



# EVALUATING SAFETY IN SPORTS

*As popularity and attendance at CCHS football games increase, CCHS and CCSD administrators continue to adapt and evolve measures against possible violence.*

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**F**loodlights glare over Death Valley. Billy Henderson Stadium is packed with students and Athens-Clarke County community members alike as rival varsity football teams Clarke Central High School and Cedar Shoals High School take the field for the 58th annual Classic City Championship on Aug. 15.

According to CCHS Associate Athletic Director Chris Aiken, there were 2,771 GoFan tickets sold for the game. With such a large crowd, the stakes for conflict increased with high-risk football games.

In turn, the safety measures at these games have also evolved.

"About 10 years ago, (security) was very relaxed," Clarke County School District Chief of Police Terry Reid. "(After) having more incidents, the superintendent of the state started mandating some safety (measures) that we had to put in place. We are not in this bubble in that it can't happen in Clarke County. Everything's kind of expanded since then."

At CCHS, the implementation of these plans at the district level has shaped protocol at high school sporting events such as football.

"Since I've started working here (four years ago), I have seen the security and the ideals that we presented (progress). Things are better now than when I first started working. Things are more organized," CCHS Security Officer Chris Hood said.

The rise in this organization isn't random, though. According to CCHS

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**-- CHRIS HOOD,**  
CCHS Security Officer

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Associate Principal Dr. Summer Smith, incidents of violence and conflict have become more prevalent at popular sporting events because of the expanding audiences.

"The two sports that tend to cause the most issues would be football and basketball," Smith said. "Typically, when we play (CSHS), that's a high alert game because it's a high volume game. We had a couple of issues at (the 56th Classic City Championship on Aug. 18, 2022), and it's not safe for anybody when the issues pop off. We definitely make plans for games that we know will (have a) bigger volume of people."

Before entering Billy Henderson Stadium, there are various safety measures

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**Above:** WHAT-IFS: A Clarke County School District police vehicle overlooks Death Valley during the Clarke Central High School varsity football team's game against Loganville High School on Oct. 11. CCHS Security Officer Chris Hood acknowledged the concerns surrounding the need for enhanced safety protocols at CCHS sporting events. "(There were) a lot of what-ifs. What if this parent gets mad at another parent and one person has a weapon? How can it escalate?" Hood said. "Since we're doing what we're doing, if something did happen like that, at least no weapons would be involved." Photo by Wyatt Meyer

that patrons are required to go through.

There are typically five Clarke County School District police officers and two School Resource Officers stationed across a variety of locations – in the parking

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**-- TERRY REID,**  
CCSD Chief of Police

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lot, at each of the three ticket gates, on the field as well as at each of the five entry points into the stadium.

According to Reid, CCSD officers also began to use handheld metal detectors, or “wands,” on all attendees to check for weapons before their tickets were scanned for entry in the 2020-21 football season.

“We have (hand-held metal detector) wands in every gate,” CCSD Police Department Team Leader Michael Waters said. “Anything from a small pocket knife to a gun, or anything that could be used as a weapon (sets off the wand) to make sure it doesn’t get in the game.”

Additionally, a clear bag policy with maximum capacities of 12 inches by six inches by 12 inches was instituted in the 2022-23 season.

“(The clear bag policy) was moreso (because) we’re trying to keep up with how professional athletics and college athletics have been doing it,” Aiken said. “Going to concerts or anything like that for the past 10 years, almost everyone’s shifting to clear bags. It’s just an easy thing to put in place to add (another) layer of safety.”

While many of these safety procedures were adopted with the intention of general safety, the main ticket gate between the Competition Gym and the James M. Crawford Memorial Arena was divided into two separate checkpoints for both the home and away sections at the beginning of the 2022-23 football season to combat the chances of conflict between attendees.

“We decided that allowing fans to go behind the pine trees behind the (Competition) Gym (during football games) was causing a lot of issues. It’s a pretty big open space and that’s where we saw a lot of our conflicts arise,” Aiken said. “We were just allowing too much exposure to different fan bases being able

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**Right: POSITIVE PROGRESS:** Clarke County School District Chief of Police Terry Reid stands above the Billy Henderson Stadium stands on Oct. 22. Reid felt that CCSD’s initiative to make sporting events safer for attendees has calmed the minds of many. “With the system that we’re using, the contact with the students and the people coming to the game has been phenomenal,” Reid said. “A lot of them are to the point (that) they say it makes them feel safe. That’s all we want, (for) these events (to) be family-oriented.” Photo by Wyatt Meyer



