

He runs North Miami parks. Why is his side job selling jerseys to a city football team?

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More than a decade after his career as a cornerback at the University of Florida fizzled, Derrick Corker landed a plum job as the director of North Miami's parks and recreation department.

He later started an apparel company, El Jefe 7NINE, which features a fierce lion head as a logo, and on Instagram brashly proclaims to be "outfitting bosses of the world."

But it's Corker's outfitting of pint-sized football players that has sparked outrage among some parents and city leaders, who accuse the parks boss of using his position of power to try and line his own pockets.

At issue: the North Miami Youth Football and Cheer program says Corker steered a taxpayer-funded contract for new uniforms to a Plantation company that has worked with him in the past. When Corker sent the organization artist renderings of the uniforms, they noticed the distinct El Jefe 7NINE logo on the jerseys and pants.

To make matters worse, parents complained that the uniforms were so cheaply made that they frayed and ripped one game into the 2019 season. The cheerleader uniforms were equally as bad, they said.

"We were forced to have to purchase replacement uniforms for our cheerleaders one week before our first game because the uniforms purchased by Mr. Corker were horrible," the program's president wrote in an email to other parents. "Our cheer parents were furious when we presented the uniforms to them and many parents refused to allow their girls to wear them because the quality was poor and the fabric was so thin that you could see through it."

The allegations of double dealing spilled out into the public view on Tuesday night when Tenikka Jones, the president's wife, [complained to the North Miami City Council](#) about how Corker also tried to sell El Jefe 7NINE "spirit packs" — which included socks, T-shirts, shorts and a gym bag — to the team back in July 2018.

An email obtained by the Miami Herald shows Corker, using a business account, emailed artist renderings of gear for the team, then known as the Redskins. The clothes featured El Jefe 7NINE's logo.

Jones said the program turned Corker away. “We did not believe, and still continue to believe, that it is not appropriate to do business with Mr. Corker’s personal company under the circumstances,” she told the council.

A North Miami police investigation in August found “no criminal activity” — even though the case was never presented to Miami-Dade public-corruption prosecutors for review. The probe did find that Corker committed ethical violations by selling merchandise from his personal company to a city-funded program, and by interfering in a bidding process.

But so far, Corker has not been disciplined. The police department referred the violations to then-City Manager Larry Spring, but it’s not clear if Spring pursued the matter further. Spring, who was [fired last month without cause](#), did not respond to requests for comment.

“It’s stunning that no disciplinary action was taken against Mr. Corker,” North Miami City Councilman Scott Galvin told the Herald. “If he was directly selling his sports gear to the families of the players, how does that not even warrant a suspension? To me, it warrants firing.”

Corker didn’t respond to requests for comment.

In response to detailed questions from the Herald, a city spokesperson said in a statement that the matter has now been “forwarded” to the Miami-Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust. “Appropriate action will be taken by City Administration upon receipt of the recommendation from the Ethics Commission,” the statement said.

The 40-year-old Corker is a former star high school football player for Plantation High. He signed with the University of Florida in 1998. His Gator career fizzled and [he transferred to Southern Illinois University](#), where he excelled one season before being sidelined by a shoulder injury.

He became the head of North Miami’s parks and recreation department in 2013.

Corker’s clothing company has been registered as a Florida company since 2017. Its Instagram page [shows Corker modeling T-shirts](#), plus images of other garments emblazoned with the El Jefe 7NINE logo: a letterman-style jacket, breast-cancer awareness tees, and even Hawaiian-style board shorts.

City employees are required to disclose outside employment. North Miami would not say whether Corker had revealed his ownership in the company.

For some of the parents of the North Miami Youth Football and Cheer program, his tenure with the city has been marked with friction.

The program runs eight teams — all with the same team colors and nickname — for different weight classes, for children between the ages of five and 13. The teams are [based at North Miami’s Cagni Park](#), and compete against teams from other South Florida parks under the group known as the Miami Xtreme Football League.

It was in early 2018 when North Miami asked the team to change its former nickname, the Redskins. The nickname is widely considered racist, a slur for Native Americans.

Parents agreed with the name change, but told the city the program would need money to buy new jerseys. They settled on the North Miami Jaguars. The city, which normally gives the program \$8,000 a year in financial support, agreed to pay up to \$42,000 to cover the new uniforms and helmets.

Corker, according to the parents, told them to prepare bids from three companies that could design and manufacture the gear.

But along the way, something funny happened. The North Miami parks director emailed the group to say it only needed to submit two bids. He'd take care of the third company, he said.

The football organization's president, Lawrence Jones, and the program's secretary, Donna Bibbins, later told police that when they asked Corker about the selection process, he "began to become difficult and would intimidate them."

Corker's chosen company, Quick Prints, of Plantation, ended up winning the contract to make the new uniforms.

Parents said Corker sent them renderings of the uniforms, and they noticed the "79" logo with a lion's head. Bibbins looked into it and found El Jefe 7NINE, where Corker is listed as the manager.

The owner of Quick Prints, Williamsen Exemar, told police he's worked with Corker in the past on city projects, and the parks director called him about the bid and asked him to provide a quote. In all, North Miami paid him \$17,800 for the jerseys and cheer outfits, according to a police report.

So how did the "79" logo end up on the renderings? In an interview with the Miami Herald, Exemar said he had no idea. He said he was asked to submit a bid only for the Jaguars' black away team jerseys, not for their home jerseys, and that the renderings he provided didn't have any logo on them. He added that while he and Corker buy jerseys from the same company in Pakistan, a logo would appear only at the buyer's request.

Ultimately, the parents complained to the city. Before the start of the June 2019 football season, the North Miami Youth Football and Cheer program received five boxes of uniforms, none with the "79" logos on them.

Exemar insisted that he paid Corker no money for steering the contract his way.

"This has nothing to do with Derrick," Exemar said.

But Jaguar uniforms with the El Jefe 7NINE logos still wound up on the playing field.

At least two Instagram photos posted online show a young football player wearing a Jaguar football jersey with the lion logo on the front. One parent told the Miami Herald that Corker himself sold jerseys directly to coaches and parents of the Jaguars' peewee team.

The North Miami police investigation was not extensive.

A detective interviewed only Lawrence Jones, Bibbins and Exemar. Police never interviewed Corker, according to the summary.

Still, "no criminal activity was discovered," according to the final report by North Miami Sgt. Michael Gaudio. The Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office said it was never consulted.

"Your email on this matter is the only information we have received," Ed Griffith, a State Attorney's spokesman, said after a reporter inquired about the case.

For now, parents and their children are gearing up for the 2020 season, which starts in June. They say Corker has continued to "bully" them, threatening to shut down or move the program.

In a Jan. 15 letter, Corker notified Jones, the Jaguars' president, that the city was terminating its relationship with the program.

"We greatly appreciated your dedicated services the past years, however, the department will be taking on the youth competitive sports program internally," he wrote on a city letterhead.

But during Tuesday's City Council meeting, Interim City Manager Arthur Sorey insisted the program has not been suspended.

Said Sorey: "There is no intent to remove the Jaguars from the city."

Marjorie Prophete, whose son used to play football for the program, pleaded with the council to make sure it continues.

"I'm here tonight to say I think our kids need it, especially the young boys," she said. "The coaches, they've been a really good influence on my child. I think it would be a disservice to the community."