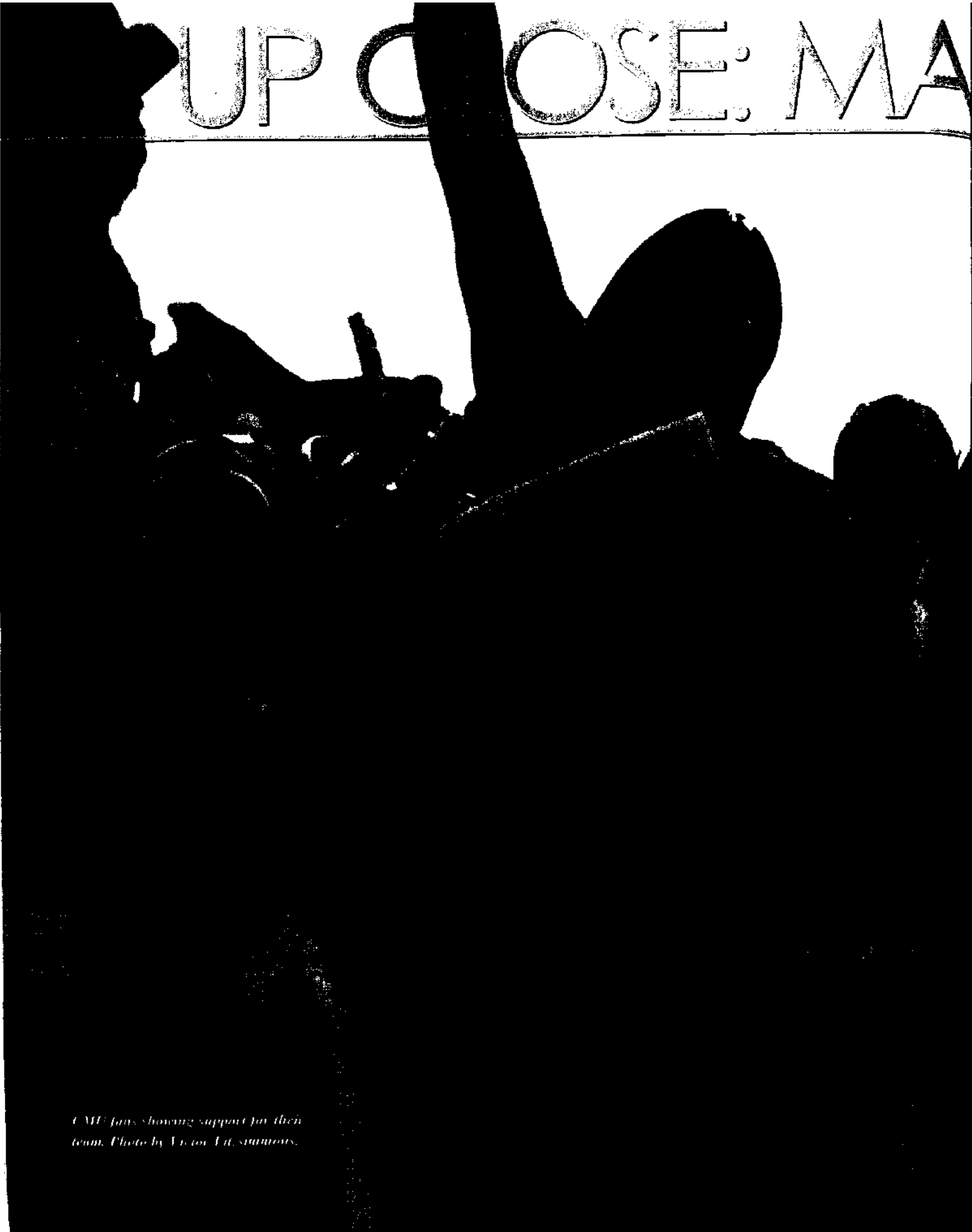


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*UMJ fans showing support for their
team. Photo by Victor Vit, Simmons.*

RICH MADNESS

Western Weekend



BY DAVID WALSH

Celebrations following a victory for the hometown sports team are a normal part of life in almost any town. Over the past several years, however, these celebrations have become more disordered and violent in nature. It is not uncommon for the post-game activity to now include arson, vandalism, looting and full-blown rioting. Sadly, these activities can follow both victories

and losses; often they are a result of games that are advertised as rivalries.

Most large cities have standard response plans for such incidents and their departments spend time training to implement the plans. For the smaller and middle-sized cities, especially those housing a college or university, it is important to have similar plans. It is also important to take the time to front load the agency with tactics meant to forestall any civil disturbances surrounding university sporting events.

