# Transcript for the City of Ohio State Podcast Season 3 Episode 5: Game Day at Ohio State

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The City of Ohio State podcast takes a deep dive into the support services that keep OSU's Columbus campus running 24/7. Hear from industry experts in facilities, construction, real estate, public safety, transportation and more. The City of Ohio State podcast is brought to you by the Office of Administration and Planning. Go bucks. Hello and welcome to the City of Ohio State podcast. I'm your host, Dan Hedman. Fall semester is humming along and with that comes Ohio State Football. The Buckeyes hosted more than 100,000 fans and visitors during home games, and that gameday experience is supported heavily by the Office of Administration and Planning. Today, we'll welcome five guests representing athletics, public safety facilities, environmental safety and transportation. To pull the curtain back on how game days come together. First up is Erika Hoon, associate athletic director for event management. Erica, thanks for being with us. Thanks for having me. Of course, you've been with Ohio State since 2007 and where multiple hats ensuring athletics events run smoothly. But today we'll focus on football Saturdays. What is your role leading up to and during a game day? Sure. So, again, thanks for having me today. You know, football game days, I mean, the discussion doesn't just start on the Monday, the week of we start having conversations about the season as soon as the previous season ends. So we are constantly and continuously having conversations and discussions about what to look forward to, what challenges might lie ahead of us. And so some of those things take a little bit longer runway, if you will, to get us prepared for the season. So there's a lot of conversations with many folks in the AP world that we talk about, you know, different construction projects happening on campus and the other things that are happening around the city that might impact campus on game days. So we spend a lot of time just focusing on those elements alone and how they impact us on the daily and then how they impact us on a home football Saturday. And so we really just take a global look at what's going to happen on a football game day and then in and around the game. So everything from outside the event, working your way into the gates, into the stadium during the game and then post-game egress, traffic patterns, all the things like that. So we, you know, each week gives there different challenges. So we just try to identify those challenges, work through the work through it and identify solutions. And sometimes that might be an extra communication to our guests on the week of or pre-season. We do a nice multimedia day at the beginning of the year and share what's new, what's going on. And so we kind of it's a little bit of everything. And so, you know, we really like to take a global look at it, understand the impact to us, understand the impact to campus and really try to just identify what's our issues and how can we work through them. Yeah, I don't think a lot of people realize just how much work goes into hosting an event like this. It's so fun for so many people and everybody looks forward to a football Saturday. And I know you're not an AP staffer, but you just mentioned how closely you work with all those from across our team. Is there anything specifically you can say about kind of how A&P and athletics come together on a game day to make it happen? My gosh, it's not just game day, Dan. It's every day we work really hand in hand with many of the units and A&P. I would say DPS and TTM are two that we really work closely with. From all those meetings I've talked about before and leading up to and so I think, you know, years ago I'm aging myself. We said I've been here since 2007, but the one university initiative was something that we really took to heart and we really lean in with all of our partners and amp to, you know, all those things I mentioned previously about make taking that global look and how does it impact the game day. And so we work really closely with, like I said, Department of Public Safety team effort, unit print. I have to give a shout out to Connie over there because she definitely helps us out in all of our signage and credentialing needs for the game day. And, you know, with PARE and WOSU, I know we all have minor roles with them, but like I said, everyone plays, pays, plays a part in it and we all just work together. And it's not just Saturdays, it's every day. I'm constantly communicating with our deputy chiefs, with Director Moll and obviously all of our friends and all those other units as well. So it's it's not just one day. It's it's almost every day. Well. And hard work pays off, right? It creates a great fan experience. And that's what I wanted to talk about here. So we're a few games into the season, but what changes are new this year at Ohio Stadium and how do you continue to expand those services to support the fan experience for all Buckeyes? Sure. So I'll probably start on the latter part of your question there. We conduct guest surveys at every home football game, and so after each game, every ticket holder receives a survey just sharing about their experience on game day. And so throughout the season, we take a peek at those surveys, some low hanging fruit or any immediate action needed on any comments that we receive through that. But other times we just really