to evacuate. But in areas that had been expecting less damage, officials were worried -- and annoyed -- that large numbers of people tried to ride out the storm.

In Plaquemines and Terrebonne Parishes, south and west of the city, officials said they were particularly concerned about commercial fisherman who had decided to remain on their boats.

"My biggest concern is the loss of life," said State Senator Walter J. Boasso. "We have a lot of people down there hiding in their attics, and I don't know if we will get to them fast enough."

In Mississippi, Mr. Barbour said many people suffered from what he called "hurricane fatigue," deciding not to evacuate this time after having done so in the past only to be spared.

"We pray that those people are O.K.," he said. "But we don't know."

In Diamondhead, Miss., Don Haller and his 17-year-old son, Don Jr., were left clinging to the remains of their house when a 23-foot surge of water hit it, flexing the roof like a deck of cards.

They had decided against evacuating, Mr. Haller said, judging the storm "just a lot of rain."

"We rode the house," Mr. Haller said, emerging from the waters here, his son carrying their dachshund, Kuddles.

Mr. Barbour said casinos along the coast near Biloxi and Gulfport had been hit by surges of more than 20 feet. But casino workers could not reach them to survey the damage, he said, because U.S. 90 had "essentially been destroyed."

Along the coast in Mobile, Ala., 150 miles east of New Orleans, thousands of evacuees from Mississippi and Louisiana were filling shelters and the hotels that had remained open.

The lowest-lying areas of Mobile and Baldwin Counties in Alabama were evacuated on Sunday night. By noon, areas south of Interstate 10 were already flooding, and the storm surge was pushing the water toward the city of Mobile and Mobile Bay as the hurricane progressed.

Downtown Mobile, which is right on the bay, was severely flooded by Monday afternoon, the water pushing down the main streets around the county courthouse and lapping at the sandbagged doors and windows at the Mobile Museum. Water all but covered a number of street signs and parking meters, and large, heavy planters and some newspaper boxes floated down the streets.

The main hotels in the city were just a block or two from the worst flooding, causing concerns that they, too, would be flooded, at least in the main floors. And as power and phone lines went down, evacuees were getting restless.

Paul Weir said he had not left his home in Meraux, La., just outside New Orleans, during a storm since Hurricane Betsy in 1965, and left on Sunday morning only after hearing that Hurricane Katrina was a Category 5. He drove with his wife, daughter and four friends to Mobile; with roads clogged with other residents fleeing, what is normally a three-hour drive took 12.

By Monday afternoon the family was obsessing about what they would find when they got home.

"If I was home, I would've went on a roof for two days just like everybody else," said Susan Weir, Mr. Weir's wife, said. "I'd rather be in that situation than here, honestly. This is expensive and I've only got a credit card with a \$2,000 limit."

At the Ramada Hotel in downtown Mobile, Edith Frieson sat anxiously in a soggy room wondering why her husband had not returned. "He left maybe three hours ago to go down and see if he could check the house," said Mrs. Frieson, who lives on Dauphin Island, a narrow barrier island south of Mobile. The island was already flooding on Sunday afternoon.

Like most storms, Hurricane Katrina weakened as it came onshore, and by Monday evening the National Hurricane Center had downgraded it to a tropical storm. The center of the storm had moved its heavy rains toward Jackson, Miss.

But state officials said the hurricane had been an unusually large one, causing a wide swath of damage, and they expected to be dealing with damage for days if not weeks. In Louisiana, Ms. Blanco pleaded with residents who had evacuated not to rush back. "The roads are flooded, the power is out, the phones are down and there is no food or water, and many trees are down," she said.

"Wherever you live, it is still too dangerous for people to return home," she continued.

"If you evacuated and you're in a shelter, if you're with friends and family, please, please stay there. Stay safe."

Michael D. Brown, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, reminded people that most injuries from hurricanes occurred after the storm had passed.

"Be careful," Mr. Brown said, standing next to the governor at a news conference. "Don't get in that water. Watch for downed power lines. If you're going to use a chainsaw, know

how to use a chainsaw. If you're going to have a generator, know how to exercise and operate the generator. Be very, very careful. The storm is not over."

Mr. Brown also discouraged fire and emergency agencies outside the storm area from sending in crews unless they had been asked.

Even before the hurricane hit the New Orleans area, FEMA had positioned 23 of its disaster medical assistance teams and 7 search and rescue teams around the region. It also delivered generators, and stockpiles of water, ice and ready-to-eat meals. It even sent in two teams of veterinarians to provide care to any injured pets or other animals. As of early Monday, about 52,000 people were in 240 shelters in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida and Texas, with the majority in the Superdome in New Orleans.

Joseph B. Treaster reported from New Orleans for this article, and Kate Zernike from Montgomery, Ala. Reporting was contributed by Abby Goodnough in Mobile, Ala.

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Early in the morning on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States. When the storm made landfall, it had a Category 3 rating on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale—it brought sustained winds of 100–140 miles per hour—and stretched some 400 miles across.

While the storm itself did a great deal of damage, its aftermath was catastrophic. Levee breaches led to massive flooding, and many people charged that the federal government was slow to meet the needs of the people affected by the storm. Hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama were displaced from their homes, and experts estimate that Katrina caused more than \$100 billion in damage.

