

Security and spectator enjoyment at the Rugby World Cup 2003: Profiling visitor perceptions

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Introduction

Since September 11, 2001 the threat of terrorism has become a priority consideration for sport event and facility managers. Due diligence and safety concerns have led to increased foresight and planning precautions in relation to security⁵, especially for sporting events that are broadcast on the world stage. Thus, the Olympic Games and other mega sporting events, such as the FIFA World Cup, have historically been considered to be prime targets, especially since the late 1960s, when technological advances to the media, through the use of satellites, enabled these events to be broadcast worldwide. This allowed protestors a global real-time audience to publicize their message.

This study investigates the relationship between sport and terrorism in reference to one of 2003's biggest sporting events, the Rugby World Cup 2003, held in Australia. The tournament ran for 44 days, and its 48 matches involved 20 national teams, initially divided into four competition pools of five teams each. The top two teams from each pool advanced to the quarter-finals. The winners of these matches progressed to the semi-finals and the winners, of these, Australia and England, played in the final on November 22 2003 in Sydney.

The issue of terrorism was solidly in the minds of many Australians during this period since three bomb blasts in Bali killed 88 Australians and injured over 100 more in 2002. As a consequence, Australian sport event organizers are now obliged to invest substantially more in security measures due to the threat of terrorism. At the same time they also have to ensure that the people travelling to watch and participate in sport event are not overwhelmed by the heightened security to the extent that it detracts from their experience.

The impact of hallmark sport events are typically measured on a multitude of indices including economic, tourism, commercial, physical, socio-cultural, psychological and political impacts⁶. Taking a different approach, this research project investigated the impact of external threats of terrorism on perceptions of safety and security of World Cup spectators at two separate events. Empirically grounded explorations on the relationship between sport and terrorism are rare⁷ despite the fact that sport has not been immune from terrorist activities.

Method

A convenience based sample of 511 World Cup spectators from the three New South Wales cities hosting matches (Sydney, Gosford and Wollongong) were surveyed to determine: the extent to which terrorism changed these sport tourists' motivations to attend the event; how safe they felt during the World Cup; and how risk management measures taken by the event organizers impacted on their level of enjoyment.

⁵ Pantera, M., Accorsi, R., Winter, C., Gobielle, R., Griveas, S., Queen, D., Insalaco, J., & Domanoski, B. (2003) Best practices for game day security at athletic and sport venues. *The Sport Journal*, 6(4) <http://www.thesportjournal.org>.

⁶ Faulkner, B., and Raybould, M. (1995). Monitoring visitor expenditure associated with attendance at sporting events: An experimental assessment of the diary and recall methods. *Festival Management and Event Tourism* 3; 73-81.

⁷ Wedermeyer, B. (1999). Sport and terrorism. In *The international politics of sport in the 20th century* eds. Jim Riodan and Arnd Krüger. pp. 217- 231. New York: Routledge.

Items on perceptions of security (that were validated for the 2002 FIFA World Cup⁸), and questions about fan identification⁹ were included along with demographic questions. The findings are discussed in the context of risk management, concluding with consequences for the future organization of sports events.

Results

The respondents were: primarily casual fans, from Australia, attended an average of two matches, came in a group ($M=4$), male (65%), university educated and aged between 30-40 years. Very few attendees had considered not attending because of security concerns, and nearly everyone felt very safe while at RWC. Most respondents indicated that they were neutral about the impact of the security on their level of enjoyment of the tournament.

Three distinct types of spectator motivations emerged under factor analysis. The first type the 'conspicuous fans', these people were characterised as seeing the Rugby World Cup (RWC) as a once in a lifetime opportunity, being big fans of RWC and attaching high importance to cheering their team. The second group of spectators were 'opportunistic attendees' and were defined by their combining RWC with a holiday, visiting friends and relatives and business networking these people did not see themselves as RWC fans or supporters. The final group were the 'incidental spectators' who purely came to matches because of low cost (or in many instances free) tickets, were highly price-sensitive and they were most concerned about safety issues (this group was largely NSW residents).

Discussion

Other research has noted that the key to effective crisis management is in developing continuous learning processes designed to equip managers with the capability to deal with sudden and unexpected problems or shifts in public perceptions thereof¹⁰. By better understanding the perceptions of spectators about safety requirements and security needs organisers can work to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to satisfy these consumers.

The conspicuous fans were mainly males, who came to watch the rugby, were regular attendees at other rugby competitions, and did not really care how much they had to pay for their tickets. These fans were characterised by strident comments such as 'shoot the bastards – terrorism doesn't belong in sport' – and general a feeling that terrorism threats would not stop their attendance. For these fans, while safety and security was somewhat important, it was not a factor in decisions to attend or levels of satisfaction. In contrast, the opportunistic attendees were acutely aware of the RWC security measures but indicated that the overt bag searches and sniffer dogs did not impact their satisfaction of their experience. The incidental spectators were concerned about their safety, aware of security measures and felt that the measures undertaken actually enhanced their RWC experience. The trick of course is balancing the different needs of these spectators, and ensuring that the sport event experience lives up to their expectations.

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⁸ Toohey, K. & Taylor, T. (2004) The FIFA World Cup 2002: The effects of terrorism on sport tourists Journal of Sport Tourism 9 (1) in press.

⁹ Ritchie, B., Mosedale, L., & King, J. (2002) Profiling sport tourists: The case of super 12 rugby union in the ACT, Current Issues in Tourism, 5 (1) 33- 44.

¹⁰ Robert, B., & Lajtha, C. (2002). A new approach to crisis management. Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management, 10(4), 181-191.