see the trends and identify what we might need to adjust for the next season and just based on truly fan and guest feedback. And so this year leading into the football season, we started doing some restroom upgrades. It is a 100-year-old facility and so we have done upgrades obviously since it was originally built, but it needs a facelift in some areas. So a lot of our ADA restrooms received new flooring, new paint, new structures inside the restrooms, some other spaces that we've done over the years. Based off of that feedback was creating a nursing mother space. We have a lot of guests that come in that are new moms and they have some needs to take care of while they're at the game. And so we provided a space for them to be able to facilitate their needs for the day. Other elements we added this season were TVs in the concourse, and that's part and parcel to our weight time feature. And so that is a feature in our app that guests can see how long the lines are at restrooms and at concession stands. Kind of using a red, yellow, green format there just to see and gauge how long they'll be standing in line. But knowing that sometimes long lines are inevitable during certain points in the game, we did add a bunch of TVs to the concourses, too. So for guests to be able to watch the game and continue enjoying the game from being in the concourse, and then our partners with Levy always look for new and exciting elements in their concession stands from a food and beverage perspective. So always looking to expand their menus or find new offerings that might interest our fans. And then while maintaining the staples, the hotdog, the popcorn, the pretzels, you know, those are the staple items when you come to the stadium. But sometimes we know that fans like to look at a little bit more expanded menu, so they come with new ideas each season for that. And it's such a family friendly atmosphere. I know I went to a game earlier this year. I don't get out there to every single game, but when I do go, it's such a great time. And and your team does an awesome job hosting these. I got one more question for you before we bring in our next guest. And it's kind of open ended, so you take it wherever you want. But is there anything about your work or hosting any major events? So not just football that people may not realize or would be surprised to learn? I think the amount of time that we spend on everything outside of the actual event itself, you know, at the end of the day, I would say, well, football is going to happen. So, you know, a minor example is week one. We did have a power outage in the press box during pregame and it kind of everyone was, you know, running around making sure that they can get everything up and running. And at the end of the day, we had a game clock, we had our officials and we had two referees. And I said, we can play football today, folks. And so all the other elements, all the other things, not saying they aren't necessary, but we spend a lot of time on them too. And so at the end of the day, we want to make sure that there's a game happening, but we spend a lot of time on everything surrounding it to make sure that is, like you said, an enjoyable experience for everybody on their way in and on their way out of campus for the day. Well, I think we have the number one fans, the number one band, hopefully the number one team and by far the number one support team through your team and A&P. So appreciate your work and appreciate you being with us today. Absolutely. Thank you for having me. We'll bring in Eric Whiteside now. He is one of the Ohio State University Police Division's Deputy Chiefs and plays a major role in game day safety. Deputy Chief Whiteside I know you can't discuss staffing levels in detail, but can you give us a broad overview of how many officers and security personnel are on hand and the time it takes to plan for a safe gameday experience? Well, Dan, you know, you have to think about game day, not just in what happens inside the stadium, but what happens on campus. In the university district, you have people tailgating. You have people going to work. You have people attending events around campus. You had people go in the hospital and people are just trying to go home in the university district. So we have to take that all into consideration as we do our planning. How does each one of those little things interact with each other and how does that affect our overall security plan and where we put our resources It's so the amount of planning, a detail that goes into that, it's a continuous process. So once the last game of the season ends, we're going back or looking at what worked, when, well, what could we have done differently and what could we do better? And that's a lot of that planning is going to go on with well represented from the Columbus Police, the Ohio State Highway Patrol, Franklin County Sheriff's Department, Columbus Fire, and a whole variety of local partners and federal agencies as well. That's good. I mean, it takes a large group of law enforcement, non-sworn security. And even we were talking to Erica, who in athletics just coordinating with athletics to make sure that everybody is on the same page and that we can have a safe gameday experience. I guess what does a typical game day look like? Let's say it's a noon kickoff. When does OSUPD personnel come on shift and what types of duties do they perform during a game day? Well, it's a really a long day for everyone involved. I think