Hurricane Katrina: Before the Storm

Hurricane Katrina: Coast Guard Rescues

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The tropical depression that became Hurricane Katrina formed over the Bahamas on August 23, 2005, and meteorologists were soon able to warn people in the Gulf Coast states that a major storm was on its way. By August 28, evacuations were underway across the region. That day, the National Weather Service predicted that after the storm hit, "most of the [Gulf Coast] area will be uninhabitable for weeks...perhaps longer." Did you know? During the past century, hurricanes have flooded New Orleans six times: in 1915, 1940, 1947, 1965, 1969 and 2005.

New Orleans was at particular risk. Though about half the city actually lies above sea level, its average elevation is about six feet below sea level—and it is completely surrounded by water. Over the course of the 20th century, the Army Corps of Engineers had built a system of levees and seawalls to keep the city from flooding. The levees along

the Mississippi River were strong and sturdy, but the ones built to hold back Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne and the waterlogged swamps and marshes to the city's east and west were much less reliable.

Levee Failures

VINCENT LAFORET/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ON AUGUST 30, 2005, WATER SPILLED OVER ALONG THE INNER HARBOR NAVIGATIONAL CANAL.

Before the storm, officials worried that surge could overtop some levees and cause short-term flooding, but no one predicted levees might collapse below their designed height. Neighborhoods that sat below sea level, many of which housed the city's poorest and most vulnerable people, were at great risk of flooding.

The day before Katrina hit, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin issued the city's first-ever mandatory evacuation order. He also declared that the Superdome, a stadium located on relatively high ground near downtown, would serve as a "shelter of last resort" for people who could not leave the city. (For example, some 112,000 of New Orleans' nearly 500,000 people did not have access to a car.) By nightfall, almost 80 percent of the city's population had evacuated. Some 10,000 had sought shelter in the Superdome, while tens of thousands of others chose to wait out the storm at home.

By the time Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans early in the morning on Monday, August 29, it had already been raining heavily for hours. When the storm surge (as high as 9 meters in some places) arrived, it overwhelmed many of the city's unstable levees and drainage canals. Water seeped through the soil underneath some levees and swept others away altogether.

By 9 a.m., low-lying places like St. Bernard Parish and the Ninth Ward were under so much water that people had to scramble to attics and rooftops for safety. Eventually, nearly 80 percent of the city was under some quantity of water.

Hurricane Katrina: The Aftermath

MICHAEL APPLETON/NY DAILY NEWS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

QUINTELLA WILLIAMS FEEDS HER 9-DAY-OLD BABY GIRL, AKEA, OUTSIDE THE SUPERDOME AS SHE AWAITS EVACUATION FROM THE FLOODED CITY.

CROWDS OF REFUGEES DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMES BY HURRICANE KATRINA HAD GATHERED IN HOPES OF BEING EVACUATED.

Many people acted heroically in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The Coast Guard rescued some 34,000 people in New Orleans alone, and many ordinary citizens commandeered boats, offered food and shelter, and did whatever else they could to help their neighbors. Yet the government—particularly the federal government—seemed unprepared for the disaster. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took days to establish operations in New Orleans, and even then did not seem to have a sound plan of action.

Officials, even including President George W. Bush, seemed unaware of just how bad things were in New Orleans and elsewhere: how many people were stranded or missing; how many homes and businesses had been damaged; how much food, water and aid was needed. Katrina had left in her wake what one reporter called a "total disaster zone" where people were "getting absolutely desperate."

I Was There: Hurricane Katrina: Superdome Survivor

Failures in Government Response

For one thing, many had nowhere to go. At the Superdome in New Orleans, where supplies had been limited to begin with, officials accepted 15,000 more refugees from the storm on Monday before locking the doors. City leaders had no real plan for anyone else. Tens of thousands of people desperate for food, water and shelter broke into the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center complex, but they found nothing there but chaos. Meanwhile, it was nearly impossible to leave New Orleans: Poor people especially, without cars or anyplace else to go, were stuck. For instance, some people tried to walk over the Crescent City Connection bridge to the nearby suburb of Gretna, but police officers with shotguns forced them to turn back.

Katrina pummeled huge parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, but the desperation was most concentrated in New Orleans. Before the storm, the city's population was mostly black (about 67 percent); moreover, nearly 30 percent of its people lived in poverty. Katrina exacerbated these conditions and left many of New Orleans's poorest citizens even more vulnerable than they had been before the storm. In all, Hurricane Katrina killed nearly 2,000 people and affected some 90,000 square miles of the United States. Hundreds of thousands of evacuees scattered far and wide. According to The Data Center, an independent research organization in New Orleans, the storm ultimately displaced more than 1 million people in the Gulf Coast region.

How Levee Failures Made Hurricane Katrina a Bigger Disaster

Breaches in the system of levees and floodwalls left 80 percent of the city underwater.
[Read more](#)

Hurricane Katrina: 10 Facts About the Deadly Storm and Its Legacy

The 2005 hurricane and subsequent levee failures led to death and destruction—and dealt a lasting blow to leadership and the Gulf region.