Mt. Pleasant, MI, is a city with 25,000 residents,

located in Isabella County, near the geographic center of the state. Within the city limits is Central Michigan University (CMU), a relatively large (20,000 students) school that enjoys an intense rivalry with Western Michigan University (WMU). Every two years, these teams play in Mt. Pleasant, drawing tens of thousands of fans to the city. In addition to the fans, there are hundreds of other citizens who come simply to partake in the pre and post game festivities.

Over the years, post game parties have wreaked havoc on Mt. Pleasant. Riotous behavior was common, with many injuries and property damage. The administration of the Mt. Pleasant Police began to systematically plan for these games, improving the mobilization each year. The response plan has been successful in curtailing behaviors that are precursors to large scale civil disturbance. This plan can serve as a basic frame that can be customized to most small and mid-sized cities that must respond to this increasingly common situation.

At its most elemental level, this approach involves the Three Ps. An agency must build partnerships, must have a plan and must do some basic police-work to address potential civil disturbances surrounding university sporting events. Each of these building blocks is a critical part of planned response.

Partnerships

Mt. Pleasant Public Safety Director Bill Yeagley expends a lot of energy encouraging his officers to build

partnerships with members of the community. CMU is a large part of the city and officers have built many partnerships with people connected to the university. This is a key part of the department's response plan for CMU/WMU games.

CMU's administration has invited city officers to participate in orientation events for the university. Officers (in partnership with CMU's own police department) offer presentations regarding city-specific ordinances, party tips and other safety strategies.

Early in the school year, police and code enforcement officers walk the Main Street area of town where there are many fraternity houses, sorority houses and student rental housing complexes. The officers pass out literature describing the city ordinances involving parties, parking, refuse, etc. This provides face-to-face contact with the residents and allows officers to survey potential trouble spots.

There are more than 10 major apartment complexes in or near the city that cater to students. Officers visit the management offices of each complex. They offer tips for addressing issues such as parking, limits on party size and other safety items. Personal visits help the officers feel some connection to the apartment complexes. They also offer the added benefit of building a relationship with the managers.

Several managers allow the officers to set up mini-offices in their complexes. Some even provide officers apartments to use for surveillance efforts, which might not

have happened had the officers not made a specific effort to build a partnership. This is a clear example of community policing at work.

Planning

On a typical Saturday night, there are usually about 15 officers on duty in the city of Mt. Pleasant and the surrounding county. For Western Weekend, the plan calls for approximately 160 officers in the same area. A mobilization of this magnitude requires significant pre-planning.

Each of the 34 sworn and six civilian members of the Mt. Pleasant Police is assigned to work the day of the game. This requires overtime money to be set aside during budget sessions. Fortunately, the city commission recognizes the value of keeping the city safe and secure during large events and is very supportive in their funding of law enforcement efforts in this area. Beyond the Mt. Pleasant staff, there is a need for over 100 extra officers.

The Michigan State Police (MSP) offers a great deal of support. Often only state agencies can muster large numbers of officers for this type of incident. The MSP has significant experience with crowd control, but even adding over 60 state troopers is not sufficient to staff the function. Yeagley requests help from other nearby police and sheriffs departments. Ten different agencies contribute personnel and vehicles to the operation.

The requests are made several months in advance,

allowing nearby agencies to plan accordingly. Even one or two officers from an agency are helpful on a mobilization of this scale. It is also helpful to ask participating agencies for assistance with vehicles. Cars are at a premium during this mobilization.

Mt. Pleasant officers are sent through refresher crowd control training in preparation for the event. This is done in a remote part of the county, allowing officers to practice out of public view. The policy for invoking a skirmish line is reviewed by the county prosecutor to ensure that it is current and legal.

The agency responsible for dispatching should play an early role in the planning. Isabella County does not yet have an 800 MHz radio system, so there are only four radio channels available. Only two of those channels have repeaters that allow for countywide communications. With limited radio capabilities, it is important to carefully assign radio channels. For this operation one repeated channel is dedicated to dispatching regular complaints to cars in the city and county.

One repeated channel is used as the primary tactical channel for the operation. The two non-repeated channels are used for running warrant checks and car-to-car communications. The dispatch center has additional staff on hand. By providing them with a copy of the operations plan and a map with each team's assignments, they are able to more

accurately determine whether or not a call for service is related to the mobilization.

The operation uses the Incident Command System with teams assigned clear areas of responsibility and led by those with clear authority over their activity. The Mt. Pleasant Director of Public Safety serves as the Incident Commander, with the city police captain commanding tactical and the city police Inspector commanding logistics. The state police operations commander reports directly to the Incident Commander. The operation is assigned a PIO.

There are several sites where officers are simply placed on post and told to primarily provide visual deterrence. This is particularly effective in areas where there is a great deal of pedestrian traffic. These are good posts for agencies from out of town, since there is less chance that units will get lost and less need for radio communications. It is also easy to release these officers as soon as there are concrete indications that the night's events have calmed.