if you want to look at the people that are here, the longest or the earliest is going to be our K-9 teams. They're here typically on a game day for like, say, a noon kick, probably about 4:00 in the morning. They're actually inside the stadium with representatives from the Columbus Fire Bomb Squad going through to make sure the stadium is safe before you and the stadium workers arrive and then we start building. It takes a lot of time to make sure that everyone who's working that day understands their assignment and the most recent game information. And after we do get them, everyone prepped and ready to go. We try to have all of our traffic officers in place probably about 3 hours before kickoff, to make sure we get those early arriving fans coming to tailgates and going to fan fest. And then by 10:00, all of our officers are actually inside the stadium, on their gates, on their assignments, and we're ready to go before even the bulk of the fans really start arriving on campus. And then they're here late in the evening because you have traffic pattern going out. So definitely a long day for all of the OSUPD and partner agencies that help put a game day on. Traffic ends up being one of the most important elements of game day. I know we've mentioned it a couple of times here, but how do you get 100,000 people in and out and what tips do you have for fans coming to the Shoe to see a game? Oh, absolutely. A traffic and parking. I mean, that's a big part of a person's gameday experience. And we understand that. And we devote a lot of time, resources and energy to make sure fans can get to the game and leave campus in a timely fashion. I think the best advice I can give to the fans out there is to visit the Buckeye Game Day website and plan to route before you get to campus, so know where you want to go and how to get there. There's maps in there that get in the timing. So a lot of really good quality information. And the next thing I would say is give yourself extra time to get to campus there early arrive the better you know come to campus enjoy your time on campus go to fan fest, enjoy tailgate, go to Lane Avenue, go to the skull session. Really kind of soak in the atmosphere. You have a great time doing that just as a morning traffic does pick up as you get closer to kickoff and become a little bit more challenging to get closer in in a timely fashion. And one of the things I like to do when come to a game is sometimes I'll park on West Campus and take those free shuttles. Just it gets you real close to the stadium and you don't have to battle all the traffic as you get closer to the stadium. So that's good, too. In terms of gameday security, I know there are multiple layers, including a no bag policy, metal detectors and some other things. Why do those things help and how often does public safety review and adjust security protocols? Well, then, as I mentioned before, the planning for a football season is year round. So at the end of the very last game, we go back and we take a look at how do we do over the season, what can be done better, what could we do differently? And that's one of the things we look at is does our security plan, does it make sense? Are we following the best practices? Are we listening to our stakeholders, the other agencies that are involved? Are we putting forward the best plan that we can to help keep people safe? I think if you look at the stated protocols we do at the stadium, the no bags, the metal, the magnetometers, I think you'd recognize that they're the best practices and they're used throughout the country. Yeah, that's good. And I appreciate the fact that you're never, you know, resting on your laurels. Right. You're always trying to gain additional security measures, looking at what NFL stadiums are doing, talking to other agencies. I think that should make fans feel really good about bringing their family to campus for a game. Drones have become so common now, but can also be a safety risk when flown over crowds. So how does Ohio State combat this? And specifically, what is OSUPD do? Well, right off the bat, I think it's important for anyone listening to know that you can't fly drone on campus without the permission, the university says. So if you don't have permission, that's a nonstarter. Second there on game day, there's something called a temporary flight restriction, the airspace around the stadium, basically, that bans anything and airplanes, helicopters and drones from being flying in the proximity of the stadium. If you ignore that temporary flight restriction, you're doing it, pose a risk to everyone's safety in a way that it can lead to some legal consequences. So we do have a drone detection system on campus. So any time a drone goes up, yeah, it will notify us right away. It tells us where the operator is and we'll send a team of officers to that location to meet the operator to have them put the drone down and then take any enforcement actions that we need to. Very interesting. Okay. I got one last question for you before we bring our next guest. But if you watch college football, you'll see every coach typically has an officer assigned for protection during game days. How does OSUPD support Ohio State football from the sidelines to the walk into the stadium or even traveling on the road? But I would say that our coach today is a very popular Buckeye. And I think our role is to help make sure that he can accomplish everything that he needs to on a game day and in a safe manner. So