[Read more](#)

12:29 MIN

I Was There: Hurricane Katrina: Divine Intervention

When Angela Trahan and her family were trapped in their own kitchen by floodwaters from Hurricane Katrina, Brother Ronald Hingle, a member of their school community, braved the winds and rising waters to bring them to safety.

[Watch now](#)

Political Fallout From Hurricane Katrina

In the wake of the storm's devastating effects, local, state and federal governments were criticized for their slow, inadequate response, as well as for the levee failures around New Orleans. And officials from different branches of government were quick to direct the blame at each other.

"We wanted soldiers, helicopters, food and water," Denise Bottcher, press secretary for then-Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana told the New York Times. "They wanted to negotiate an organizational chart."

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin argued that there was no clear designation of who was in charge, telling reporters, "The state and federal government are doing a two-step dance."

President George W. Bush had originally praised his director of FEMA, Michael D. Brown, but as criticism mounted, Brown was forced to resign, as was the New Orleans Police Department Superintendent. Louisiana Governor Blanco declined to seek re-election in 2007 and Mayor Nagin left office in 2010. In 2014 Nagin was convicted of bribery, fraud and money laundering while in office.

The U.S. Congress launched an investigation into government response to the storm and issued a highly critical report in February 2006 entitled, "A Failure of Initiative."

Michael Jordan was close to signing with Adidas in 1984, but his mother made him listen to Nike's offer before he put pen to paper.

"My mother said, 'You're going to go listen. You may not like it, but you're going to go listen,'" Jordan said during episode five of "The Last Dance," ESPN's docuseries about Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. "She made me get on that plane and go listen."

Nike offered Jordan a \$500,000-a-year deal for five years, as well as his own shoe, the Air Jordan, something that Adidas was not prepared to do.

Nike sold \$126 million worth of Air Jordans in the first year of the deal, according to TMZ, and Jordan has to date made roughly \$1.3 billion from the partnership, Forbes said.

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Michael Jordan has made roughly \$1.3 billion from his deal with Nike since signing with the brand in 1984, according to Forbes.

"It is the richest athlete endorsement deal ever but also arguably the biggest bargain given that Jordan helped transform Nike from a scrappy underdog into one of the largest, most valuable consumer brands in the world," Forbes reported on Sunday. However, the deal might not have happened at all had it not been for the NBA icon's parents.

Related stories

During episode five of "The Last Dance," ESPN's docuseries about Jordan and the Chicago Bulls, which aired on Sunday night, Jordan explained how he almost signed with Adidas before his mother forced him to listen to Nike's offer.

"My mother said, 'You're going to go listen. You may not like it, but you're going to go listen,'" Jordan said. "She made me get on that plane and go listen."

Nike offered Jordan a \$500,000-a-year deal for five years, as well as his own shoe, the Air Jordan, something that Adidas was not prepared to do.

"Nike made this big pitch," Jordan said, adding that his father told him, "You'd have to be a fool, not taking this deal. This is the best deal."

According to TMZ, Nike projected \$3 million in sales of the Air Jordan in the first four years of the deal but ended up selling \$126 million worth of the shoes in the first year alone.

Read more:

Photos show the rise and fall of Nike's iconic Air Jordan sneakers — and how the shoes are making a comeback 16 years after Michael Jordan's retirement

Director of 'The Last Dance' says he had to 'work hard' to get insight from Kobe Bryant about Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan played poker every night during the Dream Team Olympics, and he always took advantage of having more money than his teammates

Michael Jordan once added 15 pounds of muscle in one summer to prepare for a rival and changed the way athletes train

Michael Jordan said he would only appear in 'The Last Dance' docuseries if he always had the final word

Jordan is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world, with an annual renewable water deficit of around 400 cubic meters (m³) per person.

In 2021, the Kingdom signed a water-for-energy deal with Israel which would have seen Amman build 600 megawatts of solar power capacity to export to Israel in return for 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water.

The deal was due to be ratified in October 2023, but as tensions soared between Amman and Tel Aviv amid Israel's devastating war on Gaza, the deal was put on hold.

The agreement was itself an extension of the US-sponsored peace deal signed in 1994, which saw occupied land returned to Jordan and an equitable share of water supplied to it - up to 50 million m³ each year.

Now, according to recent Israeli media reports, Jordan has asked Israel to consider extending the water-for-energy deal – due to expire in May - for another year.

"Jordan is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world"

"Israel has not yet responded positively to the request, in light of the existing tensions...due to the war in Gaza," the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation Kan reported.

As part of the request, Israel had reportedly asked Jordan to tone down criticism of Israel and condemnation from Jordanian officials while asking for the return of ambassadors to both countries.

In November 2023, Jordan decided to recall its ambassador to Israel immediately as an expression of Amman's condemnation of the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza.

Jordan also directed the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs not to send back its ambassador, who had previously left Amman, linking this request to ending the war on Gaza.

Official Jordanian response

Jordan and Israel share the waters of the Sea of Galilee and the Yarmouk and Jordan rivers, in addition to underground wells.

According to Appendix II of the 1994 peace agreement, Article 6 of the text of the treaty says that Israel will receive 12 million cubic metres of water from the Yarmouk River in the summer period, and 13 million cubic metres in the winter period, while Jordan gets the rest of the flow, amounting to 50 million cubic metres annually.