**Above:** A SAFE ENVIRONMENT: Clarke Central Security Officer Chris Hood scans an attendee with a metal detecting wand at the Clarke Central High School varsity football game against Loganville High School on Oct. 11. CCHS Athletic Director Chris Aiken has kept the safety of attendees in mind when planning sporting events at CCHS. “Fan engagement, fan excitement and fan safety are the priorities. Making sure that everyone who comes has a good time and leaves having a good time is (of) the utmost importance for all of us,” Aiken said. “That’s why we spend so much time not only planning it but, after events, going back and trying to come up with better ways to make it more enjoyable for the fans and a more safe environment.” Photo by Wyatt Meyer





to intermingle while a varsity athletic event was going on, so we switched (to) where fans could now enter to the main gate sitting behind the weight room.”

After rising concern of patrons sneaking over the gate from South Rocksprings Street onto the practice field, portable lights have been stationed as of the 2024-25 season to prevent anyone from sneaking into the game as well as

“(I was) walking out (of the stands) to get ready to leave, and when (I) got to that first gate, a police officer stopped us and said that we couldn’t go. Then, we saw from the top of the hill a group of five police (officers) running down the hill,” CCHS senior Ava Gossett said. “Everyone saw that and started to scatter and rush through that gate (regardless). Everyone was yelling.”

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**-- TAMIKA HENSON,**

CCHS Associate Principal of Operations

reducing gatherings behind the visitor side’s bleachers. However, some issues arising at CCHS football games have been attributed by CCHS administrators to relations outside of school brought into the stadium.

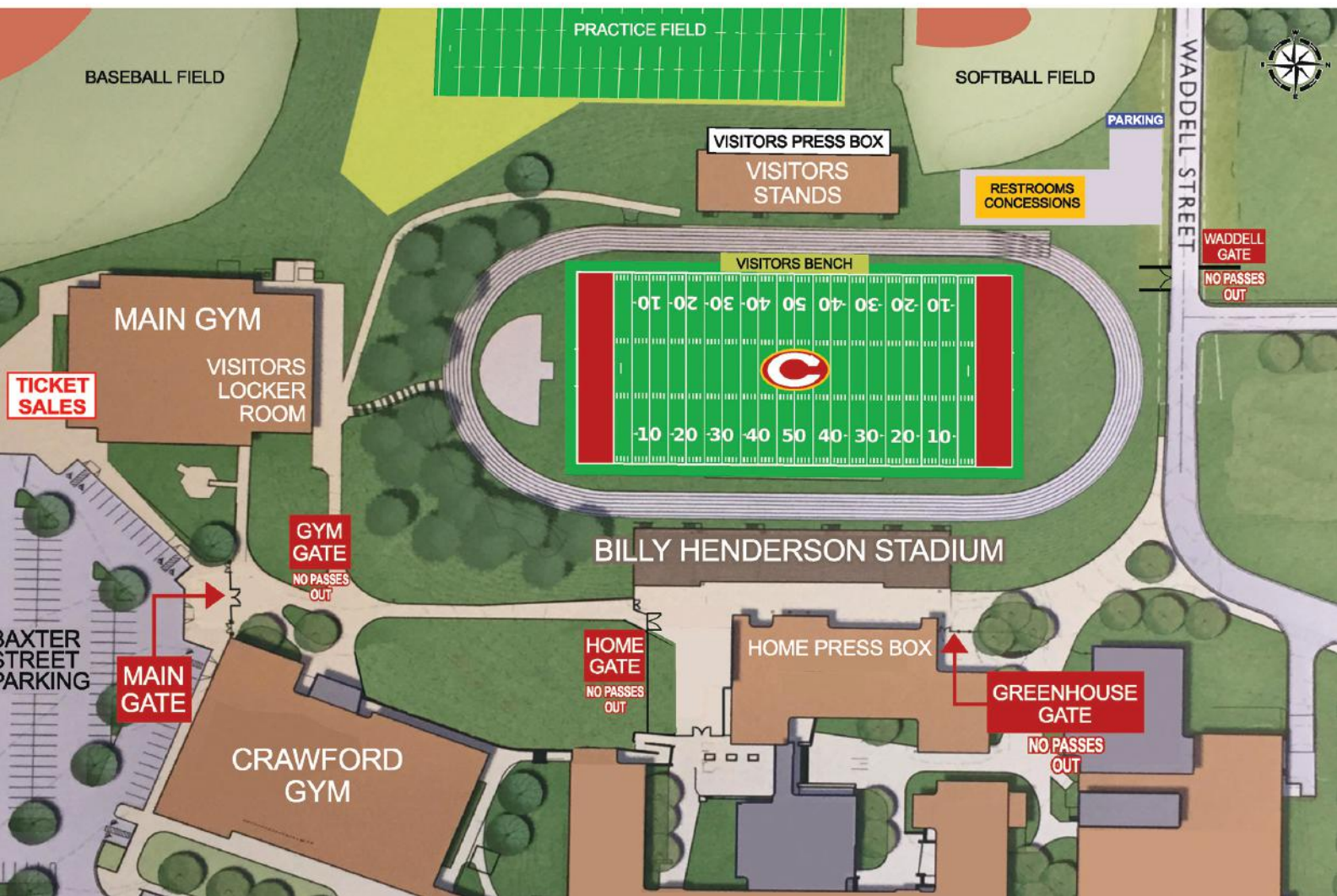
“I do believe that some community issues trickle into our sporting events, and that’s the need for an increase in security personnel,” CCHS Associate Principal of Operations Tamika Henson said. “I actually think that some security personnel are aware of the issues, and this is why we have more police officers at games.”

