

Infinity Construction was proud to have worked with RWL Architects and OSports as General Contractor on the Avon Baseball Stadium project. CONGRATULATIONS to the City of Avon and The Lake Erie Crushers on their new home!



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Developing a Winner

Lake Erie Crushers, City of Avon step up to the plate with new Frontier League ballpark

By Mark Watt | Photos by Jim Maguire

On June 2, the Lake Erie Crushers jogged through the gates of their new ballpark in Avon to a welcoming crowd on opening day. An expansion team in the Frontier League, an independent, Midwest-based baseball league with a level of play comparable to Class A Minor League ball, the Crushers are bringing professional baseball to Lorain County for the first time. In return, the team gains access to a newly built, \$12 million baseball park with “all the amenities of a professional ballpark, just on a smaller scale,” according to Ron Landig, president of RWL Architects, Inc., which designed the field with assistance from OSports, a division of Osborn Engineering that specializes in sports facility planning.

“The City of Avon invested in a well designed, well built facility,” says Christopher Wynn, director of design at OSports. “It’s a substantial ballpark, but it’s also extremely intimate, which is rare in professional sports, so that you can really be right on top of the action.”

Built with Infinity Construction acting as general contractor, All Pro Freight Stadium is a state-of-the-art facility with accommodations for 5,000 visitors, including loges, box seats and even lawn seating, as well as a pair of concession stands, a party deck and a team shop. Utilizing artificial turf, the baseball field is engineered to provide

efficient drainage and low maintenance costs, while providing a comfortable playing surface.

“We’re very excited about the new ballpark,” says Paul Siegwarth, assistant general manager, operations with the Lake Erie Crushers (who previously held a similar position with Cleveland Indians Single A affiliate Lake County Captains). “It’s an impressive achievement. When we brought the ballplayers onto the field for the first time, it was like seeing kids at Christmas. Their eyes get wide and ‘wow’ is the first word that comes out of their mouths. It’s the same for the fans too.”

Teaming up

Jim Smith, mayor of Avon, says that the new stadium is a dramatic first step in a concerted effort to transform the underdeveloped interchange of Rt. 90 and Rt. 611 from a truckstop into a major economic driver for the City of Avon and surrounding areas. While Smith had originally looked at the possibility of attracting medical buildings or retail to develop near the interchange, six years ago he crossed paths with Matt Perry, a consultant with National Sports Services. Perry connected Smith with Steven Edelson, managing director at Chicago-based International Facilities Group, who was interested in becoming a partner in



CATCHING THE ENERGY The City of Avon's new All Pro Freight Stadium is designed to provide fans with a level of intimacy that allows them to be "right on top of the action," according to Christopher Wynn, director of design at OSports.

the ownership group of a new Frontier League team – what eventually would become the Lake Erie Crushers.

"It was a good fit, for them and for us. The idea from our point of view was to increase the value of the property around here and that has already happened," Smith says, noting that his vision for the area expands beyond the new stadium. A new YMCA is being built next door along a brand new access road. He hopes to add an indoor soccer

or hockey facility in the future. "We also get a boost in economic activity here and with the ballpark, which the city owns and the team maintains, we have a nice facility to be used not just for baseball games, but also for concerts, car shows and other events. I've thought this thing out long and hard. We'll put a million people at the site a year."

To get the project rolling, Smith brought aboard RWL Architects, Inc. in early 2008 to serve as lead archi-

tect for the new ballpark. RWL had worked with the city on projects over the previous several years on projects like Avon's fire station, police station, post office, service garage and senior citizen's center. Although the firm had no direct experience with sports facility design, architect Bill Belloma had worked with Osborn Engineering early in his career and used that relationship to bring aboard Osborn's sports facility division, OSports.





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DAY AT THE DIAMOND At the Lake Erie Crushers' June 2 home opener, the team christened the new ballpark with a 5-2 win over the Windy City ThunderBolts, of Crestwood, Illinois.

A public bid took place in April and Infinity Construction was awarded as general contractor for the complete project, including all mechanical, electrical and plumbing work. Working quickly, the design team provided completed drawings within three months, in time for Infinity to break ground last July – allowing just 10 months to construct the entire baseball stadium.

Especially because of the abbreviated timeline for the project and the complexity of operating on a busy worksite (the access road and infrastructure were being installed concurrently, and construction of the nearby YMCA eventually began as well), Charles Polinko served a major role as construction administrator for the City of Avon, acting as the onsite eyes and ears for the mayor.

“If Infinity came to us with a question, we would work to make a decision that made sense economically while maintaining the project schedule,” Polinko says. “Typically, you really don’t have infrastructure work going on – utilities & roads – while buildings are going up. With the speed that this project came about, we started site work about two months prior to construction. It was interesting for sure, stressful at times.”