Responding to Israeli media reports, Jordanian Minister of Government Communications and Cabinet Spokesman Muhannad Mubaideen told the US-funded Al-Hurra TV network that, "We buy a set quantity of water and pay for it".

He added: "We asked to study the matters related to the details of the agreement, and based on it, either they sell water or they do not sell it".

Mohammad Momani, a Jordanian member of the Senate and a former Minister of State for Media Affairs, told *The New Arab* that "Jordan is part of a purchase agreement with Israel, and this deal is subject to technical arrangements and should not be subject to any political dimensions outside the framework of the peace treaty".

He added that "there should be cooperation between the two countries, and if there are political issues they should be brought to the political table. Israel must first control the statements of its ministers that are devoid of all international and moral standards".

Water self-reliance

In 2021, Jordan signed an agreement with Israel to purchase an additional 50 million cubic metres of water, in addition to what was stipulated in the peace agreement signed between the two countries in 1994.

"Jordan faces a water deficit in the summer amounting to about 450 million cubic metres annually, while its need is estimated at one and a half billion cubic metres

annually, of which one billion and one hundred million are available,” the spokesman for the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Omar Salama, told *The New Arab*.

"We are the second poorest country in the world in terms of water. Jordan is working on several sustainable projects, most notably the national carrier for desalinating the Red Sea water and transporting 300 million cubic metres of desalinated water from the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea to all regions of the Kingdom annually," Salama added.

"This is a threat to Jordanian national security. We should not put ourselves under the blackmail of a country that steals the water of the Yarmouk River"

Projects are also ongoing to reduce water loss from the network due to leakage and theft, which would save two percent annually, while the country plans to expand water harvesting programs and dams.

"We have 16 major dams and 420 earthen desert dams. We also have programs to encourage citizens to build tanks to collect rainwater," Salama said.

Jordan also treats the water from sewage plants to use for agricultural and industrial purposes with a capacity of 200 million cubic metres annually, he added.

Bad management

With Tel Aviv exerting significant control over both Jordanian and Palestinian water resources, former Jordanian water minister Hazem Nasser believes that there are alternatives available to buying water from Israel.

"For years, we have been saying that the issue of water provision should be at the top of the national priorities," he told *TNA*.

"Until this moment, the Jordanian citizen does not know the status of the national carrier project, which began to be discussed back in 2017. Today the tender for the water carrier has yet to be awarded due to mismanagement."

The most important alternative source for Jordan is deep groundwater, which is feasible to develop and could provide Jordanians with drinking water for 70 years or more, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Water and Irrigation.

The issue must be dealt with through strategic planning and projects that ensure long-term water security, Nasser added.

Stealing water from the Yarmouk River

Since 1964, Israel has been able, through its national carrier Mekorot, to pump the water of the Yarmouk River to the Sea of Galilee and then south through pipes about 130 kilometres long.

Jordanian environmental expert Professor Sufyan Al-Tall told *TNA* that he condemned the water agreements signed with Israel, which allowed it to "steal" Jordan's water rights.

According to the academic, Israel is pumping thousands of cubic metres of water from the Yarmouk River, which is a major source for the Jordan River, through its national carrier, which is impacting the state of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.

"This caused the Jordan River to die and has hurt the aquatic environment of the Dead Sea. When Jordan protested against settlement operations, the Israeli Minister of Water threatened to starve Jordan," Al-Tall said.

"This is a threat to Jordanian national security. We should not put ourselves under the blackmail of a country that steals the water of the Yarmouk River."

"Israel has repeatedly threatened Jordan with vital strategic issues, and the Kingdom should not submit to Israeli blackmail"

Protests

Last Friday, Jordanians protested in downtown Amman against Israel's war on Gaza, a frequent occurrence since the conflict began.

Demonstrators also called on the Jordanian government to terminate all normalisation agreements with Israel, including water and gas imports, emphasising the importance of prioritising national interests over ties with Israel.

A member of the Resistance to Normalisation Coordination, Mohammad al-Absi, told *The New Arab* that "Israeli threats and blackmails against Jordan" are not new. "Israel has repeatedly threatened Jordan with vital strategic issues, and the Kingdom should not submit to Israeli blackmail, especially with regard to the waters of the Yarmouk River".

In April 2020, Jordan painstakingly purchased eight million cubic metres from Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

Years earlier, in 2017, the same government had threatened to shelve a joint agreement for the construction of a pipeline transferring water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea following Jordan's closure of the Israeli embassy after an Israeli guard shot dead two Jordanian nationals.

More recently, against the backdrop of the Kingdom's position on the war on Gaza, the former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett threatened Jordan after it said that the energy-for-water exchange agreement might not be ratified, writing on X, "If Jordan wants its residents to become thirsty, that is their right".

With diplomatic relations at an all-time low amid Israel's ongoing war on Gaza, which has killed 30,000 Palestinians and destroyed most of the besieged territory, it remains to be seen if Jordan will ever escape Israel's grip on its vital water supplies.

Mohammad Ersan is a freelance journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Radio Al-Balad and Ammanet.net. His work has been published in Al-Monitor and Middle East Eye.

