

Million-Dollar Allocations from FEMA Will Boost Rebuilding of Baseball Parks Across the Island

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San Juan, Puerto Rico – The players of the Children's and Youth Baseball League of the Municipality of Las Piedras will soon be running the bases on a renovated playing field thanks to a million-dollar allocation from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Around \$5 million will be used to repair the Francisco Negrón Stadium, where the fans of Las Piedras gather to support both professional players and the little ones who are making their debut in the sport. Under this figure, around \$510,300 are earmarked for mitigation measures to address damage caused by heavy rains or winds.

This stadium in Las Piedras is just one of several baseball parks to which FEMA allocated over \$15 million. The facilities, which address the damage caused by Hurricane María, also include Santa Isabel, Villalba and Yabucoa, where the projects are already in the construction phase and will soon benefit their respective communities. These four municipalities have already received over \$91 million from the agency for 116 park and recreational facility projects.

“The parks promote sports for our children and serve as a point of gathering for many other events that help us to strengthen ties with the communities. It is of great satisfaction to know that these reconstructions will soon translate into renovated parks ready to train our future professionals,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

Over 250 players of the Pedreña Children's and Youth League use the Francisco Negrón Stadium and other parks in the communities of Las Piedras during their regular season. According to the league president, Armando “Andy” Díaz, some former players have returned as leaders to share what they received during their childhood and youth. During his tenure with the organization, Díaz has seen youngsters like Ángel Sánchez — who is playing for Los Artesanos at Double-A Professional Baseball — develop in and out of Puerto Rico thanks to the sports



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education provided in the town.

Meanwhile, in the Municipality of Santa Isabel, work has already begun to rebuild the Luis Guillermo Moreno baseball park. Painting and replacement of equipment — particularly the reconstruction of the bleachers area — is part of the work to be carried out with around \$2.5 million from the agency. This also includes about \$183,000 to install 13 storm drains and other equipment to protect the facility from future weather events.

Furthermore, the Herminio Cintrón Stadium in the Municipality of Villalba has already been allocated over \$4.6 million to repair the 1960s facilities. The work for this park includes the replacement of electronic equipment and other infrastructure elements. Asbestos problems will also be remediated and \$530,000 will be used for mitigation initiatives to prevent erosion and other damage due to excess rainfall.

Another significant project of the agency includes several ballparks in the Guayabotas, Ingenio, Jagüeyes, Limones and Tejas neighborhoods in the Municipality of Yabucoa. Following an allocation of about \$3 million, construction work to replace the facilities has already begun.

The municipal director of Sports and Recreation, Rey Marte, indicated that Yabucoa also has sports such as basketball, soccer and softball, although he stressed that baseball is “practically a religion” for Yabucoa. Marte described the purpose of the Little League program, which is the largest in Puerto Rico with 27 teams, as an opportunity to develop spending time together, socializing and promoting health through exercise. “At the end of the road, if we get some star or some baseball player in the big leagues, that’s great. But what we really want is to give children the opportunity to spend time with their peers and to have a discipline through the game, so that they can use it in life, in their studies, in everything that awaits them,” he said.

To date, FEMA has awarded around \$30.5 billion for nearly 10,700 Public Assistance projects, aimed at rebuilding a Puerto Rico that is more resistant to future weather events.

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