Teams are placed at each student populated apartment complex. Apartment team size is determined based on the history of activity at the site during previous mobilizations and on the past 12 months of calls for service data. Each team patrols the complex on foot, making contact with groups of party-goers as the night progresses. The apartment complexes are placed on a large city map, providing a visual guide as to where teams are placed. This map is important for proper deployment of any Mobile

Field Force or regular road patrol units called in for assistance.

If there is a concentration of bars or other liquor establishments in one geographic area of the city, there should be a team assigned to that area. In Mt. Pleasant there are numerous bars in the downtown region. Officers assigned there make contact with bar owners and clearly lay out their expectations. The bar owners know that officers are assigned to the area and that the officers have a clear mission for that evening.

Another critical piece of the mobilization is the mobile field force. The San Diego Police Department provided Mt. Pleasant with the basic outline of a mobile field force concept. Usually assigned as a four officer unit, members of this group are on directed patrol, free to rapidly respond to problem locations or calls for assistance. Isabella County is fortunate to have a multi-agency emergency services team (tactical team). Members of this team staff the mobile field force units, providing four officers per unit and offering commanders flexibility in unit deployment.

Some sort of mobile force is important to hold in reserve. Though the static teams are of significant value, it is good to have a mobile team that is able to swoop into a location. It is responsible for stabilizing the situation for the stationary team, then is immediately released and available to respond to a new area.

Civilian records professionals set up a process for signing in each officer assigned to the event. The officer is

Officers walking the crowd as the game begins. Photo by Dennis Geppert.



given a packet that includes his assignment, mission, commander, call sign and the basic ordinances he might use. At night's end, each officer must sign out. A veteran city officer is assigned full time to help outside agencies complete whatever city paperwork is needed to process arrests and citations.

There are dedicated arrest teams that respond to pick up prisoners at the location of the arrest. This is logistically efficient and provides the crowd with psychological reinforcement regarding the consequences for illegal behavior.

Officers are allowed to wear their fatigue-styled uniforms for this mobilization. Wearing fatigues allows for flexibility in terms of assignment and deployment. It also allows officers to layer their clothing to account for weather and allows for a certain level of comfort for the officers as they work the 10-20 hour day.

Standard gear for such an event includes: full duty belt with assigned equipment (including flashlight), long baton, riot helmet, gas mask and gloves, bullet resistant vest, portable radio and spare radio battery.

Food service and restroom facilities are extremely important. There should always be an urn filled with hot coffee. Restrooms must be easily accessible. Consideration should be given to contacting community service providers and inquiring as to their ability to provide mobile canteens for food and other rest services. Some agencies might even consider donating such services. CMU provides sandwiches, chips and soda.

A comprehensive written plan is essential, especially as the event unfolds. The incident and tactical commanders should have copies of the entire briefing plan so they know where their resources lie. Flexibility is key, but there must be a point of reference for operations. It is helpful to provide copies of the plan to the leaders of each smaller team— apartment teams and downtown teams— to ensure that leaders know which mission has been assigned to whom. Certainly the written plan will be of historical value for the next mobilization.

Police-Work

When the event takes place and officers are mobilized, simple police work takes over. Police activity before, during and after the event should consist primarily of high visibility patrol (in cars, on foot and on bicycles) and vigorous enforcement of public disorder laws and ordinances. The goal is to keep the party-goers moving and in small groups. Officers are directed to notify the tactical commander if they observe a group that exceeds 25 people. The tactical commander and a mobile field force unit respond to the scene to evaluate the group.

Dispersion is one option, moving the group inside is a second option and doing nothing a distant third. It is helpful to use the analogy of the participants acting as a ship searching for a port to dock itself in. By not allowing large groups to congregate in public, the ship is not allowed to dock. With participants flowing from location to location, the intent is that they will self-disperse after some period of time. It is analogous to a ship running out of fuel long before being allowed to tie up to a dock.

Inevitably there will be arrests. In the latest iteration of the event for Mt. Pleasant, there were 21 physical arrests and over 100 citations. Most offenses were alcohol related (primarily minors-in-possession and drunk-and-disorderly subjects). A critical function of the arrest teams is identifying arresting officers and ensuring that each arrested person has an identified arresting officer. Any use of force, complaint of pain or suspect injury should immediately be reported to a command officer.

There is always room for improvement. During the last Western Weekend in Mt. Pleasant, there were significant problems with the use of the radio channels. It is likely that new radio repeaters will have to be installed for the county. Digital cameras to document arrests seemed like a solid idea but there was no process to clearly identify the officers in each photo. Some apartment teams were not staffed appropriately for their assigned area. A comprehensive after action report was completed and will be used in preparing for subsequent events of this nature.

There is no magic method for preventing civil disturbance in small and mid-sized cities. One process that seems to work is the Three Ps system. By building partnerships, carefully planning and doing police-work it is possible to keep post-game celebration safe and legal.

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