they're there to help kind of make sure that he can move about in uninhibited. And if there's times when he's interact with the public there just to make sure that he can do so in a safe manner. And that includes everywhere he goes on game day. Okay, very interesting stuff. Deputy Chief Whiteside, thanks for pulling the curtain back a bit on how we keep game days safe. Thanks, Dan. We're halfway through and I'll hand it off to co-host Brooke McKivergan to take you the rest of the way. Brooke is standing by with Tom Holman from Transportation and Traffic Management. Thanks, Dan. Tom, we just heard from Deputy Chief Eric Whiteside about gameday safety and he touched on the challenges of traffic flow. So what types of things this team do to support fans coming and going from game days? So our team supports athletics and public safety with traffic management and our crews deploy equipment used for directions and traffic patterns such as cones, barricades, signs, digital message boards and even portable light towers for games that may end in the dark. And then also team operates several shuttle options on game days. And we all know that parking for any major event can be stressful. So is it best to park close to the stadium, or what other options are available for fans who aren't as familiar with a Saturday on campus? Well, both options are available. Their game parking map is available on the Department of Athletics Game Day Guide, and it's also available on CampusParc's website for fans that choose not to drive into central campus. Plenty of parking options are available in the West Campus parking lots. TTM operates a complimentary shuttle that runs from the Mount Haul loop over to Coffee Road Park near the edge of the Woody Hayes Bridge. And from there, it's just a short walk across the bridge to the stadium. That shuttle runs 6 hours before kickoff, runs continuously throughout the game until one hour after the end of the game. If fans are looking for disability parking, they should head to the lots north of Saint John Arena along Main Avenue. There's a wheelchair accessible shuttle that we run that will transport fans from that lot, picks up near the ROTC building and then takes them down to gate 22 on the east side of Ohio Stadium. And just like the west campus shuttle, it runs 6 hours before the game, continuously through the game until one hour after the end of the game. Great. And you also managed the scooter vendors and the ride share program relationships. So how do either or both of those services change on game day? Sure. For scooters, there's a no rides surrounding the stadium and that includes the East and West Stadium. Lots in the area to the southeast of the stadium. Each of the scooter vendors has designated parking zones located within their respective apps so that riders can see where the preferred parking is for those. In addition to that, there's a scooter parking zone at the car park, the tennis courts on the south end of the stadium. And that area opens 4 hours before kickoff and closes one hour after the end of the game. And then, of course, we just remind folks that to use scooters on game day, to slow down and use caution and free pedestrian areas. As far as rideshare goes, there's no changes to the program that we operate with Lyft, but we would mention that heavy demand may increase the wait times and then pricing is impacted by time traffic and driver availability. So just be aware of those things and of course follow the safety tips that we have online. So follow your ride on the app. As the driver who they're picking up and confirm the vehicle that's picking you up matches your reservation. Absolutely important stuff. A lot of hard work goes into making sure people get to where they need to be safely. Tom, thank you so much for being with us. We'll now shift our focus inside the stadium to spotlight a program that helps the scarlet and gray go green. For that, we welcome Mary Leciejewski. Hey, good morning, Brooke. Good morning. Thanks for being with us. Absolutely. Thanks for having us on. Yes. So Facilities, Operations and Development partners with athletics to ensure Ohio Stadium is a zero waste facility. So can you tell our listeners what that means and why it's so important? Absolutely. So our Zero Waste Initiative, which was started in 2011 at the stadium, aims to divert 90% or more of the waste generated at the stadium away from landfills through recycling, composting, waste, prevention and reuse. So each game day between ten and 14 tons of material is generated just inside the stadium. And so the university aims to keep as much of that as possible out of the landfill. And the work at Ohio Stadium supports the University Wide Resource Stewardship Goals, which outlines the way that we can reduce our environmental footprint. That's a ton of waste. So what types of operational changes support a zero waste gameday? So we focus on a few different things. One is clear signage, convenient recycling and composting stations and educating fans at every opportunity we can. So first things first. We look at our products to examine what food and beverage products we bring onto our campus so we can divert as much of that when the fans are gone. And we also collaborate with vendors and food service providers to ensure that their products are recyclable or compostable and making it easier for fans to participate in zero waste. A good example is your nacho tray, which used to be and then was covered in nacho cheese