

ARTICLE FEATURED IN THE
AUGUST 2020 EDITION OF
SECURITY MAGAZINE

SECURITY

SOLUTIONS FOR ENABLING AND ASSURING BUSINESS

ENSURING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF ATLANTA UNITED

**“As a brand, our
goal is to set an
example”**



Meet Scott Ashworth, Director
of Security for Atlanta United

Features

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Maria Henriquez



Ensuring the Safety and Security of Atlanta United

Meet Scott Ashworth, Director of Security for Atlanta United.

Working in the sector of sports and entertainment, while being a protector of people, is an absolute honor,” says Scott Ashworth, Director of Security for Atlanta United. “I love sports and, being an Atlanta native, I love Atlanta sports as well. It meets the mark where my two passions intersect, which makes it the perfect position for me. I’m grateful to the company and the corporation.”

Atlanta United joined Major League Soccer in 2017 and won the 2018 MLS Cup in just its second season, the earliest an expansion team has won the title since 1998. Owned by Arthur M. Blank, and led by club President Darren Eales, Atlanta United plays its home matches at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, located in the heart of Atlanta, Ga. Since opening in August 2017, the stadium has achieved many milestones – hosting the 2019 Super Bowl, the 2018 College Football Playoff National Championship, Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl and Kickoff Games and numerous sporting events.

Ashworth joined the Atlanta United front office team full-time in 2017 as Team Security Manager. Today, as Director of Security, he oversees the protection of the team and staff for Atlanta United and Atlanta United 2, including match day security and day-to-day operations at Atlanta United’s training facility. He reports to Joe Coomer, Vice President of Security for AMB Sports and Entertainment. Prior to joining Atlanta United, he served 10

years with the Forest Park, Ga. Police Department, rising to the rank of Lieutenant. While part of the force, he was integral in establishing the Crime Scene Investigation Unit – a leading example to police departments across the US. He also spearheaded several technological initiatives including a drone program to assist with surveillance, investigations and search and rescue cases and advocated the use of body cameras to increase transparency and public trust. He obtained his bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Clayton State University.

How does Ashworth ensure the safety of Atlanta United fans, players and its assets, while helping create a positive and unique game day experience?

Operations and Security

Ashworth says Atlanta United differs from other major sports in the US due to the number of international players that are on the team. "This isn't a challenge, but being able to meet the needs of international players, international fans, and then to travel internationally regularly adds to our risk landscape. It's challenging but exciting to coordinate the movement of an entire team, especially when our players are well renowned, not only in America, but in Mexico, Central and South America."

To maintain an effective security program, Ashworth relies on a large security team. "Each of those entities have a security director, each with incredible backgrounds. When we come together, we make one heck of a security team," he says.

Ashworth considers his team to include everyone that plays a role into the security of his team and operations, he says. "It may sound cheesy, but when I'm traveling with the team, I'm in the trenches with the players, staff, coaches and the technical staff. When I'm at the stadium, my team includes the officers guarding the gates to the people behind the scenes and after hours, and even the owners of the corporation. On a good day, everybody is your teammate. If everybody is working well, it just becomes that much better of an event for everybody, including fans."

Measuring Effectiveness

To measure the success and effectiveness of his security team, Ashworth uses two metrics. The first is evaluating the fan perception of security at the stadium. "We conduct fan surveys to receive feedback on the importance of safety, how safe they feel with the technology and the security measures we implement," he says. "We want every visitor or fan to feel welcomed and safe at all times, without impeding upon the fan experience."

The second metric is self-assessment. "We often self-assess and stress-test our policies and procedures by having different teams come in and test more than 43 event-day practices," he explains. Once the feedback is received, the security team focuses on

remediating issues if needed.

Procedures and Measures

When Ashworth first began his role, the security team was relatively new. “It was our first year and we didn’t have a travel security protocol,” he explains. Therefore, he implemented a travel security plan that protects players, staff and fans who travel outside of Atlanta. Part of the plan includes researching locations ahead of time and establishing relationships with local authorities in the cities, states or countries the team visits.