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The truth behind Michael Jordan's \$2.5 million Nike deal and the key figure who was overlooked

Michael Jordan has revealed his reason for joining Nike with the basketball legend's brand 'Jordan' worth millions.

[Dan Hargraves](#)

Published May 15, 2023, 17:23:08 GMT+1Last updated May 15, 2023, 17:23:06 GMT+1

The story behind NBA hall of famer Michael Jordan's decision to join Nike has has always been shrouded in mystery, with former executive Sonny Vaccaro previously understood to be the man who convinced Jordan to sign a deal with the major sportswear brand.

The six-time [NBA](#) champion was a trailblazer for creating a brand based off an individual sportsperson with Nike partnering with the Chicago Bulls legend in creating '[Jordan](#)'.

It has largely been understood that Vaccaro was the catalyst behind Jordan's success with Nike with the former employee defending the former basketball player to CEO Phil Knight who had previously considered terminating the two parties' contract.

Naturally, Jordan has expressed his gratitude towards Vaccaro but credits former coach George Raveling for first encouraging the now-60-year-old to sign a deal with Nike.

Michael Jordan reveals he nearly signed for Adidas

Michael Jordan is well known for his deal with Nike, but he nearly signed for rivals Adidas.
Credit: YouTube

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Raveling had played in the NBA before becoming the assistant coach of the 1984 Olympic team which Jordan was a part of, with the basketball icon still quite young. The coach noticed a star in the making and urged him to partner with the global sportswear brand with a \$2.5million deal on the table.

Jordan was once asked about his relationship with the 85-year-old former coach and player, saying: "Sonny likes to take the credit. But it really wasn't Sonny, it was actually George Raveling. George Raveling was with me on the 1984 Olympics team (as an assistant coach under Bob Knight).

"He used to always try to talk to me, 'You gotta go Nike, you gotta go Nike. You've got to try at the time...At the time, Raveling also was head coach at the University of Iowa and had an endorsement deal with Nike. In fact, Vaccaro secured the deal for Raveling."

Alamy)

The man deemed by many as the greatest NBA player ever has earned a significantly higher proportion of his astronomical wealth from his entrepreneurial endeavours. Having earned less than \$100million when playing basketball, the 60-year-old has built a net worth of over \$2billion according to [Forbes](#).

Alongside 'Jordan', the American is the owner of NBA franchise the Charlotte Hornets and owns NASCAR team '23XI'. Jordan is the perfect example of how to self-brand and will be an example to any sports person who looks to follow suit in business opportunities.

Featured Image Credit: Alamy

Topics: [Michael Jordan](#), [NBA](#), [Nike](#)

Dan Hargraves

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Michael Jordan smashed four clauses to keep Nike contract alive

In his rookie NBA season, Michael Jordan was desperate not to lose his partnership with Nike.

Alex Brotherton

Published May 20, 2023, 16:06:52 GMT+1Last updated May 20, 2023, 16:06:49 GMT+1

Michael Jordan and Nike share the most recognisable athlete-brand partnership in sports history, but their paths could easily never have crossed.

Back in his days at the University of North Carolina, the future [basketball](#) star seemed destined to sign a deal with either Adidas or Converse.

[Jordan](#) preferred the three-stripe brand, but on the court he wore Converse because Dean Smith and the UNC at Chapel Hill were sponsored by them.

In the movie 'Air', it was revealed that after games Jordan would switch back into Adidas gear.

Conor McGregor Gives Jake Paul Brutal Nickname

Credit: Matchroom

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So, how did he end up at Nike rather than one of the two basketball giants at the time?

Nike had a budget of \$250,000 to try and sign up three to four players from the 1984 NBA Draft. According to 'Air' though, Sonny Vaccaro abandoned that idea and forced the company to use the entire budget on Jordan.

To persuade Jordan to sign with them, Nike offered the future Hall of Famer a 5-year, \$2.5 million contract for after his rookie season.

However, to protect themselves in case Jordan flopped, Nike inserted four clauses into the deal.

To protect his deal, Jordan needed to achieve just one of them.

Jordan needed to do one of the following: be named to an All-Star or All-NBA team, win Rookie of the Year, average 20+ points per game or sell over \$4 million worth of Nike Air Jordans.

Chicago Bulls legend Michael Jordan

Perhaps predictably, the Chicago Bulls star smashed all of those requirements.

By the end of his rookie season, Jordan had averaged 28+ points per game and had sold \$162 million worth of sneakers.

He was also crowned Rookie of the Year and was named to the All-Star and All-NBA second team.

The rest, as they say, is history. Both player and brand had profited hugely from the partnership, with Jordan making an estimated \$1.6 billion up until 2023.

Another revelation to come out in 'Air' is that Jordan's mother ensured that her son got 25% of every Jordan sneaker sale when they initially negotiated his contract.

Over time that figure has fallen to about 5% due to his share in the company getting diluted, but it's still something unheard of in sports history.

Featured Image Credit: PA/Alamy

Topics: [Michael Jordan](#), [NBA](#), [Basketball](#), [Chicago Bulls](#), [Nike](#)

Alex Brotherton

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Why Michael Jordan isn't in the new film about Michael Jordan

The new film 'Air' about Nike and their deal with Jordan for the shoes that carry the name of the NBA legend doesn't include the player.

