



EXPERT INSIGHT

THE CROWD AT THE GAME

SJA hears from Scott Ashworth, Head of Safety and Security at Overtime Elite on his thoughts about security for sports and entertainment events

Can you tell us about your role?

Most of my responsibilities are focused on captaining a complex security program for Overtime Elite. The basketball league consists of six teams made up of 70 of the highest-ranked basketball players in the world between the ages of 16 and 19. The six teams play in multiple venues across four states, including Georgia, New York, North Carolina and Arizona. Games are streamed live on Amazon Prime and YouTube.

The Overtime Elite security program is a 24/7 operation protecting all athlete residences, OTE offices, OTE Arena and off-site operations. My team is comprised of approximately 100 professionals from contract security, law enforcement and emergency medical disciplines, all working collaboratively to ensure the safety of our athletes, staff and fans. Additionally, the team is present and responsible for maintaining comprehensive safety plans on organizational travel domestically and internationally.

I am incredibly proud of one program our team has architected and owned: the Overtime Elite Crisis Management and Business Resilience Program. This program includes top-notch processes and procedures that guide leadership at the highest levels of the organization to manage unforeseen incidents that could negatively affect the business.

Last year, we were also able to extend our program to support Overtime's newest league, OT7, a seven-on-seven football league. In 2023, with the OT7 program growing significantly, the security team will do its part to ensure everyone has a safe and enjoyable experience.

How have you seen the security industry change?

There is no doubt the security industry has changed for the better. Technology may have some debatably negative societal impacts, but it has brought the security industry forward significantly.

Over the past two decades, it has been amazing watching surveillance cameras get smaller while real-time images delivered by these devices are presented in 4K. Now, we have cameras that have their internal computer. Providing complex data sets to its end users, security professionals can directly measure in real time what their venue's crowd flow is and can monitor behaviors or movements associated with suspicious behaviors.

Security's innovation over the past few years continues. The industry's willingness to jump into the app world has also been beneficial. I have been introduced to new programs that some have referred to as "Uber Bodyguard" services – these programs are awe-inspiring and offer convenient solutions to people who don't have the budget for a 24/7 Overtime Elite Security Program but want a well-trained guard quickly if they receive a credible threat at two in the morning.

What do you find most challenging in your role?

Helping to highlight security as a great and fulfilling career to younger generations to drive promising professionals to our trade. In the past, I have been met with dreadful looks when I suggest to bright young minds that they should bring their talents to corporate security. ►

Honestly, it's mostly our fault as security professionals. There's a touch of irony, as we became so skilled at masterminding our environments to protect more effectively, but with less visual evidence of that protection. Cameras got smaller, technologies got more intricate, needs for human assets fell, access controls became more seamless and aesthetically pleasing design elements were introduced. If we do our jobs right, people are not alarmed enough to notice all of the precautions.

So, is this veiled, somewhat secretive image a problem for recruiting exceptional young talent? I certainly think so. If our presence or purpose doesn't speak loudly for us, we should amplify the message in other ways.

Industries have skyrocketed on influxes of intelligent and creative pioneers dreaming of making their mark. Where would Microsoft, Google, Meta, IBM and Apple be without the growth in popularity of coding?

Imagine the leaps and bounds we could make in security innovation if we improved our storytelling to the next generation about what we do, to encourage droves of young colleagues to join our ranks.

What do you think will be the main focus of development for sports security?

There are tons of concerns that leaders in the sports security field are concerned about, but recently, it seems – for good reason – crowd management and control ranks the highest. With tragic deadly incidents like the Travis Scott concert in 2021 or the recent incident at an Indonesian soccer match where 130 people tragically died in a stampede, it's clear why consideration needs to be paid to this issue.

I foresee the sports and security world focusing much of its attention on ensuring these events aren't allowed to happen. Advanced training in crowd engineering,



understanding human behaviors and mitigation strategies will likely play a significant role in ensuring success. Additionally, ticket scanning, surveillance cameras, spatial identification and behavior monitoring analytics from new and improved technologies can prove an essential positive contributor to eliminating these kinds of tragedies in the future.

“ IF OUR PRESENCE OR PURPOSE DOESN'T SPEAK LOUDLY FOR US, WE SHOULD AMPLIFY THE MESSAGE IN OTHER WAYS. ”

Furthermore, I see the sports security world continuing to maintain the intensity of screening that has remained following the early 2000s. However, while I don't see the intensity subsiding, the processes will not appear as intrusive to the fans and guests.

I've seen plenty of unique products for this and have witnessed the reliability and positive effects on entry lines. I'm thrilled for the future of checkpoints everywhere.

What advice do you have for those in sports and entertainment security?

I would align with my previous statements and advise anyone in the sports and entertainment security industry specifically to avoid getting locked into any one way of thinking. I have some phenomenal professional colleagues in this industry subset, many of whom continuously push the needle of progress forward. One of the most significant downfalls can occur when professionals in the sports and entertainment security world and the security industry, in general, are not open to accepting new technologies or processes.

I have often seen colleagues fail to embrace or endorse new technologies without investigating whether they would positively affect their organization. Some people get stuck in their ways. I say scratch that – be open to new ideas!

Additionally, leaders should not overlook younger generations of security leaders because they have "different work habits" or may not be old enough to know what a floppy disk is. Even though they don't have decades of experience, they can bring new perspectives and often have a better pulse of current issues. Although a process may have worked for 20 years, it can still work more efficiently and effectively. ■