

A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME

A NEW CRICKET FIELD DEBUTS IN QUEENS.

BY KYLE STACK



ABOVE

The landscape architects used water-loving plants and bioretention to improve drainage, which had been poor (inset) for the new cricket field in New York City's Baisley Pond Park.

IMAGE CREDITS

Courtesy Nancy Owens Studio

New York City is famous for its love of baseball, so it's logical that cricket, a sport considered to be a cousin of the old ball game, is surging in popularity among the boroughs. Cricket has been embraced across the city, especially in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Sixteen facilities for cricket exist in New York City's public parks; the newest field is in the 110-acre Baisley Pond Park in southeastern Queens.

Opened in early May, the park's \$4.4 million, 17-acre facelift includes a new cricket field, relocated paths, renovated bathroom facilities, and an updated stormwater management system, all of which were designed by the New York City-based landscape architecture firm Nancy Owens Studio LLC.

Queens Parks Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski explains that members from the local Melbourne Cricket League played their games at the southern portion of Baisley for several years with the Parks Department's approval, and league members lobbied the department to upgrade the field. "We were trying to find these large, open spots of land where there were no other permitted athletics going on," Lewandowski says of her department's quest to find potential cricket fields.

The local demand to play the sport has erupted. The web site *newyorkcricket.com* lists nine active city cricket leagues, including one for city police officers. A spring high school league was introduced in 2010 by New York City's Public Schools Athletic League, and there are now 418 active players on 26 teams in five divisions. "I'm certain this will lead, once they graduate high school, to them playing in the city's adult leagues," Lewandowski says.

Part of the appeal for adults is a field with proper maintenance, which wasn't the case at Baisley. Anne Berman, ASLA, a senior landscape architect at Nancy Owens Studio, says drainage problems throughout the grass areas and dirt pathways made her suspicious that parts of the park were subsiding. The abundance of phragmites and lilies growing along the edges of Baisley's 30-acre lake provided evidence of highly alkaline hydric soils and stagnant water conditions: Surface and stormwater runoff comprised almost all discharge into the lake.

To solve this problem, the designers used a mound created for the cricket field as an opportunity to add bioretention areas. Sizable bioswales were built near the water's edge, which Berman says had to be managed within the constraints of cricket's field dimensions. "We wanted to give [cricket players] as large a field as possible," she says.

More than a dozen water-loving plants, including tussock sedge (*Carex stricta*) and compact inkberry hollies (*Ilex glabra* 'Compacta'), were planted to promote water absorption. Red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), among other trees, were installed to soften the views of an industrial area that surrounds the park.

Berman says field drainage has performed very well. She's also encouraged by the enthusiasm of the cricket players throughout the park's reconstruction process. "I've been surprised to see how committed these organizations are to what they do," Berman says, "and to fostering a love of cricket in the next generation." ●