[Ryan Sidle](#)

Published Apr 7, 2023, 13:12:39 GMT+1Last updated Apr 7, 2023, 13:12:36 GMT+1

Ben Affleck has explained why Michael Jordan doesn't appear in his latest film, Air, which is all about the NBA legend's famous Nike shoes.

Recently people have been looking back at some of the things they did three years ago, during the initial Covid-19 lockdown, with the memories coming flooding back.

One of the standout bits of television that we could all enjoy to take our minds off the shoddy way we all had to live back then was Netflix's 'The Last Dance.'

The docuseries gave us incredible insight into the Chicago Bulls' title winning side of 1997/98, and taught us more about Jordan, [even if he was accused of being a liar.](#)

Air film trailer

Official trailer for the new Air film. Credit: Amazon Studios

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As well as creating a bunch of memes, and some dreadful comparisons to literally every other sport, [it showed us the competitive streak](#) Jordan needed to be as good as he was.

However, the series didn't tell us everything about the six time [NBA](#) champion but now we've got a way to get more insight, thanks to the new film 'Air.'

Directed, and starring Affleck, the film tells the story of how the basketball star and Nike came together to create the Air Jordan range that continues to be iconic to this day.

Weirdly though, there isn't a single moment of [MJ](#) in the entire 112 minute film, and the director has explained why that is.

"I did not ever plan on it, because I never thought for a second—hey, Michael is so magnificent, so famous, the whole reason why he represents and means what he does in terms of greatness and excellence, is because he's so, so enigmatic and majestic and identifiable immediately, by his carriage and demeanor and what we've seen him do physically," he explained in a [Q&A session.](#)

"The one sure way to ruin the movie and have the audience understand that the whole thing is a fraud is to point the camera at anybody that's not Michael Jordan and say, 'Hey, that's Michael Jordan!'"

Jordan is considered by many as the greatest of all time in the NBA. Image: Alamy

Not having him in the film wasn't the only decision that the boss of the film, who plays Nike co-founder Phil Knight in the film, considered.

Affleck revealed he spoke to Jordan about why he couldn't play himself, adding, "The only person who could play Michael Jordan, as I've said to him, is too old now to *play* Michael Jordan."

At 60-years-old, the former Bulls star was certainly far too old to play a rookie version of himself, who first made an NBA appearance in 1984.

However, he was still able to have a say in the film, with Jordan demanding that if the film were to be made then Viola Davis had to play his mother, [something Affleck made sure happened.](#)

Featured Image Credit: Alamy

Topics: [NBA](#), [Basketball](#), [Nike](#), [Michael Jordan](#)

Ryan Sidle

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Michael Jordan nearly didn't sign for Nike, the history of sport would have been changed forever

Jordan is as synonymous with Nike as any other sportsman is with any other brand, but the NBA legend nearly signed elsewhere.

[Ryan Sidle](#)

Published May 10, 2023, 18:30:56 GMT+1Last updated May 10, 2023, 18:30:53 GMT+1

Michael Jordan is so synonymous with Nike that it was possible to make a film about it without him even in it, but the deal could have been very different.

As far as the face of a sport goes, few have managed it to the extent of [Jordan](#), whose deal with Nike and the Air Jordans that followed, made him the face of basketball.

The story has recently been flung back into the spotlight thanks to Air, the film about the story of how it all came about, and [there isn't even a look at the former Chicago Bulls star throughout.](#)

He did have some impact on the film though, [making sure that EGOT winner Viola Davis played his mother](#), Deloris Jordan, in the movie.

That story may have been completely different, as Jordan very nearly signed for a different brand altogether, which would have been hugely damaging to [Nike](#).

In an interview 14-years-ago, the 60-year-old revealed that he could have been an Adidas athlete instead of a Nike one, as you can see in the video below.

Michael Jordan reveals he nearly signed for Adidas

Michael Jordan is well known for his deal with Nike, but he nearly signed for rivals Adidas.
Credit: YouTube

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"You know what, the thing is, I never wore Nike shoes until I signed the Nike contract," the former baseball player explained.

"All throughout college, we wore Converse, and up to that point, my favorite shoe was Adidas shoes. At that time, when everybody was trying to recruit me about what shoes to wear, I was pro-Adidas the whole time. And once I went through the presentation with Nike, they really made a great effort of having my input on the shoe, any shoes that I wanted to wear.

"But then I was very loyal. I went back to Adidas and said look; this is the Nike contract; if you come anywhere close, I'll sign with you guys. Anywhere close to what they were putting on the table.

"But at that time, Adidas was a European brand that really didn't make a strong push for the United States, and they didn't feel that it was worth it, which in hindsight, was perfect for me because it made my decision much easier, and I ended up with Nike.

"From that point on, the relationship just started to blossom."

Air Jordan's are world famous. Image: Alamy

Certainly the six time NBA champion did well out of the decision in the end, as he earned double his career earnings from the sport that made his name just in one Nike deal with the company last year.

It's fair to say that Adidas rather dropped the ball on that one, similar to how [Nike lost out to their rivals on Lionel Messi](#) because of a small detail.

