

Affecting Penn State Fan Behavior

Operations and Logistics
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INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the Presidential Leadership Academy class and among members of the Penn State Athletic Department, fan behavior at Penn State needs improvement. There are the obvious cases of negative fan behavior, like the “urine bombs” thrown at the 2005 Ohio State game as well as the riots after the Ohio State game in 2008. The infamous encounter between Penn State fans and Michigan fans involving racial slurs will also not soon be forgotten. It is because of events like these that the Presidential Leadership Academy is proposing preventative measures be taken by the University. The Operations and Logistics group researched various regulations and policies that could be improved or added to the existing system at Beaver Stadium. Our focus areas include the “Show and Blow” program and ticket revocation policy, an alternative breathalyzer system, an expansion of the existing “text-a-tip” program, and changes to usher training. Through these advances, we are confident that a more positive fan environment will result.

“SHOW AND BLOW”

Program Implementation - Wisconsin Model

The University’s athletic department should establish a program that targets and combats poor fan behavior with two main focuses. The first would be a ticket revocation policy that permits the University to revoke season tickets and related privileges if ticket holders are involved in serious alcohol-related and/or fan behavior infractions. In the second, the University would institute a “show and blow” program for underage students who are ejected from a football game due to the overconsumption of alcohol and the resulting behavior. Those students would need to register a BAC of .00 to enter a subsequent game (“University of Wisconsin-Madison Alcohol Issues”).

The implementation of these initiatives presents the potential for some challenges. Success for these programs is based on how such challenges are addressed and resolved. There are a few legal considerations for using breathalyzers that need to be addressed. It is unclear how the University may require breathalyzers for students, if they can do so at all. The Operations and Logistics group was unsure if there are laws surrounding the use of breathalyzers by non-police administration. Additionally, there are procedural and administrative costs associated with high volume of breathalyzers, and over the course of the season a large number of tests will likely be needed. This may present a significant increase in costs to the Athletic Department. Potentially, a slowing down of entry into the stadium may result from the number of spectators being breathalyzed. Carrying out this program in the appropriate amount of space and time might make it more difficult for other patrons to enter the gates and further clutter the entrances. Finally, the proposed BAC threshold for reentry is notably low. While a BAC of .00 has been used in another program, it may be too strict of a threshold for practical use at Beaver Stadium.

Though the challenges seem overwhelming, we do believe that a successful implementation of the “show and blow” program will have significant positive results both immediately and long-term. It will help deter problematic fan behavior since those individuals who regularly exhibit poor behavior (especially when alcohol is involved) will face appropriate consequences or change their behavior. The initiative will also set a clearer standard for acceptable behavior. By taking a tougher stance on what is considered unacceptable, the University and the Athletic Department will strongly communicate what is appropriate behavior for fans within the stadium. In the long run, it will encourage individuals to drink less and/or behave more reasonably even while intoxicated. They will be aware of the reality that they

could be ejected from the stadium or have their tickets and/or privileges revoked. Attendees will be significantly more inclined to be conscious of their actions if they are intoxicated. For some people, the program may be enough to discourage drinking and intoxication on game day altogether.

This program, along with a large number of like initiatives, was able to be successfully implemented at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Susan Crowley, Director of the PACE project may be contacted directly for further information at (608) 262-9007 or sjcrowley@uhs.wisc.edu.

Alternate “show and blow” strategy:

Another potentially feasible breathalyzer-based system, focused on preempting problematic drunkenness at football games, could be used in the place of the University of Wisconsin's model. While Wisconsin's program ensures the sobriety of fans who have already been disciplined for alcohol-related offenses, another version of this program could be used to breathalyze obviously intoxicated students who attempt to enter the stadium.

Currently, police at Beaver Stadium's entrance already work to confront visibly intoxicated students and this version of the “show and blow” initiative would supplement those efforts. In practice, the program would entail adding breathalyzers to some of the student entrances. As students enter the premises on game day, selected students will be asked to perform the breathalyzer test or leave the game. Either members of the police force or University representatives will administer the breathalyzers. Organizing the program in this manner also opens the option of randomly testing a small number of students in addition to problematic ones.

