

Security at Major Events

Coordinating security for corporate offices, hotels, apartments, convenience stores, and just about every other possible location can have its challenges. Coordinating security at major events, however, is especially challenging. This article will focus on some of the challenges I faced when coordinating security for several events and locations in Houston, Texas for Super Bowl XXXVI.

All NFL cities desire to host the Super Bowl. The money the event brings along with the international exposure for a city are tremendous. But, one terrorist attack, one shooting, or one highly publicized breach of security can harm that city for many years to come. As a result, most event coordinators take security measures for large events, such as the Super Bowl, very seriously. I learned that is not always the case, however. Some events are simply hosted to generate money and security is not a major concern.

I became involved in one of the largest events during Super Bowl XXXVI due to the fact I coordinated security for two high-end nightclubs in downtown Houston. The owners decided to create what became Super Bash. This event was to host over 70 live bands over a period of five days. Additionally, the ownership of the club also owned a restaurant nearby. Security for the nightclubs, restaurant and Super Bash became my responsibility. Discussions began about eight months prior to the Super Bowl. Naturally, there was a lot to discuss.

One important point to note here, the security director should be included in all executive level meetings. Sometimes, the meetings may not generate much in the security related field. However, I was included very early on. During these meetings, sometimes, I said nothing. But, I still learned a lot. I was able to obtain information on the various vendors, hosts of the events, and number of people expected at each event, just to name a few. For the Super Bash and one event at the nightclubs, meetings with representatives with the City of Houston were also necessary (more on that later). I was fortunate to have owners who took security very serious.

About six months prior to the events, I had my first meeting with ESPN. They were going to host a party at the nightclubs the Friday before the Super Bowl. The head of security with ESPN traveled to Houston and met with the owner and me on several occasions. We discussed many issues and concerns that their security folks had. One thing in particular was the use of firearms. In Texas, it is a felony offense to carry a firearm in a nightclub with very few exceptions. Naturally, the head of security wanted to ensure that the people he was there to protect were going to be well protected inside the clubs. Dealing with ESPN was the most professional experience I had as a security coordinator. Their event came and went with no issues at all.

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The Super Bash presented a totally different set of challenges because the event took up two huge parking lots downtown. The parking lots were across the street from one another and each had different stages featuring different bands. The City of Houston denied permits to block the common street due to the fact the street was a major exit route for other major venues. The only remedy we could come up with was to hire additional officers to man the intersections watching for both pedestrians and vehicle traffic. This plan worked out fine.

Another challenge was the main stage. One thing we had not planned on was a large crowd rushing the stage. The first night our headliner played, a child and an adult woman were pinned against the stage due to the crowd pushing toward the stage. I addressed that by pulling two officers from other assignments in an effort to move people away from the stage. In a crowd that is drinking, excited, and beginning to get a little unruly, this was quite a challenge. However, every night after that, I had additional officers assigned just to watch the stage. Mind you, we did not hire any security companies. All of these officers were police officers.

A local hip-hop radio station hosted one event at the nightclubs. I had concerns about that event from the start and made my concerns known to the management. The event called for blocking off an entire city street as a red carpet walk for celebrities. The ticket prices for this event were extremely high. The radio station advised that they would handle the security on the outside of the building for the entire event and I would coordinate the security inside. On its face, this sounded like a good plan. However, I had experience with this radio station in the past and security was never a concern for them. Because they actually blocked off a city street, they did have some police officers on site. However, once the celebrities had entered the club, the radio station sent their security home and abandoned their posts outside. This created a huge problem for those of us working the clubs. People were demanding that they be let in and the people manning the door were not allowing them entry. Some became quite unruly and uncooperative, including a couple of NFL players. Once again, I was forced to move additional officers away from their primary posts in order to deal with unruly crowds outside.

When all was said and done, we had no serious problems throughout the entire week. All of our challenges were met and solved. I was fortunate to have great management to deal with that included me in just about every area of planning. Finally, I had over 60 officers working at all of these events during peek times throughout different sites. They all performed at an extremely high degree.

The crux of this article is quite simple. Keep the security director involved in all high level meetings. Even the meetings do not appear to be security related, a lot of great information can be obtained that will assist in the security efforts. As a security director, be patient and flexible. Security issues are likely to arise. How you handle them will dictate your performance. Finally, hire people that are going

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to perform their duties at a very professional level. This made my job as the security coordinator much, much easier.