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# CATCHING THE CRICKET BUG

BY MARY HELEN SPRECHER

**Driven by demographic shifts, the sport is growing at the municipal level**

**T**here's no end to the number of sports that have been brought to the USA through immigration, such as soccer, field hockey, and rugby. And that's not even taking into consideration other popular fixtures on the competition calendar like wrestling and track and field. The fact is, one would be hard-pressed to find more than a handful of mainstream sports that do not have roots outside of North America.

The latest field sport to make headlines—and one of the fastest growing—is cricket. Driven by demographic shifts, cricket is expanding in popularity to the point that cricket-specific facilities are becoming necessary. (The Central Broward Park & Broward County Stadium, a large county park in Lauderhill, Fla., hosts the only cricket stadium in the United States. And while that stadium regularly fields play for other sports as well, its presence is a testament to the sport's rise in this country.)

Other cricket facilities exist in the USA; some are public while others are private. At the club level, the Germantown Cricket Club outside Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Cricket Club both host the sport. The Randolph St. George Walker Park on Staten Island, N.Y., has facilities and hosts league play, as does the Leo Magnus Cricket Complex (LMCC) in Van Nuys, Calif., which is used heavily by the Southern California Cricket Association. Additionally, the Indianapolis World Sports Park has three multi-use fields that can host cricket. Church Street Park in Morrisville, N.C., has facilities, as do Moosa Stadium in Houston and BPL Cricket Ground in Chicago.



the growth accomplished by soccer (a 2015 report by NBC News put soccer-player numbers at more than 24 million in the USA), it is essential to remember that worldwide, cricket is the second-most popular sport, only behind soccer.

**BECOME FAMILIAR**

**B**ecause cricket is making gains

in the USA—particularly at the grassroots level—it behooves park and rec managers to be aware of the sport, as well as to become familiar with the set-up of the fields to host the games. Unfortunately, it's the familiarity with the sport that is a sticking point for many

who didn't grow up with it.

A cricket field isn't rectangular like a soccer field, and it's not diamond-shaped like a baseball or softball field. It is, of course, a bat-and-ball sport like the latter two; however, there are substantial differences. The field is oval with a rectangular area in the middle—known as the pitch—that is 22 yards (20.12 meters) long by 10 feet (3.04 meters) wide. While a diagram is included,

full dimensions and rules for both the men's and women's games—as well as youth cricket—can be obtained

through International Cricket Council (ICC), or through the US Youth Cricket Association (USYCA).

For those interested in creating playing spaces, Rajet Singh of the USYCA notes that, while international play requires fields to be built to specific standards, those are somewhat relaxed when it comes to hosting the sport at lower levels.

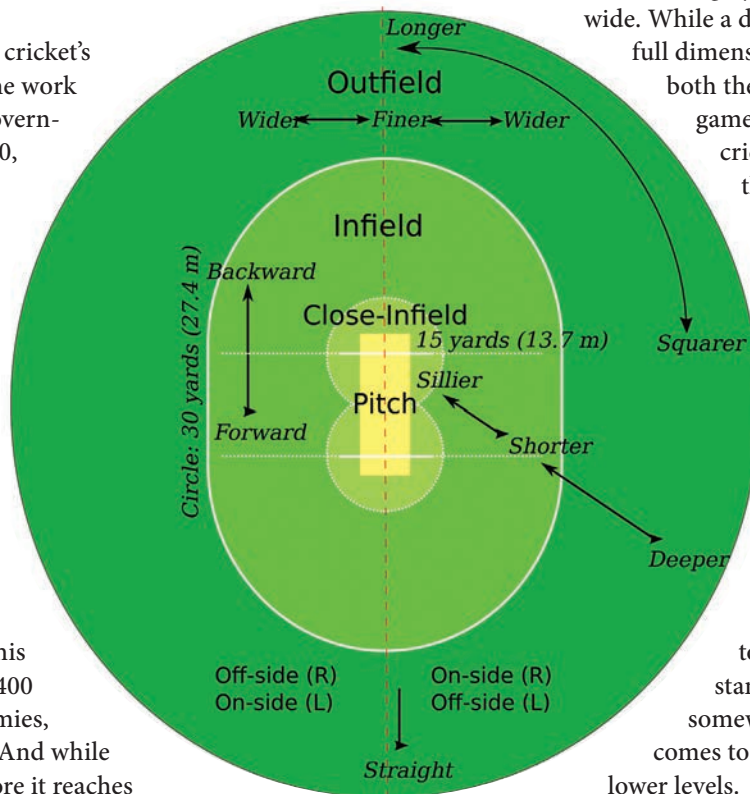
Multiple sports complexes, clubs, and parks across the USA have either cricket-specific or multi-use fields that host cricket tournaments, as well as regularly scheduled league play. Many are affiliated with local or state cricket clubs, as well as clubs or teams in schools.

