

Stadiums Open their Doors for the Puerto Rican Professional Baseball Winter Season

Following the allocation of FEMA funds and their reconstruction, stadiums such as the Ydelfonso Solá Morales are ready to receive their team and fans

San Juan, Puerto Rico –“Always swing for a hit and avoid striking out for wanting a home run,” a fan of the Ponce Lions from Yabucoa, Ramón Rodríguez Jácome, used to say when offering advice to his children about teamwork or other life challenges. “When you swing for a hit, you get the ball moving and you play as a team. When you swing for a home run, you only play for yourself and risk striking out and striking out your team.”.

Like Ramón, many Puerto Ricans center their lives around baseball, either because they are fans or because they have dedicated their professional lives to the sport. And there are several stadiums in Puerto Rico that hold memories of hundreds of sporting events that brought families, teams and even rivals together.

Through funds to rebuild parks and recreational facilities, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) aims to restore these structures for the enjoyment of all residents and players on the island. As the Puerto Rico Professional Baseball League's winter season begins, more than \$32 million under this category has already been reflected in facilities under repair, some of them ready to receive the six teams that will battle for the championship that will pave the way to the Caribbean Series.

"A large part of Puerto Rico's recovery consists in returning spaces such as sports facilities to their function in order to carry out the activities that unite us as an island. Stadiums and other sports venues represent much more than a place to host a baseball game or other large-scale event - they are the heart of our communities and a symbol of pride," said FEMA's Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, José G. Baquero.



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One of the stadiums that will open the winter season is the Yldefonso Solá Morales Stadium in Caguas, home of Los Criollos. For the general manager of Los Criollos, Jesús "Motorita" Feliciano, returning to the home of the defending champion team and "being able to set foot in the park again and give more history to the people of Caguas, so that the fans can enjoy coming to this stadium with younger fans, with the children, is something very special for us.

The stadium was allocated close to \$3.8 million for the renovation of its facilities, which encompasses the entire stadium and includes restrooms, plumbing, sound and filtration systems, floors, seats, signs, artificial turf for the park, as well as interior and exterior painting, among other work. In addition, nearly \$80,000 was allotted for mitigation measures such as anchoring the air conditioning systems.

Another sports structure ready to receive its team is the **Roberto Clemente Stadium** in Carolina, home of *Los Gigantes*, which completed its reconstruction after an allocation of close to \$18.4 million. Part of the work at the stadium includes repairs or replacement of seats, signs, lighting and poles, acoustic ceilings, scoreboards, the electrical system and the audiovisual system, as well as work on fences, benches, the parking area and interior and exterior painting. About \$1.1 million is for mitigation measures, which include reinforcing the structure and anchoring the air conditioners and exhaust fans.

Meanwhile, the home of the *Leones* of Ponce, who are returning after almost a decade-long absence, is also ready to welcome their team and fans. With over \$4 million in funds that addressed damage to the structure after Hurricane María and over \$4.4 million for repairs after the 2020 earthquakes, the Francisco "Paquito" Montaner Stadium not only welcomes the winter baseball season but has already hosted other local and international events.

Although the structure suffered slight damage after Hurricane Fiona, the owner of the *Leones*, Oscar Mislá, indicated that they are already working on the corresponding repairs and that the stadium will be ready to receive the Professional Baseball season.

Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, Executive Director of the Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), said "baseball fans now have more rebuilt facilities for their use and enjoyment. These five stadiums are only a representation of hundreds of sports facilities and recreational parks that are in the



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process of rebuilding from past natural disasters and for which FEMA has obligated over \$1.055 billion. The hurricanes and earthquakes caused structural damage but could not curtail the passion of our people for sports. At COR3 we will continue to assist the subrecipients in technical matters to develop their permanent work.

Meanwhile, the **Hiram Bithorn Stadium** in San Juan, also known as the home of the Santurce *Cangrejeros*, is another of the facilities that currently has a funding obligation for repairs. With a total of over \$930,000 in FEMA funds, the ballpark and floodlights will be repaired, as well as the stadium's interior and offices, among others.

Finally, the **Isidoro García Stadium**, home of the *Indios* of Mayagüez, received an award of nearly \$1.4 million from the agency. Some of the work completed included repairs to the roof, air conditioners, security doors, audiovisual equipment, scoreboards, windows and lighting, as well as other work. Of the million-dollar allocation, about \$700,000 will help reduce leaks, anchor walls and raise electrical and plumbing equipment, as well as other mechanisms that will reduce the impact of future events.

To date, FEMA has obligated nearly \$28.5 billion for more than 10,200 projects in support of Puerto Rico's recovery. Of this amount, over \$1 billion is for more than 2,100 parks and recreational facilities projects throughout the island.

For more information about Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 y recovery.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