Mark Vega, project manager with Infinity Construction, notes there were two major challenges of the project from a construction point of view. The first was the schedule.

“From day one, I was questioning how we could get a fully functioning stadium including concessions, team shop and offices, built by opening day.” Vega says. “I was a little nervous about that. I didn’t have any doubts about us completing the construction – giving the team enough time to move into the ballpark was my biggest concern. Our contract was originally to complete construction on June 1, just one day before opening day. I knew that wouldn’t work so with the help of [Infinity Superintendent] Mark Busta and [Infinity Project Engineer] Vince Notarberardino, we developed a schedule to complete the construction of the ballpark 10 days earlier than what was in our contract.”

The second challenge was keeping the schedule on track through a tough winter. The cold weather came earlier than usual last November, Vega says, and that interfered with plans for masonry work, which must be performed at above 45 degrees. To keep the project

Sporting Support

Cleveland firm builds on history of sports facilities design

OSports – Osborn Sports + Recreation Architecture (formerly Osborn Architects and Engineers) has been designing sports facilities since 1909, when the firm created League Park in Cleveland.

Since that time, the firm has contributed to the country’s “Sports Skyline” by designing the Polo Grounds (New York, New York), Yankee Stadium (New York, New York), Griffith Stadium (Washington, D.C.), Fenway Park (Boston, Massachusetts), Sportsman’s Park (St. Louis, Missouri), and old Comiskey Park (Chicago, Illinois). In the years that followed, the company was also involved in the expansion of Milwaukee County Stadium (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), the addition of an upper deck and “Tiger Tower” at Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, Louisiana) and the expansion of Lambeau Field (Green Bay, Wisconsin), among other facilities.

OSports continues its tradition of creating and reviving athletic fields with its recent work on Wrigley Field (Chicago, Illinois), Jacobs/Progressive Field (“Heritage Park”), the design of All Pro Freight Stadium in Avon and, currently, with work on PNC Park (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania).

In addition, OSports was the architect of record on the 2002 award-winning project to renovate and expand the historic “Horseshoe” at The Ohio State University. The field was lowered to below the water table and a slurry wall designed, thus increasing the stadium’s capacity to 105,000. Major structural changes were made to add new player and band facilities, and suites were added to the existing structure. A new structure was built around the existing stadium to further expand the seat deck.

OSports works as a team with its partner firm, Osborn Engineering, for all major engineering disciplines. Osborn Engineering provides civil, structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection and energy optimization/commissioning.

According to Chris Wynn, director of design at OSports, having all major disciplines in-house makes coordination between groups possible and minimizes the errors that can creep in when a project moves between engineering firms.



COVERING THE BASES The playing field utilizes an artificial grass product called TigerTurf, composed of two-and-a-half-inch blades of synthetic grass and about an inch-and-a-half of loose rubber pellets that are shuffled into the surface. By using the synthetic surface, maintenance costs are dramatically reduced: watering and mowing are no longer necessary.

moving, the entire perimeter of the ballpark was enclosed within a cocoon of tarps and scaffolding, warmed by temporary heaters.

“Luckily we were rewarded with nice weather in March and April,” Vega says. “Our field work – putting in field turf and the under-drain system and finishing up concrete and landscaping – was able to move ahead as the original planned schedule showed.”

Belloma, of RWL Architects, credits Infinity for keeping the project moving forward despite obstacles.

“If it wasn’t for Infinity, I don’t think this project could have happened,” he says. “They pushed and pushed, yet they were also patient enough to wait for design adjustments when issues arose.” According to Mark Busta, “the team approach between Infinity, RWL and the City of Avon to make on-site decisions was critical to the success of the project.”

Take me out to the ballpark

“A major premise of the Frontier League is to get the fans close to the team so that

you feel like you’re a part of the action,” Vega says. “This ballpark was built with that concept in mind, and you can feel it from the moment you first walk in.”

Visitors approach through a set of iron gates and up a set of steps at the bricked entrance, which opens to a wide concourse overlooking the field. Along the concourse are two sets of restrooms, a team shop with an adjoining office space, and two concessions stands served by kitchens with elevator access to transport food to second-story suites.

“The team was big on having full-service concessions and catering for groups, which is a major leap from other Frontier League parks,” says Wynn, of OSports. “There’s a full service commissary for large groups, such as for big civic events or concerts. They’re ready for everything.”

Executive offices for management are situated on the second level. Nearby is a press box with controls for the scoreboard, a radar gun and technology accommodations for radio and television.

Adjacent to the main structure is a 8,000-square-foot clubhouse, which houses locker rooms, bathrooms, show-

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SWINGING FOR THE FENCES The new ballpark is the first step towards dramatic development at the Rt. 90/Rt. 611 Interchange, according to Jim Smith, mayor of the City of Avon. A YMCA is currently under construction nearby. Looking forward, Smith imagines hotels, restaurants and more.

ers and managers' offices for the home and visiting teams, plus a home team lounge area, a trainer's room, two changing rooms for umpires, a laundry room and garage. Plans call for using a storage area within the clubhouse as an indoor batting cage, Wynn says.

