



STADIUM SECURITY

Simon Houlton explains the importance of ensuring your security team is up to the job, regardless of whether it's for a pop concert or a football match

Saturday 10 March 2018, The Olympic Stadium, West Ham United hosted Burnley in a Premier League match which sparked controversy and protest. Fans of the home side ran onto the pitch shouting at players, taking corner flags and expressing their hate towards the board after suffering a 3-0 loss. David Sullivan and David Gold,

co-owners of West Ham United were escorted to safety in the 84th minute as fans turned to shout abuse and throw whatever items they could find towards them.

The question is, where was the security? Why were these fans allowed to be anywhere near the pitch, let alone spend more than two minutes running around? Who knows what they could've been carrying in their

Fans clash with the police during the Premier League match between West Ham United and Burnley at the London Stadium

pockets. This is just one recent example of stadium security – or rather a lack of it.

Another example of a far more tragic event that took place in Manchester on the 22 May 2017, was the Ariana Grande concert. Suicide bomber Salman Ramadan Abedi was in the foyer when he detonated a shrapnel-laden homemade bomb as people were leaving the Manchester Arena venue. Where were the security guards? How was Salman let in and why wasn't he searched extensively, along with everyone else that should have been?

DUTY OF CARE

Stadium security is an incredibly important part of any event; protecting the people who attend is the single most crucial part, and sadly, it takes an event like the two mentioned to realise just how poor security can be. There are many factors that can contribute to this, ranging from the training of staff to the level of care shown. Stadium security isn't something that should be taken lightly and if we wish to stop incidents such as these happening again, it needs to become tighter.

When it comes to security personnel, the first question to ask is: are they actually qualified? Being a security guard isn't just about having a large physique and the ability to command a group of people. It's also important to be aware that some staff might simply be applying to see a show for free, with little care about their duty. Therefore, to do background checks, run courses and do tests to determine whether they are suitable for the job is crucial. If the hiring process has its flaws early on, then it will only cause problems in the future. Doing reference checks on CVs as well as looking through social media to find any information that crosses over with the event – ie they support the particular team – could be worth raising in the first stages of the hiring process.

There are far too many questions that can be asked when discussing the nonexistent, poorly trained or very little security at stadium events, but does this mean we should look towards the event/stadium owners? Have they taken the easy route when hiring the cheapest security guards possible, instead of spending time to hire the best of the best? A basic concept of capitalism suggests that managers or owners care more about their profits than audience experience; this can then be associated with stadium-style events and the security. It's clear to see that more time should be spent looking for appropriate security teams rather than the most accessible. Showcasing this to the events audience will help them to feel more at ease, knowing their safety is a priority to the security around them.

With 10, 20, 50 sometimes 90,000 people walking through gates to ensure they get to their seat on time, security can often take a backseat role as time becomes more important than effectiveness and safety. The automatic reaction is to speed up baggage checks to help move crowds along quickly. However, this 'speeding up' process often consists of vague checks where security officers feel around bags and guests gently, making little to no effort to go through every pocket or compartment. The frustration of crowds becomes clearer meaning that lax security officers can be tempted to get quicker, meaning people can sneak items in with a much lower chance of being caught.

With the power of social media, videos soon spread around showing how little effort some security guards are putting in to check guests. Moreover, as this continues, people from the outside see how easy it is to take any weaponry or items that could cause problems into a stadium. For many European football matches for example, flares have been banned due to the disruption they cause; yet we constantly see them being let off. The simple truth is if they were searched properly, there wouldn't be any flares inside the grounds.

However, this point also raises the question around foreign security and whether it is taken as seriously as it should be. Before the last year's World Cup in Russia, there were several concerns over the safety of the players and at one point it looked as though they wouldn't travel due to the dangers in the region. Thankfully the security was tight and problems were

MOST SECURITY STAFF DO AN OUTSTANDING JOB SO THE PUBLIC IS ABLE TO ENJOY STADIUM EVENTS

minimal. However, even having this doubt in mind shows how poor security at big events has been in the past. Having the mindset of 'safety over experience' is not what guests should be thinking and it's down to the security to ensure this doesn't happen.

TRAINING REMAINS KEY

Common solutions to this issue consist of warning guests to arrive early to help avoid queues and slow baggage checks and increasing the number of security staff on the opening gates. Neither of these has a 100 percent success rate and can often make little to no difference, but the key is the training of security guards. Even as a guest to the event, you can generally tell whether someone is good at their job and more specifically, cares. Lazy, brief checks signal that the security officer would rather be elsewhere, instead of looking after the safety of individuals. However, should we be questioning the antics of these guards or the event owners responsible for hiring them?

It goes without saying that training security staff is a necessity, but then again if the staff aren't trained right, they shouldn't be operating at the event at all. This is where training methods need to be looked over. It starts from the top; therefore, if the head officers aren't putting in the right practices, it is likely to crumble. Communication, guest awareness as well as emergency and evacuation procedures should all be taught to the highest standard, importantly, along with the physical aspect of being a security guard, part of the solution should be done through mental reassurance. Reminding staff that the security of these individual's lives is down to them as a team will help protect and solve any issues they may be having. This ranges from simple baggage trouble, to finding seats, to evacuating the building in a scenario of danger. As an event attendee, we want to feel safe and if we know that the security

is confident in how to handle any disruption or evacuation it only helps.

GETTING THE RIGHT MIX

By making the security come across as welcoming yet still maintaining their authority is crucial, as most security teams are grossly outnumbered by attendees. Being able to count on event goers to come forward with any issues or suspicions works as a huge benefit, an extra few thousand pairs of eyes makes security a lot more affective. The only way to gain this trust and approachability is through alternative training methods. Most security firms will concentrate on getting their team trained with security related qualifications. Although these are obviously essential, it would also be beneficial to train staff in customer service and public relations to ensure they can find that balance of approachable yet firm.

It is important to remember that the majority of security staff do an outstanding job, risking their safety and lives to ensure we can continue to enjoy stadium events. Employers of security staff should show a duty of care towards individuals under their

employment, by offering ongoing reviews and even counselling sessions to ensure that security staff can remain at peak performance. During these reviews staff should be made to feel that they can bring up any issues they are having with the job role without feeling judged. Employers should then put measures in place to fix the issues, whether it be ongoing training or personal support in the form of a team counsellor.

LAZY, BRIEF CHECKS INDICATE THAT THE SECURITY OFFICER WOULD RATHER BE ELSEWHERE

Buddying up less experienced staff with established professionals, will give them a chance to gain some extra knowledge and support that they won't achieve on a training course or classroom, turning new recruits into a well-rounded security expert with hands-on experience, dealing with issues that may not be covered in a brief training course ●

Simon Houlton – CEO of IScreenYouScreen – has created a software solution to allow reference checks to be done at a far superior rate than those of human checks, speeding up the process for HR departments looking to fill a job role.

Police forensic officers investigate the scene of an explosion during an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena in May 2017



Picture credit: Getty