



How to Work With Sports Facilities

The Odeum Sports and Expo Center near Chicago hosts a number of special events, from conferences and trade shows to sports tournaments and concerts. According to company president Phil Greco, the best way to plan an event is to sit down with the facility managers—operations, food and beverage, meetings and events—and imagine the event from beginning to end.

When planning a potential bike rally, Greco and his staff knew that several hundred bikes would make their way to The Odeum. He said, “We asked a lot of questions: How are we going to park the bikes? How will we handle the influx? What will we do for traffic control? Will the police be able to convoy the bikes? Where will they enter? We walked through the event, starting with parking.”

The managers at The Odeum try to foresee the details of the event and solve problems before they occur. Greco said, “Sometimes we have professional show managers, and they know exactly what they want and when they want it.”

One trade show hosted by The Odeum produces 60 shows across the country. “They almost give you a book,” Greco said.

Event planners need to keep in constant contact with facility managers. Greco said, “You never want to hear, ‘What do you mean we have 400 motorcycles arriving at the same time? We should have put up barricades or cones or had extra staffing in the parking lot.’ Or ‘What do you mean we’re having 1,200 people? Nobody updated me. I thought we were only having 500. We should have opened four more concession lines.’”

If an event planner has never planned the event, and an indoor sports facility has never hosted the event, everyone involved must question the relationship.

“There are things we can’t do because we’re just not big enough,” Greco said. “There are things we won’t do because we’re too expensive and the show’s too small.”

Even if facility managers don’t know exactly what event planners want, both parties can gather information until man-

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agers understand the event enough and planners understand the facility enough to communicate. If they agree the event will indeed fit in the facility, then it’s really just a matter of walking it through.

“We had three fields of inline hockey for a major tournament, and the tournament had never been done in our facility, although the event planners had done other tournaments, so they were more experienced in planning their event than we were in hosting it,” Greco said. “A lot of time was spent looking at pictures. We called the facility that had done the tournament and asked what their challenges were. How did they keep the boards clean? How did they prevent the floor from becoming too slippery?”

Andy Barney is president of Soccer Excellence, the company that, along with the United States Indoor Sports Association, promotes the National Indoor Cham-

pionship. The NIC runs regional championships in every region of North America. It is the largest and most prestigious youth and adult indoor soccer tournament in the world.

When the NIC chooses a facility, the tournament directors consider safety in the area because many participants are youth. Also considered is proximity to hotels. The physical aspect of the facility is always a factor, but even more important is the service to go with it.

“We want to make sure the managers aren’t just in business for the dollars, but are willing to go the extra mile to do the right thing,” Barney said. “That way, if you need something out of the ordinary, they’re willing to help you out.”

The NIC has developed an extensive checklist to reproduce the event from facility to facility.

“Most important is to develop a system to use again and again so that you are constantly reminded of what you need,” Barney said. “Most damaging is to wing it.”

New event planners can add to their checklists as they gain experience and recognize what needs to be done.

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