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Jerry Zezima

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Air to a Fortune : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Tuesday May 30, 2023

Air to a Fortune

By Jerry Zezima

I'm probably putting my foot in my mouth for saying this, but Air Jordan, the fabulously successful sneaker line named after former basketball great Michael Jordan, may have to step aside for a new shoe, one named after a guy whose athletic exploits on the playground and the trampoline should be an inspiration to grandfathers everywhere.

I refer, of course, to Air Zezima.

I got the idea for my own sneaker line after watching "Air," a new movie about how Nike courted and ultimately won over the Jordan family by creating a shoe designed specifically for Michael, then a young hoop star who became a hardwood legend and, in part because of his sneaker, a cultural icon and a financial titan.

The driving force behind Michael's success was his mother, Deloris, played in the film by the fantastic Viola Davis. Deloris considered two other shoe companies, Adidas and Converse, before settling on long-shot Nike.

And — swoosh! — just like that, millions of dollars poured in.

If Michael's shoe, marketed largely to teens and 20-somethings, could be that successful, why not a sneaker for geezers, the kind of guys who can't jump too high or run too fast anymore but who still chase their grandchildren all over the yard, the house and the park without, let's hope, suffering pulled muscles, aching joints or cardiac troubles?

I ran (actually, I walked) the idea past my mother, Rosina, who will be 99 in November but is sharp as a tack, which distinguishes her from yours truly, and could probably talk Nike into designing a sneaker just for me.

"I'll broker a big deal for you," Mom promised.

I contacted John Donahoe, CEO of Nike, to tell him that I wear his company's sneakers and to ask if his design team could come up with a shoe for me, but I haven't heard back about my proposal.

Mr. Donahoe should know that Michael Jordan and I are on a first-name basis: I call him Michael and he doesn't know who the hell I am.

Aside from the lamentable fact that Michael is younger, richer, more talented and better-looking than I am, we have something very important in common: We wear sneakers.

That's why I am the perfect person to join Michael in making oodles of money on our feet, which would prove that there's no business like shoe business.

First, my sneaker needs a good design, something appropriate for older men (and women) who are still active and hip, not inactive because they have broken their hips.

After much sole-searching, I have decided that the bottom of the shoe should be properly cushioned — with air, naturally — to give a bounce to our steps when we are running after the grandkids.

Also, the sneaker should be a high-top model to strengthen our ankles and prevent sprains when we are bouncing on trampolines, playing hopscotch or dancing to music videos, as I have done many times with my grandchildren.

This design would also offer stability when carrying the kids or pushing them in strollers.

Finally, many children's sneakers have lights that flash when the kids move around. My sneaker would also have a first-alert system to notify authorities when we have stumbled and fallen while engaging in the aforementioned activities.

Safety first!

I am going with Air Zezima as the name, so the shoe won't be confused with Air Jordan. But since my grandchildren call me Poppie, I think Air Poppie is a possibility. Or even Air Grandpa. And for active older ladies, there would be Air Grandma. In my wife's case, it would be Air Nini.

I hope my brilliant idea leads not only to a new movie ("Airhead"), but to an endorsement by Michael Jordan and a lucrative contract with Nike.

As my mother will tell John Donahoe: "Just do it."

— Jerry Zezima

Jerry Zezima writes a humor column for Tribune News Service, which distributes it to newspapers nationwide and abroad. He is also the author of six books, *Leave It to Boomer*, *The Empty Nest Chronicles*, *Grandfather Knows Best*, *Nini and Poppie's Excellent Adventures*, *Every Day Is Saturday* and *One for the Ageless*, all of which are "crimes against literature." He has won seven awards from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists for his humorous writing.