

Security Management of Collegiate Sport Venues

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High profile sporting events in the United States have been identified by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as potential terrorist targets (Lipton, 2005). University sport venues are no exception to this terrorist threat. In October, 2005, an Oklahoma University student killed himself by prematurely detonating a bomb strapped to his body outside an 84,000 packed stadium (Hagmann, 2005). Besides terrorism, other potential threats include drug/alcohol usage, fan violence, patron injuries, weather concerns, power failure, and sabotage (Fried, 2005). Assessing risk, reducing vulnerabilities, and increasing the level of preparedness will help minimize potential threats to university sport venues nationwide.

The purpose of this study was to establish standards for effective security management of university sport venues. Identifying standards will assist university sport security management teams in their quest to provide a safe environment for sport spectators, and help provide consistency in security practices among sport venues nationwide.

Research Questions

1. What standards are needed for effective security management of university sport venues?
2. What is the perceived level of importance for the security standards?

Hypothesis

1. Significant differences will exist in perceptions of importance for developed standards between athletic facility managers, local sheriffs, campus police chiefs, and local county emergency management director's.

The researcher developed standards through a series of interviews and a three-round Delphi study. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for both the interviews and Delphi panel. Four sport security personnel participated in the interview process and an initial set of standards were developed and used for the Delphi study. The 28 member Delphi panel included the athletic facility manager, campus police chief, local sheriff, and local emergency management director responsible for game day security operations at seven state-supported universities in Mississippi. Importance ratings for developed standards were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale during Round 2 and 3. An ANOVA was conducted after Delphi round 3 to test for significant differences in perception of importance between athletic facility managers, local sheriffs, campus police chiefs, and local county emergency management directors.

The initial interview panel and Delphi panel produced 134 standards in eleven categories: Perimeter Control, Access Control, Credentialing, Physical Protection Systems, Risk Management, Emergency Management, Recovery Procedures, Communications, Security Personnel, Training, Modeling, and Simulation, and WMD - Toxic Materials Protection. No significant differences existed in perception of importance for each standard between athletic facility managers, local sheriffs, campus police chiefs, and local county emergency management directors. Twenty-two participants successfully completed all three rounds of the Delphi study (78.6%).

The outcome of this study has been a consensus of best security practices by key personnel responsible for security operations at university sports events in the state of Mississippi. University sport security personnel may utilize these standards to prioritize security measures according to importance, especially those organizations with limited funding and imminent need to harden their facility. Standards in the Credentialing, Emergency Management, Risk Management, Communication, and Training, Modeling, and Simulation categories were assigned some of the highest mean importance scores.

It is extremely critical for security staff to work as a team in the coordination of security operations during university sports events and to have in place effective communication systems. Athletic department staff, hired security staff, and all other game day staff (ushers, vendors, ticket takers, etc.) must be properly trained and aware of security policies and practices. Emergency response and evacuation plans must be developed and updated on a continuous basis. Disaster scenarios/exercises need to be executed at least once before the sport season begins, involving all emergency response services ensuring multi-agency collaboration.

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Future research may focus on determining implications of new security standards on sport consumers, sport marketers, sport financial officers, and the potential legality issues for intercollegiate athletic departments and universities.

References

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