Danger Lurks! Does Risk Management Work? Effectiveness of Risk Management Strategies at University Athletic Venues

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September 11, 2001 (“9/11”) was a terrifying day for Americans as the United States was confronted with a series of terrorist attacks. Terrorism, other security threats and natural disasters are concerns for facility managers of athletic venues (Hall, Marciani, Cooper, & Rolen, 2007a, 2007b; McCann, 2006) and “failure to maintain reasonable security controls can now create liability under civil and possibly criminal law” (Whitley, Koenig & Roberts, 2007, p. 273). Facility managers have a duty to protect others from harm or they, and the institutions they work for, risk liability (Piccarello, 2005; Whitley et al., 2007), a costly legal defense, and/or damage to their organization’s public image (Inge, Jr., 2012). Thus, risk management measures should be implemented to minimize such exposure, but which risk management strategies are effective?

To reduce liability, a facility manager must consider how to respond to acts of terrorism, security threats and natural disasters. 18 U.S.C. § 2331(113b) defines domestic terrorism as activities that “involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d., para. 3. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2006) views sports venues as key assets for which security must be addressed. Sports facilities may face direct or indirect attacks from terrorists (Whitley et al., 2007) because the media often covers sporting events (Miller, Veltri & Gillentine, 2008), and for political reasons attacks on sports venues will achieve terrorists desired public recognition (Baker, Connaughton, Zhang, & Spengler, 2007).

The threat of terrorism to sports stadiums is legitimate because substantial casualties can occur with a large congregation of people (Whitley et al., 2007) in a condensed space. For instance, terrorists executed athletes at the 1972 Munich Games (Miller et al., 2008) and a CNN (1996) news report detailed another terror attack at the 1996 Atlanta Games when a bombing killed one person and injured over one hundred people (as cited in Hall, Marciani, Cooper, & Rolen, 2007a). These examples show that the threat of terrorism to athletic facilities is a legitimate concern. Yet with the passage of time since 9/11 and the possible feeling of remoteness from the more recent attacks upon other athletic venues, there is concern that facility managers may be complacent or struggling to get approval from cost-conscious superiors for extra staffing and security equipment (Rogers, 2010).

However, not all man-made threats are acts of terrorism. Security issues may occur in the form of spectator violence or challenges with crowd control. Sports venues are difficult to secure because large amounts of people congregate at facility entrances and exits (Miller et al., 2008) and securing such events can be costly and require extra personnel to manage. Big crowds are slower to react and it is difficult to convey important communication to large groups. Hundreds of deaths at sporting events have been attributed to chaotic crowds crushing fellow spectators (Sports Disasters, 2005). “The world has witnessed many deaths and injuries because of poor facility managing, improper signage, poor facility designing and non-effective alcohol policies” (Doukas, 2006, para. 29). Plus spectators bringing in weapons could cause bodily harm (Hoch, 2008). The Los Angeles Dodgers, for instance, have gotten bad press for instances of their fans violently attacking opposing team fans in 2003 and in 2011 (Los Angeles Times, 2011). In addition, athletic facility managers might need to protect employees and spectators from harm caused by natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes and wildfires (McCann, 2006). Fortunately the collapse of the stadium roof in 2010 happened prior to the Giants-Vikings game and was able to be relocated (Bleacher Report, 2010), but natural disasters are relatively unpredictable and potentially damaging to an athletic facility (McCann, 2006).

Ultimately, athletic venues should evaluate which risk management strategies may help avoid or reduce liability.
Athletic facility managers should follow industry guidelines for risk management strategies or they may breach their legal duty of care to patrons, employees and athletes ("Symposium: Panel I: Legal Issues in Sports Security," 2003). With the potential for large-scale disaster, there is a question of which security measures are effective to reduce risk. Minimal research has examined which risk management strategies are effective at reducing risk and which strategies should be used in athletic facilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the risk management strategies utilized in the athletic facilities of NCAA Division I schools. Using Spengler et al.’s (2009) Risk Management Process model as a theoretical guide, the following research questions were posed: (1) which risk management strategies are currently utilized, (2) how are these strategies selected/chosen, and (3) how effective are those strategies to avoid or to reduce risk?

Expert and snowball sampling were used to conduct a pilot study to survey interview Facilities and Operations Managers at Southern Northern University (pseudonym) in the eastern region of the United States using Qualtrics to collect responses. Following the pilot study, Facilities and Operation Managers of all remaining NCAA Division I schools listed in the directory published by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) were contacted by email and asked if they would participate in a subsequent study using the same survey interview. The survey interview instrument used for this study is a modified version of the “Game Day Security Operations Checklist” created by Pantera, et al. (2003). The survey interview questions cover four areas that include individual and institutional demographics, risk management overview, and risk management strategies. For instance, under the risk management strategies section, participants are asked to identify whether they use bomb-sniffing dogs to inspect an athletic facility prior to a game. If yes, there are seven probe questions, and if no, there is one probe question.

Collected data is exported into Nvivo 10 and SPSS to help streamline data organization. SPSS is being used for the analyses of descriptive statistics for the demographic questions, whereas, NVivo10 is being used to analyze questions concerning risk management overview and strategy. Data analysis, which is still ongoing, follows a method similar to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) approach to grounded theory. Transcripts from each participant will be read multiple times by raters/researchers. Common words, phrases, and sentences communicated by participants will be assembled into collective identifiable themes or first-level codes. Following this, the entire transcripts will be re-read and if no new first-level codes are created, the remaining codes will then be consolidated into first-order categories using axial coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After fitting all first-level codes into first-order categories, the raters/researchers will read through the transcripts again to further consolidate similar first-order categories together to generate more comprehensive conceptual core categories.

The results of this study will be shared at the conference. Although major theoretical and practical implications regarding this study will be described in further detail during the presentation, the findings of the study should contribute to the sport management literature and to the knowledge of which risk management strategies are being utilized, why they are utilized and which strategies might be most effective for managers of athletic facilities to utilize in order to avoid or reduce risk and legal liability.