Making this addition to the existing police presence may have several potential outcomes. The primary benefit this system has over the University of Wisconsin's is its function as a deterrent. Advertising this program will publicize the University's dedication to decreasing underage drinking at sporting events and will potentially create reason for students to better monitor their drinking beforehand. However, implementing this "show and blow" strategy would incur a greater cost than its reactive counterpart, as it requires a larger staff. Also, this plan presents greater logistical difficulties seeing as it may be difficult to deal with the increased volume of underage drinking citations on the University's campus.

EXPANSION OF TEXT-A-TIP

One major part of improving fan behavior at Penn State includes minimizing the number of occurrences that get out of control. Penn State has found a solution to create this safer environment through a text-a-tip program. According to Kevin Henry, the Coordinator of ICA Equipment and Stockrooms at the Penn State Multi-Sport Facility, the main goal of the text-a-tip program is to establish a "way for fans to connect in real time with the game day help that they need." This connection "allows for fans to discretely be the eyes and ears for a better stadium experience" (Henry). Therefore, the spectators become an integral part of improving fan behavior by simplifying job of law enforcement to identify troublesome fans.

Currently, In Stadium Solutions (ISS) provides the software and technical support needed for Penn State's text-a-tip program. On football Saturday, Penn State has "two operators working in the stadium joint command post, from the time the parking lots open until 1.5 hours after the game is over. The text message system is manned for our fans to ask questions throughout the game day experience [...T]hey can ask traffic, parking, or general assistance

questions” (Henry). Therefore, this program services both the stadium and surrounding tailgating areas.

According to Mr. Henry, the greatest strength of the current program is “the coordination once the message is received. If [Penn State has] the right information, place, person, description of the problem, [the University] can have the appropriate person dispatched within seconds. Typically, while one person is responding to a fan, another employee is reaching out to get the right response in the right location” (Henry). Fans can feel assured that when they report trouble at a sporting event, the text-a-tip program coordinates the help they need quickly.

However, this program does have significant room for improvement. First, Penn State should expand its text-a-tip program beyond football games at Beaver Stadium. Spectators could benefit from this program at all major sporting events, including basketball games at the Bryce Jordan Center, volleyball games at Rec Hall, and elsewhere. Mr. Henry eludes, “ultimately to improve fan behavior, the message has to be consistent” at each athletic venue. “The more consistent the message is, the more immediate the response is to problems, the easier fan behavior can be influenced” (Henry). This expansion would allow Penn State fans help themselves by reporting rowdy fans to the authorities across the board.

This text-a-tip expansion would not cost the Penn State much more than it currently does. According to the ISS website, “there is no cost for setup, service or support as a registered user of In Stadium Solutions. If you exceed the number of text messages included in your participation fee, you simply pay our low rate for each additional text message sent” (In Stadium). Penn State could also use the same staff at the joint command post due to the centralized nature of the program. Therefore by expanding, Penn State would not incur many

additional costs, just a fee in additional texting and any additional law enforcement needed at each concurrent sporting event.

Even though the Presidential Leadership Academy marketing group will focus more on this issue, we would like to note the fans' lack of awareness and underutilization of text-a-tip from poor publicity. On average, Henry's team receives "less than 20 messages a game, mostly attributed to the message getting out to our fan base. However, at the University of Florida, [law enforcement is] receiving upwards of 600 messages for a game day weekend." Hence, when "a patron does not notify [the Penn State athletic department] on game day, there is little that [they] can do to accommodate the fan's concerns." In order to make texting to the appropriate number easier, we propose that the athletic department includes the text-a-tip contact information on the back of each ticket. As a result, spectators, who typically hold onto their tickets throughout the game, would know where to text for help. Then, when the text-a-tip operators "know there is a problem, [they] can act" (Henry). This inclusion of contact information would not cost the university much more, considering the athletic department already includes the terms of use for ticketholders on each printed ticket.

As one can see, Penn State already has a great program to curb fan behavior at Beaver Stadium through the text-a-tip program. However, this program needs to be expanded across other athletic venues to create a consistent fan environment. In addition, the athletic department needs to make fans more aware of the availability of the text-a-tip system by including its contact information on each ticket. With these moves, fans will gain trust in this text-a-tip program that provides an efficient system for law enforcement to manage developing situations at sporting events all over Penn State's campus.

