

Prospect Meadows will feature top talent

Written by Jim Ecker

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Imagine baseball teams filled with Division I college prospects and future Major League draft picks coming to Linn County for premier tournaments and events.

Imagine somebody like Manny Machado, who just agreed to a \$300 million contract with the San Diego Padres, coming to town as a budding high school player with enormous talent.

Steve James, the Assistant General Manager at Prospect Meadows, does not have to imagine players like that. He witnessed it first-hand during his years at Perfect Game USA, and he'll be seeing the same thing now with Perfect Game staging a string of its top events at Prospect Meadows this year.

Perfect Game plans to hold up to 16 events at Prospect Meadows in 2019 as the primary tenant at the new facility that's being built just north of Marion at the juncture of Highway 13 and County Home Road.

The grand opening is planned for this spring. The first tournament will be the Midwest Memorial Day Classic from May 24-27 and the schedule of events will run through October.

The Memorial Day Classic is for 12U, 13U and 14U age groups, but there will be plenty of high school-level events as the calendar moves along. Perfect Game USA is considered the top amateur baseball scouting service in the country with its events all over the United States.

Perfect Game USA began in Cedar Rapids in the 1990's and has grown into one of the biggest success stories in amateur baseball in the nation. Now the company will be bringing many of the best players and teams to Iowa on a regular basis.

"Obviously what they bring in are the best club teams in the country that have the best players,"

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said James, who left Perfect Game to join Prospect Meadows last fall. "What fans are going to see is the future of baseball."

James saw Bryce Harper, Javy Baez, Francisco Lindor, Machado and many other Major League stars play in Perfect Game events as youngsters.

"That's the type of thing you'll see here," he said. "Those are the type of players that are going to come through this facility."

Perfect Game president Jerry Ford has been a big supporter of Prospect Meadows since the idea for the facility was first proposed. Now his company will help fill those fields on a regular basis.

"It's a big part of our program," said Jack Roeder, the General Manager at Prospect Meadows. "If it weren't for Perfect Game, we wouldn't be building eight large baseball fields."

Perfect Game has a 15-year contract with Prospect Meadows to bring 1,000 teams to the facility every year, starting in 2020 when Prospect Meadows is fully operational for an entire season.

"That's a major, major investment in Prospect Meadows," said Roeder. "Obviously there will be many other events here. But without question, they're the biggest piece."

Game Day USA, a major youth sports organization in Naperville, Ill., will be holding two tournaments at Prospect Meadows this year and plans to stage even more events here in 2020 and 2021.

In addition to Perfect Game and Game Day, Roeder and his staff have been working diligently with local baseball leagues and organizations to hold games on weekday nights at Prospect Meadows. There also are plans for a Junior College showcase, college baseball games and

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softball games.

The eight regulation baseball fields that will open this year are considered Phase 1 of the new facility. Phase II, with eight additional fields, is scheduled to open in 2023.

A Miracle Field for children with disabilities also will be opening this year. Prospect Meadows also will be hosting an expansion of the League of Dreams program for young boys and girls.

For more information about Prospect Meadows, including the Rotary Donor Wall, visit ProspectMeadows.com.