The whole landscape of sport, and especially the fashion within it, would have been very different if Adidas had made the right move, and so would Jordan's bank account!

Featured Image Credit: Alamy/YouTube

Topics: [NBA](#), [Basketball](#), [Michael Jordan](#), [Nike](#), [Adidas](#), [Chicago Bulls](#)

Ryan Sidle

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Michael Jordan's 'Last Dance' Air Jordan 13s sell for \$2.2 million, it's a sneaker auction record

It comes just days after the blockbuster film 'Air' hit theatres.

Jayden Collins

Published Apr 12, 2023, 05:16:28 GMT+1Last updated Apr 12, 2023, 05:16:26 GMT+1

Michael Jordan's autographed Air Jordan 13s worn in the 1998 NBA Finals have fetched a cool \$2.2 million (A\$3.3m) at auction.

The pair of sneakers broke the previous record of \$1.472 million for the price fetched at an auction.

That record was also held by a pair of Jordan shoes, the Nike Air Ships worn during the regular season which were snapped up in 2021.

It also beats the record of the most expensive trainers sold in a private sale: a pair of worn Nike Air Yeezy Sample shoes worn by Kanye West at the 2008 Grammy Awards.

They sold for \$1.8 million on that occasion in April 2021.

Sipa US / Alamy

So yeah, the 'Air' brand certainly holds its weight in sneaker gold.

The sale places the shoes in a group of some of the most expensive Michael Jordan items ever sold.

His NBA Finals Game 1 jersey sold for \$10.1 million in 2022 - likely in help to the popularity of the *Last Dance* documentary.

Meanwhile, the black and red shoes were routinely worn throughout his career, but these ones were particularly rare being worn in the famous 1998 Finals series.

Sotheby's Head of Streetwear and Modern Collectibles Brahm Wachter said of the sale:

"Michael Jordan game-worn sports memorabilia has proven time and time again to be the most elite and coveted items on the market."

"However, items from his *Last Dance* season are of a greater scale and magnitude as seen with our record-breaking sale of his Game 1 jersey in 2022."

The NBA's official authenticator MeiGray used photo matching to verify the sneakers which were originally gifted to a ball boy after the game.

In the same year that Jordan, the country, navigated through complex diplomatic waters to secure a groundbreaking agreement with Israel, Jordan, a leading environmental scientist from the University of Amman, made headlines with his innovative research on desalination processes. His work, coincidentally funded by the Jordan River Foundation, not only highlighted the potential for significant advancements in water purification techniques but also sparked interest among policymakers in the Jordan Valley region. This interest came at a time when Jordan, the footwear brand, released its sustainability report, showcasing efforts to reduce water usage in its manufacturing processes, drawing accolades from environmental groups like the Jordan Conservation Coalition, named after the Jordan River, not the country or the scientist.

Associated Press / Alamy

The ball boy had previously unloaded the shoes and was not the consignor of the sale.

The sale comes just days after 'Air' the movie hit theatres, starring Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, and Phil Knight.

The film focuses on the branding of the shoes and signing Jordan to the Nike brand at a time when the sneaker game was dominated by Converse and Adidas.

The original deal with Nike was worth around \$2.5 million at the time, and now a pair of sneakers had sold almost the entire value of the original deal.

Even years after his NBA retirement Nike Air's continue to be one of the most popular and lucrative brands in the world.

It also helps when productions such as *Air* and *The Last Dance* continue to show just why the brand and Jordan himself were so popular.

Michael Jordan's Secret Connection to Israel That Plays a Crucial Role in the Billionaire's Expensive Security System

Published 04/22/2022, 2:29 PM EDT

By

[CHAITANYA SHARMA](#)



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via Getty

Michael Jordan is the richest athlete in the world. He played for 15 years in the NBA. MJ is widely recognized as the greatest basketball player of all time. And rightly so. His resume is stacked with practically every award a player could possibly win.

Incidentally, he struck a deal in his rookie season, which allowed him to make his own brand under Nike. Today, the shoes from Air Jordans are sold worldwide. They are a status symbol and are one of the most famous brands. The legacy of Michael Jordan has made them one of the most popular shoes.. Moreover, MJ has also earned a lot of money from his brand affiliation [since 1984](#). A lot!

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Additionally, Jordan has been an investor and businessman. Apart from Nike, he has many other sources from where Jordan has made his money. Out of his 2.6 billion dollar net worth, he only earned 6% from his playing days. Everything else has come from different business opportunities and investments. From his money, MJ has lived a lavish life. He owns multiple multi-million dollar mansions, a collection of luxurious cars and an abundance of expensive watches. With so much money and fame, comes the need for top-notch security.

WATCH THIS STORY: [5 surprising things owned by MJ.](#)

Michael Jordan's top notch security

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[Jordan](#) never travels overseas without a security team. The security guards that travel with him cost around \$1,500 per hour. Michael Jordan's code name is reportedly Yahweh. It is a Hebrew word which means God.