when a fan was done with it. But now it's compostable. So now the fan can just take that tray and put it in the composting. That's great. And how do students or other volunteers support this work? The Zero Waste Stadium project would not be possible without the participation of two groups of really important students who play integral roles on game days. So first we have high school students and we work with a group called Life Savers who serve as zero waste educators They engage with fans and teach them how to dispose of their waste properly throughout the football season. You know, when they come to campus, they learn the basic principles of environmental sustainability and they also gain exposure to higher education in Ohio State. And then after the season, they receive an educational stipend. We also work with about ten Ohio State student interns, and they do similar work, but it's a little bit more in-depth. They engage with the vendors and to make sure that they're they know how to compost and recycle their items. Volunteers then assist fans in sorting their waste correctly while also being our eyes and ears throughout the stadium to make sure everything is running smoothly. And I know this isn't your main focus area, but after the game ends and the stadium lights dimmed, the work is not over. So who cleans up all the trash left behind in the stands? And what does that process look like? Well, I can tell you it is a big process and there's a lot of stakeholders who contribute to the after the game cleanup and first and foremost, the vendors and food service providers who are positioned throughout the stadium. We also, of course, have our volunteer groups and then the stadium staff who are coordinated by amazing individuals like Jason Browning and Mike Smith, and they play key roles in this process. But about 50% of the materials generated on game day are actually left in the stands after it begins. So the morning after the game and our OTC, they walk each bleacher row and they pick up the materials left in the stadium. Yes. And they sought out recycling from composting staff, then walk through with leaf blowers, make sure there's no little pieces of debris that are missed. NROTC then works with stadium staff and an external vendor to transport the material from the stadium to Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections in London, Ohio, where the material is meticulously hand sorted. And then, of course, outside the stadium, which I know isn't what our focus is today, I just have to give a shout out to you know, the landscape crews and the recycling and refuse crews who manage all the clean up after the tailgate areas. That is a ton of work and a lot of people who work on making sure game day goes without a hitch. So thank you so much, Mary. I'll let them know to think twice next time before he leaves is not totally on the ground. Thanks, Mary. Last but not least, we welcome in Tom Novotny with Environmental Health and Safety. Tom, thanks so much for being here. Thanks for having me. Tom, your team is on hand during home football games to support public safety through air monitoring. This is all really interesting. So can you explain what this is and why it's done? Of course. So in general, we were providing safety and environmental support for all university operations on game day. But as you mentioned, one thing that we do in particular is air monitoring of the stadium environment. So this to do this, we work in conjunction with other public safety groups. We use portable air monitors that we place throughout the stadium to analyze the air quality. Data from all the monitors that we place in the stadium get fed back to a central location, and they're available to us via a mobile platform also. And this allows us to quickly identify and respond to any concerns that we might have or see in the data. So if the monitor does alert you to something abnormal, what would happen next? So since we're getting real time data, then if an alert occurs, we get the information immediately. So based on that information, we work with other public safety entities to identify the issue and take appropriate action actions to mitigate any of those risks. So an example of this might be cleaning up a chemical spill that could be impacting air quality or just investigating to see what might be causing the issue. A really huge part of public safety that probably not a lot of people think about. So we totally appreciate you guys spending your Saturdays supporting the gameday experience. Is there anything else that you would like to share about how EHS supports Ohio State here? In addition to the air monitoring, our team is on site as a safety and environmental resource for the entire campus community. So we're here to handle other situations like chemical or biological spills, and that could be anything from the gasoline, from a generator or a tailgate or to a blood spill from an accident or anything like that And it's really just easier to have a team here on campus and on site ready to respond to anything instead of trying to get here to campus when an incident occurs makes total sense to me.

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I want to thank Tom and all of our guests for joining us on this expanded edition of the City of Ohio State podcast. The City of Ohio State podcast is brought to you by the Office of Administration and Planning for Dan Hedman, I'm Brooke McKivergan. Until next time, be kind and go Bucks!