USHER TRAINING

Ushers are in charge of guiding ticket holders to their seats. Both students and members of the public can become ushers, they just need to show interest and complete an application form. Some ushers are recruited by other ushers. Before beginning their duties, ushers need to complete an online course that educates them on the basic required tasks and skills. After completing the course, they start working almost immediately. Most of the training for new ushers takes place while on the job, since no other opportunity exists for hands-on practice. However, new ushers would often be closely supervised by other ushers who have more experience. Students are generally in charge of the student sections because adults and non-students with regular tickets might not show as much respect for the authority of student ushers. Thus the majority of ushers, especially for general seating, are actually not students.

Many levels of supervisors collaborate together. The levels are ranked in hierarchal order. Whenever an usher encounters difficulty from a disruptive fan, he/she can report to the first level supervisor, and so on. There are third level supervisors, but troubles of that magnitude usually end up involving the police.

The Operations and Logistics team decided to take on the task of controlling fan behavior inside the stadium by utilizing the usher system. At this point, spectators have made it through the first line of defense – getting their tickets while being observed by police and stadium personnel. Though ushers are always watching for problems that may arise with the fans, there is still an unsettling chance that something may go unnoticed. One of the ways to improve security in the stadium is to improve the availability of immediate help to stop any further complications, whatever the problem may be. Focusing on the usher crew, we feel that there should be improvements made to the training system and how sections are managed during the

game. For one, the issue of age can play a significant role in how well the fans will behave and listen to the usher of each section. The age of the ushers can range from students to volunteers in their 60's and 70's. Because of this and other factors, some ushers are less experienced than seasoned usher veterans. Despite the required online training and the reminder of procedures before fans enter the stadium, ushers who have not had experience dealing with fans could make mistakes during a game. They may not know the proper way to enforce rules and they might overlook problems in their section. Another issue on the topic of age deals with the placement of the certain age groups in improper areas. Having student volunteers usher the student section can be problematic since college students are far less likely to take orders from someone who is their own age. These problems are most apparent in Beaver Stadium, yet can most certainly be applied to the rest of the Penn State athletic world. We believe this is an issue that must be dealt with immediately in order to truly "provide a game day atmosphere that is beneficial to both fans and players."

We were pleased to see that ushers in Beaver Stadium are trained before working in the stands. The current training system regarding education of ushers should stay in place so that all ushers are aware of the emergency services including police and medical professionals. It might be beneficial to implement an in-person version of this training as well. Also, we have decided on a few main suggestions regarding the usher system. The first suggestions apply to student ushers. We recommend that older ushers, rather than students, be placed in the student section. We hope that the more experienced older ushers will glean more respect from students than their peers can. The students who volunteer to usher might be more helpful in sections of alumni, families, and other older fans. However, student volunteers should always be paired with an experienced usher so that if an issue were to arise, the veteran could be looked to for help. Ushers should also

be stricter in seeing that the proper amounts of students stand in each row. Many issues arise when students are jostled into overcrowded rows and situations can quickly get out of control. In addition, we suggest that ushers be required to roam the stands during the game instead of staying stationed at a designated post. This would increase the amount of eyes scanning the stands for issues as well as increase the visibility of the ushers. We believe that seeing an official nearby will discourage fans from acting inappropriately as well as encourage neighboring fans to report improper behavior.

TAILGATING REGULATIONS

Football weekends entail far more than just the games held in Beaver Stadium. Often times, for the more than a hundred thousand fans in attendance, football weekends mean tailgating in the multiple hours leading up to the game. Tailgating for many Penn State fans is best described as an opportunity to celebrate the impending game with food, drinks, friends, and various outdoor games. For Penn State, it means policing thousands of parties, answering hundreds of emergency calls, and collecting countless bags of garbage. Bob White, the director of clubs and suites for Penn State Athletics, was able to speak to some of the inherent behavioral issues that stem specifically from tailgating. Mr. White stated that in his almost 25 years with Penn State Athletics, he has bared witness to a significant behavioral change amongst the fans in Beaver Stadium. Mr. White, also the co-captain of the 1986 national championship team, attributes the behavioral changes to the addition of night games in the Penn State football schedule. Mr. White stated that he began to witness the shift in fan behavior soon after television stations made requests for games to be held at later times within the day. In Mr. White's opinion, the largest contributing factor to the behavioral change was the increased potential for significantly longer tailgating times. He stated that alcohol seems to be the largest