While these safety measures can help minimize disturbances, some conflict persists. According to an Athens-Clarke County Police Station Incident Report filed during the 58th Classic City Championship, an officer under Unit 2367 reported, “Game ending, fights everywhere, need additional units.”

For Gossett, misinterpretations of the situation along with those of other students brought uncertainty as to what students were supposed to do in cases of emergency.

“I feel like (there is a plan for the police), (but) students aren’t informed as well on those plans so we didn’t know what to do. Obviously the cops knew what they were doing because it was their plan,” Gossett said. “We have (drills) for an active shooter while we’re in school, but not at sporting events. That’s a big issue.”

Following the shooting at Apalachee High School on Sept. 4, CCHS junior Clarice Buriel has processed the possibility of gun violence at a school event. After witnessing the events at the Classic City Championship combined with an actual instance of gun violence miles down the road, the fear of danger at a







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CCHS junior

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sporting event is heightened.

"Before games, because of how many mass emails we (get), it could just be (a message saying) 'In case anything happens, go here,'" Buril said. "We definitely need to be more aware of what to do in a case like that, because it's an open space and people were running into each other (to get out). We should figure something out about it because it's not just going to happen at a Cedar-Central game."

Although there is no simple solution to safety, Reid and the CCSD Police Department continue to advocate for new technology that will improve safety. This includes the possible institution of an Evolv Weapons Detection Technology device at sporting events. Instead of wandering, these standing detectors scan attendees as they pass through to identify potential threats.

"You can sit it out there at the gates and it can scan something like 2000-2500 people real quick. We utilize a laptop and whatever the scan picks up, the weapon or knife, it zeros in on that person, and we can go right to them," Reid said. "With the approval of (CCSD Superintendent) Dr. (Robbie) Hooker, (we're) going to try to move in that direction so we get more people scanned, and then if we have to pick and move them out, we can do it before they get to the crowd."

As circumstances and society change, the commitment to adapt and create a safe environment for patrons at all sporting events remains a constant topic of discussion at the district and state level.

"I've been doing (sporting events) for about 30 years. But, as things have evolved, if there's an athletic director or principal who is not mingling with their chief of police to maximize securities on this day, you set yourself up for liability," Reid said. "We have other plans in place but we constantly, myself and other chiefs of school districts, we talkin' about safety, safety, safety. That's the priority of every conversation."

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**Above:** SPECTATOR SAFETY: Clarke Central High School junior Clarice Buril poses for a photo in the Billy Henderson Stadium stands. As a spectator, Buril has experienced the safety measures imposed at football games firsthand. "I like that we have a clear bag policy. I think we do a better job than other schools, and I think we're working harder and better towards a better method. I like that we have someone patrolling at all the gates," Buril said. Photo by Wyatt Meyer

**Left:** THE LAY OF THE LAND: An overhead map of Billy Henderson Stadium published on the Clarke Central High School Athletic Department website is displayed. At all football games, there are five ticket gates to the entrance each secured by security personnel. "There's three ticket windows, (and) once you enter the stadium, there's different sections, (like) the home bleachers or away bleachers," CCHS Associate Athletic Director Chris Aiken said. "Once you enter one of those ticket gates, we don't allow you to go back and forth between the two different sections anymore." Infographic courtesy of the CCHS Athletic Department