Fan seating at the ballpark is provided with a combination of box seats, picnic and patio areas, a raised party deck on the roof of the clubhouse and lawn seating on a grassy hill beyond the left field fence. In addition are 11 private suites, four of which are outfitted with walls that can be removed to provide flexible space for parties of various sizes.

For those who want to get up from their seats and move around, a sidewalk

wraps from the concourse and around the entire playing field. A kids' playground area will be situated beyond the right-field wall.

The 330,000-square-foot field itself utilizes an artificial grass product called TigerTurf. According to Siegwarth, of the Lake Erie Crushers, the field is composed of about 420,000 pounds of rubber, including two-and-a-half-inch blades of synthetic grass and about an inch-and-a-half of loose rubber pellets that are shuffled into the surface. The turf is used on the entire field including the infield base paths.

"It's not a traditional infield material but you can slide on it," Siegwarth says. "Instead of getting dirt marks on their clothes when they slide –

like they would on traditional infields – the players will have little rubber pellets embedded into the fabric of their clothing until they wash their clothes. In my 17 years of baseball, it's new to me. It will be a learning process on our side, but the costs of maintenance and upkeep are being drastically reduced."

Maintenance cost savings and durability were the main drivers for the turf selection, according to Ryan Gates, general manager of the team.

"There will be 51 home games each season, but our goal is to host a total of 120 events at the ballpark over the course of the year, including baseball games, concerts, car shows, events for Halloween and Easter, Oktoberfests, you name it," Gates says.

James Smith, mayor of Avon, concurs that he hopes to see the field get as much use as possible: "If we need to replace the turf in 10 years because we wore it out, than good – that means it's being used and that's our goal."

The final driver for the product selection is the efficient drainage it provides.

"It's to our understanding that the turf can drain about five inches of water an hour," Siegwarth says, noting that he learned firsthand the importance of quality drainage from an incident he witnessed earlier in his career: "At a park where I used to work, we actually ended up renting a helicopter to come in and hover over

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the infield to dry the surface because of trouble getting tarps on the field during a rainstorm. We won't have to worry about that here."

As Vega explains, the playing field is engineered to drain water from the field quickly.

"It's perfectly level, unlike a grass field, and so water drains down instead of running off like it would on natural grass," he says. "The dirt underneath is graded and cut to specific contours, and then drain pipes are laid directly on top of that dirt. Then there are 10 inches of stone dumped on top of those drainpipes, so the water goes through the turf, through the stones, into the drainpipes and then is filtered down and out of the stadium."

Throughout the ballpark, future expansion was kept in mind. The mechanical and electrical systems are designed to accommodate a possible future addition along the southwestern edge of the stadium. Camera bays were worked into the design throughout the park and are equipped with conduits and technology hook-ups required for video broadcasting, if ever needed. A restroom and concessions area could be built near

the scoreboard in center field as well, according to Wynn.

"Right now, the team has a quality ballpark that is among the best in the Frontier League, and it will evolve over the years," Wynn says. "Our firm has done a lot of work with facilities for the big leagues and we tried to bring some ideas from those experiences and pass them along here. Specifically, we have pressed the idea of allowing the fan experience to grow gradually, by trying to bring a new feature, a new attraction to the ballpark each year."

Play ball

Now that All Pro Freight Stadium is open and the Crushers' season has begun, Mayor Jim Smith is content to see the realization of his vision.

"This is a great project for Lorain County and the City of Avon," Smith says. Development at the interchange has started with the ballpark but will continue for years: community baseball fields will be built on a swatch of land just west of the property, the YMCA should be completed later this year and Smith envisions hotels, restaurants and other establishments sprouting

up nearby to provide for an influx of visitors. "People are excited and the benefits of developing here are already far exceeding my expectations. It all starts with this ballpark and thankfully Infinity got the bid because they know what they're doing. I can't say enough about the construction team, the architecture team and the group that's taking ownership of the team."

Siegwarth, of the Lake Erie Crushers, agrees with Smith's assessment of Infinity's work on the project. "That fact that they handed over the park a week before they were contractually obligated to – that was huge and saying, 'thanks' isn't enough," he says. "We were happy with all of the subcontractors out here who all took pride in this project."


As Landig says, the entire project recalls the idea from the classic baseball film *Field of Dreams* that "if you build it, they will come."

"That's happening here," he says. "It really is. And it's really something special when the ballpark is all lit up at night for everyone to see."

"This has been a once-in-a-lifetime project, and we're all proud to be part of it," adds Wynn. **P**

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