

Spectator rage: The dark side of professional sports

February 6 2012

Preventing violent outbreaks of "spectator rage", similar to the deadly riots that broke out following a soccer game in Egypt, requires assessment and action by sports team owners and stadium managers, according to a report in the forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Service Research*.

Spectator rage is an outgrowth of an ever-increasing number of episodes of consumer rage, researchers from Clemson and Stetson universities report in an advance online version of the journal. While consumers are often upset during a transaction for a specific good or service, a combination of emotional and [environmental factors](#) can trigger spectator rage.

"Unfortunately, the excitement and electricity that accompany many athletic contests sometimes erupt into volatile incidents of spectator rage," said Clemson University Professor of Marketing, Stephen J. Grove, who co-authored the report with Clemson colleagues Gregory M. Pickett and Michael J. Dorsch and Stetson University's Scott A. Jones. "When a sporting event brings together two groups of fans and casts them in adversarial roles, the contest's outcome can easily prompt emotionally charged responses from spectators."

Seventy-nine people died last Wednesday in the Egyptian city of Port Said after fans of the hometown Al-Masry club stormed the field following a 3-1 win over Cairo's Al-Ahly club. Subsequent protests left five people dead.

Fan tensions can be exacerbated when conflicting political or social undercurrents between rivals are at play, Jones said. Either a loss or a victory can spawn rampage, especially when enraged fans sense that they may not be held accountable for their actions.

Sport venues and those responsible for staging contests can and should take steps to reduce that likelihood by carefully reviewing practices and policies with respect to seating arrangements, [alcohol consumption](#), security presence and promotions, the researchers report. Screening and monitoring fans during an event is critical. Sometimes it's not what organizations do, but what they don't do that contributes to the possibility of spectator rage.

Boston College Professor of Marketing Katherine Lemon, editor of the *Journal of Service Research*, said the tragic events in Egypt should serve as a warning to [professional sports](#) teams to review the spectator experience they are trying to cultivate in order to ensure excitement doesn't shift to violence.

"The recent tragedy in Egypt is an extreme example of the increasingly frequent appearance of 'spectator rage' at professional sporting events around the world," Lemon said. "The question is how can the professional sports industry better predict, prevent and respond to spectator rage among the millions of customers who buy tickets to events across the globe? As experts report in the upcoming edition of the *Journal of Service Research*, sporting teams and clubs need to assess the possible triggers that can set off these incidents and create programs that ensure the exciting fan experience critical to their business models doesn't dissolve into rage-fueled violence."

More information: A copy of the report "Spectator Rage as the Dark Side of Engaging Sport Fans: Implications for Service Marketers" can be viewed at the *Journal of Service Research* website:

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Provided by Boston College

Citation: Spectator rage: The dark side of professional sports (2012, February 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-spectator-rage-dark-side-professional.html>

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