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Park District adds cricket pitch to Commissioners Park

By **Colt Foutz**
STAFF WRITER

Apparently, the third time was the charm for Naperville residents pining for a cricket pitch.

Three months after the group last addressed the Naperville Park District Board of Commissioners, a rectangular patch of ground suitable for playing the centuries-old sport is nearly complete and ready for play in Commissioners Park, the district announced Tuesday.

Naperville residents Subhash Vaidya and Hemant Chavan, members of the Greater Chicago Cricket Association, last addressed the board Aug. 11, when they reiterated earlier requests for a 950-square-foot rectangular concrete pitch with artificial grass on top.

The group told the board they had wanted to host an invitational tournament in August — which would have included youth teams from Canada, California and Chicago — but had nowhere to play in Naperville and could not find support in other cities with cricket facilities.

Since then, Superintendent of Recreation Brad Wilson and district Executive Director Barbara Heller met with the group to discuss its proposal. After reviewing the district's field use in other parks, Heller and Wilson settled on adding a pitch to a practice area at the 77-acre Commissioners Park on the city's far southwest side.

"One of our concerns was that by placing this type of facility that we did not displace any of the other game fields we have right now — soccer, lacrosse, football — because of the demand being placed on those fields," Wilson said.

A survey of 870 residents by the district's master-plan consultant indicated just 1 percent said cricket fields were most important to them, behind skate parks (2 percent) and trapshooting facilities (4 percent). While walking and biking trails (52 percent), neighborhood parks (40 percent), and playgrounds (25 percent) topped the survey.

But the district already boasts two skating facilities — in Centennial and Frontier parks — with a third on the way, according to district officials, and one shooting range, at Sportsman's Park. Aurora, Bolingbrook and Woodridge are among neighboring communities that already feature cricket grounds. And the sport is particularly popular with households of Asian descent, which account for about 13,000 (9 percent) of Naperville residents, Vaidya said.

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The park board offered the group no comments Aug. 11 beyond thanking them for speaking; the park board did not vote on the cricket ground installation, either. But the \$14,250 cost to install the 10-foot-by-75-foot pitch is well within Heller's spending authority as executive director.

Heller mentioned during an October interview with The Sun that adding the cricket ground was an enhancement she'd like to see happen. The district already offers cricket instruction indoors, Wilson said. By spring, classes could be offered at Commissioners Park as well.

The field will be available for pickup games this winter, but the district will begin scheduling league games there in April, as it does for other organized sports, Wilson said. Another benefit of building the pitch in Commissioners Park are the lights the district hopes to add there next year, he said.

Meanwhile, members of the association were excited to play their favorite sport in their hometown.

"This will be yet another opportunity for people in Naperville to make new friends and increase family time together," Shirish Joshi said. "Most importantly though, it will be another avenue for children and adults to channel their energies into a health-enhancing activity."

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The skinny on cricket

The Naperville Park District's first cricket pitch could be ready for play in a matter of weeks.

Neighborhood pickup games are OK, district officials said, but league teams should call the district at (630) 848-5000 to schedule play.

The district also plans to host cricket instruction at the pitch.

Where it is: Commissioners Park, at 3704 111th St.

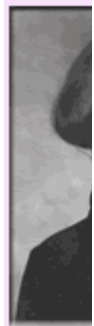
Pitch dimensions: 10 feet wide by 75 feet long.

Playing surface: Concrete, topped by AstroTurf.

About cricket: The game is played by two teams of 11 players each. The objective is to score more runs than the opposing team. A match is divided into innings, during which one team bats and the other bowls and fields. Matches can last as long as one or two innings and six or more hours.

Visit www.chicagocricket.com .

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