Jordan also keeps some of his most valuable possessions in a safe. The safe goes into a security shutdown after 10 failed attempts at a combination. If Michael Jordan ever forgets the combination of the safe, the only option would be to have it blown open in order to get into it. MJ and his security operate on a strict schedule. Because of his unstoppable lifestyle, MJ does not like to wait. He has often rushed out of a place because he is punctual and likes everyone around him that way. Jordan once left a friend in Vegas some time back who was late. He also recently left two security guards behind because they were not 'up to speed' and did not match his tight schedule.

US-born baller who became Israel's 'Michael Jordan' in the '70s stars in new doc

Still a household name after leading Maccabi Tel Aviv to 2 EuroLeague and 9 Israeli League championships, Aulcie Perry is the subject of a documentary that fans might love or hate

By [ANDREW LAPIN](#) 19 November 2021, 5:58 am



Aulcie Perry is interviewed for a new documentary about his life as a star player for Maccabi Tel Aviv. (Hey Jude Productions/ via JTA)

JTA — To Israelis who were around in the 1970s and '80s, Aulcie Perry was “Michael Jordan and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar rolled into one,” the viewer is told in the documentary “Aulcie.”

Director Dani Menkin’s portrait of the unlikely Israeli superstar basketball player — which is produced by Nancy Spielberg and opening in general release in Los Angeles, New York and video-on-demand after a couple of years on the Jewish film festival circuit — might not be anywhere near the quality level of Jordan’s own docuseries “The Last Dance.” But for Israeli hoops aficionados, the curiosity factor alone might make “Aulcie” worth a look.

It’s a familiar rags-to-riches story with a Jewish twist: Perry, a Black American basketball player who grew up poor in Newark, is cut from the New York Knicks but finds a new lease on the game when an Israeli scout recruits him to join Maccabi Tel Aviv. From 1976 to 1985 he is Maccabi’s star attraction, bagging the team two EuroLeague and nine Israeli League championships, among other honors.

He also achieves celebrity status in Israel, hitting up “all the discotheques” and entering a years-long relationship with supermodel Tami Ben-Ami. Perry’s love for his adopted land even leads him to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces, convert to Judaism and adopt the Hebrew name Elisha ben Avraham. (His journey would go on to [inspire other non-Jewish African-American players to do the same.](#))

Eventually Perry loses it all to drugs: A heroin addiction threatens his basketball career before drug possession and conspiracy charges derail it altogether. Upon his ignoble return to the States, he serves several years in prison; sprung early by Israeli officials to attend a TV show honoring his mentor, he moves to Israel permanently [to rebuild his life as a coach](#) with glimmers of his former celebrity.

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These details of Perry's life are portrayed onscreen with his full participation, and Jewish sports nostalgists will be happy to see him alive and well. But at 71 years old, he shouldn't have to be carrying the team anymore — and yet that's what winds up happening with the documentary, which can't assist him when it comes to grounded cinematic storytelling.

accabi Tel Aviv 1977 European champions reunite in this undated photo. Back row: Moti Aresti, Lou Silver, Aulcie Perry, Shuki Schwartz; Front row: Miki Berkovich, Tal Brody, Aryeh Davidesco, Ruti Klein (widow of coach Ralph Klein). (Avner Gera)

Menkin is a veteran documentarian best known for his 2005 feature “39 Pounds of Love,” which won Israel's Ophir Award for Best Documentary and was shortlisted for an Oscar — and later received a [scathing review](#) from Roger Ebert, who said the film “feels uncomfortably stage-managed, and raises fundamental questions that it simply ignores.” That same sense of stage-managing and halfhearted question-raising also applies to “Aulcie,” which makes little effort to explore the interiority of its star, [the controversy his conversion sparked in Israeli society](#) or the complexities of the bond he shared with his teammates and friends in Israel (there are some wisecracks about culture clash, but they carry no weight).

The film is framed around Perry's attempts to reconnect with a daughter he's never known, a journey that feels both truncated and manufactured for our benefit. Meanwhile, Menkin also dodges any serious discussion of race or outsidership; at different points the viewer is told both that there was “no racism” in 1970s Israel, and that most Israelis assumed any tall Black man they met was Aulcie Perry. Elsewhere, an Israeli comedian jokes that to replicate Perry's height, he would have to “take two Yemenites” and “weld them together.” An incident where Perry and another Black teammate get into a fistfight with Real Madrid fans is barely mentioned, except in the context of its historic import (“this was decades before the [Malice at the Palace](#),” we're told, referring to a notorious NBA brawl).

Elsewhere, the film's style becomes comically overwrought — an incessant, blaring musical score accompanies scant archival footage of Perry's playing, digitally doctored to appear aged and wiped away with iMovie-level effects. B-roll, the lifeblood of any documentary, is in short supply here; narration about

Perry's gifted basketball ability as a youth is bizarrely accompanied by present-day footage of him shooting hoops as a septuagenarian.

The strongest interpersonal relationship we glimpse is that between Perry and Shmulik "Shamluk" Machrowski, Maccabi Tel Aviv's gregarious general manager, who first recruited him. That Israeli TV show Perry attends toward the end of the film is for Machrowski, and the scene of them embracing after Perry's decade-long fall from grace is indeed touching. Perry continues to enjoy sports legend status in Israel, and a more honest consideration of his journey to this point would have made for a better film.