“Police, Fire, MLS security representatives, visiting venues and its security representatives, hotel security staff are involved in our comprehensive planning. In case of an emergency, procedures are followed to ensure the safety of our players, staff and traveling associates,” he says.

Ashworth and his team have also opened the lines of communications between Atlanta United supporters and fans, as they may become first responders if an incident arises. “If we ever need to disseminate information, our supporters and fans are willing to help us, and it works the other way, too. If they need our assistance with any kind of security issue, or help in understanding policies and procedures, the lines of communication are open to them.”

“We determine what measures need to be established or adjusted to protect fans and players during events, and what to expect during the event.”

Another helpful tool, Ashworth says, is social media. The team uses the OSINT Threat Detection & Investigations’ Media Sonar to monitor hashtags and accounts of players or people of interest, to guarantee that if there is a threat made against a player or any location, the security team is alerted. “We can monitor that in real-time geographic breakdown, so we can follow up with local partners or associates and investigate the source of threats or risks.”

On the Ground Security

How does Ashworth’s security team manage a balance between securing the sports complex and protecting stakeholder investment and managing fan behavior, while not impeding upon entertainment?



The security team is comprised of individuals with different talents and skills sets, he says, and each contribute their expertise during match days and non-match days. Before match days, preparation is key.

The week before a game, the security team meets with local partners at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Atlanta Police Department and the Fire Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The partnerships Ashworth and his team leverage help to provide and create a secure environment. "Each of those entities play a key role in match day security. We often meet and have discussions about security concerns, problems that could arise pre- and post-event, as well as focus on prevention to a range of security challenges. We determine what measures need to be established or adjusted to protect fans and players during events, and what to expect during the event."

On game day, Ashworth is tasked with being near and around the players. "We're a very fan-friendly sport, and our job as security is to recognize that. Therefore, we still like to give the players and their fans an up-close and personal approach. Security is still paramount, so we always make sure any interaction is a safe and enjoyable experience." During non-match days, Ashworth is ensuring the security of the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Training Ground in Marietta, Ga., where Atlanta United conducts its practices. There, he often leads tabletop exercises with the Marietta PD and the Marietta Fire



Department, as well as Cobb County Emergency Services – all on-call in case there is any disruption or incident. “We love our partnerships with the local community, and we value them as teammates,” he says.

During those practices, which often draw fans to watch, Ashworth says he strives to be strict, but also tolerant of fans who yell practices or try to get player autographs. “One of my priorities is to ensure we keep training and match day grounds a sacred place for the players to focus on their craft and sport.”

Like any other sports complex, Mercedes-Benz Stadium is highly controlled and monitored using security technology. “We have a strong network of security cameras and security guards stationed throughout the building to ensure traffic and access to the building remains monitored,” he says.

Ashworth’s goal is to be a leader in the sports security industry. In 2019, Ashworth’s security team was a recipient of the NCS4 Facility of Merit for Safety and Security Award, which recognizes a facility that has performed above and beyond normal operations to demonstrate an innovative approach to enhancing safety and security. His team also was awarded a “Safety Act Designation” from DHS.

Ashworth notes, “As a brand, our goal is to set an example. To be recognized by NCS4 and by DHS for our safety and security measures puts our brand at the forefront and is inspiring to us, as enablers of security. It empowers us to continue to be a leader in the industry.”

SOLUTIONS FOR ENABLING AND ASSURING BUSINESS

AUGUST 2020

SECURITY

The Risk Manager

Risk Management's Role and Security's Bottom Line

INSIDE

Cyber Skills for Physical Security Roles p. 20

The Case for Robust Campaign Cybersecurity p. 28

Thermal Cameras to Fight Coronavirus? p. 40



SecurityMagazine.com

@SecurityMag

A bnp Publication