contributor to poor fan behavior within Beaver Stadium. It was also noted that the majority of this alcohol consumption occurs pre-game in the tailgating zones around the university. Mr. White said that there is a direct correlation between increases in game day incidents and weekends when night games occur. The idea seems rather intuitive. The longer the university allows fans to tailgate, the larger the odds become of a fan consuming significantly more alcohol. Mr. White concluded that there are very few regulations set in place to limit tailgating times for fans on any football weekend regardless of game time.

Excessive alcohol consumption during tailgates is more than just a student perpetuated issue. Alumni are also strongly participating in excessive alcohol consumption. In some situations, conflict can easily arise when alumni, visitors, and non-student fans tailgate next to current students. In talking with Penn State students, they have cited multiple times in which alumni tailgating next to students have caused a wide variety of problems. The same is often said for visiting fans tailgating within a vicinity of Penn State fans. The co-mingling of student tailgates, non-student tailgates, and rival tailgates can make for substantial issues leading up to the game. Penn State Athletics currently has 26 different parking zones with many of them categorized for specific parking requirements. Parking, and subsequently the areas for tailgating, are separated into categories such as: reserved parking, game day parking, RV parking, overnight parking, handicapped parking, bus parking, media parking, and preferred parking. Each year, the athletic department releases a new map of the allocated parking zones color coordinated for the various parking options.

The Operations and Logistics team was able to identify some leading causes of poor fan behavior that stem directly from tailgating. There is no question that increased alcohol consumption leads to a higher likelihood of behavioral issues during a game. Some options to

curve the potential of these issues would be to limit the tailgating hours on weekends when night games occur. We also think it would be valuable to look into creating an “alcohol-free” tailgating section, where fans who wish to avoid alcohol-related incidents while tailgating can enjoy a more comfortable environment. Another potential solution would be the creation of fan specific parking zones for tailgating. Implementing policy that limits the hours of tailgating on night games and creating specific zones for various fans would significantly reduce the potential for excessive alcohol consumption. We understand that this could prove to be a tricky science. One unforeseen implication of restricting tailgating times would be creating times of influx for fans to arrive at the stadium. If the time is restricted for tailgating, then it can be assumed that high traffic times would be created when tailgating is set to open. Fan specific tailgating zones would eliminate some potential conflicts during tailgating, but more importantly aid in the policing ability of law enforcement. If zones were created specifically for students to tailgate, law enforcement could target those areas more efficiently for underage drinking. Allowing visiting fans to tailgate in specific zones would also reduce the potential for rivalry conflict that often occurs between Penn State fans and visitors prior to the actual game. The aforementioned suggestions are aimed at reducing the ability to consume excessive amounts of alcohol, increasing the efficiency of law enforcement, and reducing the potential for conflict during the hours leading up to game time.

CONCLUSION

There are many avenues for improving fan behavior at a university. Penn State already has many initiatives and systems in place for creating a safer environment for fans. The Operations and Logistics group feels that it is important to utilize the systems currently in place, but make improvements that will yield significant results. Adding new programs will also prove

beneficial to the University. Introducing “show and blow” in either form described will reduce the number of alcohol-related incidents in Beaver Stadium. Improvements to text-a-tip will help spectators get the assistance they need on game day. Additionally, strengthening the usher training system and management at sporting events will better educate ushers to monitor fans throughout the game. Putting restrictions on tailgating will also help reduce the number of alcohol-related incidents at Beaver Stadium. Each proposal will produce positive results in fan behavior on its own, but as a whole, they will create a much better environment for athletic events at Penn State. We strongly feel these changes should be made to the current system and foresee the desired changes in fan behavior occurring upon their implementation.

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