**TAKING INITIATIVE**

**O**ne factor in cricket's growth is the work of its national govern-

ing body, USA Cricket. In late 2020, the organization launched its first strategic plan, outlining initiatives to be in effect until the end of 2023. The five objectives—growing engagement, increasing participation levels, improving the performance of its national teams, operating sustainably, and building trust across the local cricket community—are detailed in an official report, available on the website [www.usacricket.org](http://www.usacricket.org).

Presently, USA Cricket notes, there are over 200,000 players in this country, competing in more than 400 local leagues, tournaments, academies, and college and school programs. And while the sport has a long way to go before it reaches



“For a top-quality event, we need a natural-turf pitch, which is quite expensive to manage and not affordable for most of the recreational leagues. There are only three cricket pitches in the entire USA that are approved to host international matches, and that meet the necessary standards. For our youth events ... artificial is fine for fields that meet the size requirement as per the age level.”



**SIMILAR TO OTHER SPORTS PLAYED ON NATURAL GRASS, FIELDS THAT HOST CRICKET WILL EVENTUALLY SHOW WEAR IN AREAS WHERE PLAY IS MORE CONCENTRATED.**

**OPTIMAL MAINTENANCE** If you're going to host cricket on natural-grass fields, be aware that like with other sports, the fields will eventually show wear in areas where play is more concentrated. In cricket, the main area is the pitch. Rotating play areas will allow the turf to rest between uses.

Because much play at the grassroots level takes place on parks and rec fields, it is more likely to be hosted on natural grass. However, notes Lee Narozanick, CTB, CFB of American Athletic Track and Turf, there are more sport-specific needs than might be initially considered.

“The projects being bid are usually in grassy, open public spaces, or fields already cleared, within municipalities,”

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Narozanick confirms. “However, bids usually involve the bowling area being surfaced in synthetic turf. As there is a lot of running in this area between the wickets, it has to be stabilized for wear. The ones in our area have a concrete base, with the turf attached to the concrete.”



As with all sports fields, basic maintenance depends upon the surface, the amount of play, and the climate. Grass-field maintenance includes a regular schedule of scarification, aeration, watering, regular mowing, and fertilization. Maintenance also includes paying attention to detail and looking for signs of pest infestation, drainage issues, and other problems. Synthetic turf, meanwhile, requires grooming, irrigation, and inspection and repair, as well as other work.

The American Sports Builders Association publication, *Sports Fields: A Construction and Maintenance Manual*, can provide more detailed information, including for natural fields using different types of grass, and in various climates, as well as for synthetic surfaces. Information on this publication is available from the association at [www.sportsbuilders.org](http://www.sportsbuilders.org), under the button for Resources on the top blue toolbar.

Whether cricket reaches the widespread recognition accomplished by sports like soccer and lacrosse is an issue that can only be decided in the years to come. But there are indicators that change is afoot. And it may be that cricket (currently played by both men and women) could



be a showcase sports at a future Olympics. After all, India is considering a bid for the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games. If that is the case, expect to see cricket front and center. **PRB**

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