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Sports Back on USVI Fields Since 2020 Shutdown, With Opportunities Being Weighed to Increase Chances of Youth Athletes' Pro Potential

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National Softball Team member Bianca Sibily By. **SOFTBALL NETWORK/FACEBOOK**

One year since the territory was in the quarantine phase and non-essential activities were brought to a halt, baseball and softball practice restarted two weeks ago and games are scheduled to resume at fields managed by the Department of Sports Parks and Recreation. Additionally, two Virgin Islanders who live in Miami returned to St. Croix last week to discuss sports training opportunities with some of the territory's leaders and officials in the sports arena.

The Department of Education will be putting on the following tournaments on St. Croix:

- April 15-18: Girls JV/ Varsity softball tournament
- April 22-25: JV/ Varsity baseball tournament

St. Thomas-St. John district players will be coming over, and all players from both districts will stay in hotels. They will be restricted to their hotel rooms and ball field only. They will not be allowed to interact with the greater community beyond those two locations to reduce the risk of contracting Covid. This should provide a level of comfort to parents, shared Assistant Commissioner of Sports Parks and Recreation Renee Hansen.

Whether or not spectators will be allowed to attend the games and what those constraints will be is still in the discussion phase. Ms. Hansen explained that the final say will come from the Department of Health after D.O.E. makes their proposals. She plans to join the conversation between D.O.E. and D.O.H.

It is yet to see what allowances will be made for other upcoming sporting events. The [FIFA World Cup games](#) a week ago on St. Croix did not allow spectators unless they were Covid-19 vaccinated and could provide proof of such, a mandate given by the Department of Health, relayed general secretary of the USVI Soccer Association Lishati-Shumba Bailey.

Leadoff Athletics president Akeem Maynard and mindset development coach Austin Jackson met with Ms. Hansen and district administrator Jamilah Henry of the Department of Sports Parks and Recreation, Senators Janelle Sarauw and Frankie Johnson, a representative from Senator Samuel Carrion's office as well as little league coaches in the territory with the intention of helping young athletes from junior high to high school rise to a competitive level of playing comparative to players on the mainland.

Raised on St. Croix, Mr. Maynard is a private trainer for children from age 6 to college players and professional athletes alike. For the past three years, he has mentored players from St. Croix and takes them under his wing as if they were his own children by taking them to school and training them.

"We're looking to introduce the Virgin Islands Leadoff Athletics program to develop these young athletes, get them ready for college and professional sports, as well as get them ready for life beyond that," shared mindset development coach at Leadoff Athletics Austin Jackson, also from St. Croix. The goal is to utilize the training platform that Mr. Maynard implements in Miami and expose young players in the territory to college scouts and professional players and scouts from the mainland. "Hopefully St. Croix is the catalyst and then we take it to the rest of the Virgin Islands," he added.

Leadoff Athletics wants to bring back an All-Star team coached by coaches from the United States and implement travel ball teams so the best of the best can have the opportunities to meet several college scouts and professional players and scouts from the mainland.

In response to the conversation, "They presented their idea on where they want to see the Virgin Islands go. It is very much needed," said Ms. Hansen. She expressed her hope for the territory to have a sports academy encompassing all sports beyond baseball and softball. She stressed the need for more funding sources.

Leadoff Athletics aims to provide sustainable opportunities for the territory that influences generations to come in a positive way. "That's the reason why the program was started and

implemented in the first place,” Mr. Jackson said. “We figured that sports—whether it be baseball, basketball, martial arts, whatever it is—can be an outlet that they can get themselves involved in and keep them off of the streets and away from the bad circle.” He further shared how sports may be that GPS to an end goal destination of a better life.

Januelle Morales, a 15-year-old junior varsity player and second baseman on coach Roderick Moorehead’s St. Croix team, shared prior to practice at the David C. Canegata Ballpark that he hopes his children like sports and their children after. Januelle wants to continue the legacy that his father Jose Morales passed on to him, the love of sports.

Januelle’s passionate advice to young people was this: “Don’t give up on your dreams, and don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do it.” He hopes to play for the Yankees.

“If you like the sport, don’t give up. Keep trying your best and one day you will be the best,” were the encouraging sentiments of short stop player on Mr. Moorhead’s team Tyrone Lake III. He is a 14-year-old all-around player frequently positioned at short stop who hopes to play for the L.A. Dodgers. He shared that he looks up to Bryce Harper of the Philadelphia Phillies “because he’s a good hitter, good outfielder and does his best on the field no matter what.”

Safety During the Pandemic

As shared by Sports Parks and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White, the department ordered and is awaiting several supplies to lower the spread of the novel coronavirus. Temperature scanners with the capabilities to electronically log information about persons should be installed at facilities within the next three weeks. Until then, temperature scans are taken with hand-held scanners and names are logged manually for contact tracing purposes.

The department published a comprehensive 7-page Covid-19 guideline document for everyone to follow at their facilities. Masks must be worn at all times and social distancing guidelines must be adhered to. Be sure to contact DSPR before going to and utilizing the fields to allow the department to control scheduling for access at this time.