

## Universities changing alcohol policies promise safer environments

By Graham Coffelt

College students are synonymous with drinking.

Though the nature of that statement to many is their opinion, some news has come for those falling within the ages 18-22 demographic. College football stadiums are about to give those who choose to drink another chance to do so.

Television contracts, ticket sales and bowl games have all been a part of the popular game for three decades, and now a new avenue for revenue has entered the money grab.

Beer.

Alcohol sales have been a vital part to professional sport, generating millions of dollars a year in advertising and direct product sales within stadiums. Now, after years of fighting, college concession stands around the country are beginning to tap kegs and serve the beverage that has become synonymous with football. The dialogue now for schools trying to implement these policies is whether or not it creates a safer environment during game days on a particular campus.

West Virginia University had this belief in 2011 when its Board of Governors passed policy allowing beer sales inside Milan Puskar Stadium and several other Mountaineer athletic facilities. The change in policy was one of the first major moves for a then new athletic director in Oliver Luck.

Luck, from the time he became athletic director, was told by both city and campus police that the current “pass-out” policy needed revision. The old policy allowed fans to enter the stadium, leave and re-enter as they pleased.

The outdated policy created a situation where Luck and local authorities said an opportunity for binge drinking was available. A dangerous situation was created in Morgantown.

The new policy, unilaterally decided by Luck, no longer allowed fans to re-enter after leaving the stadium, creating a controlled atmosphere. The safer, highly monitored operation allowed beer to be sold without the worry of fans leaving and binge drinking along with drinking in the stadium. A limit of two drinks per sale is designed to limit consumption of beer inside the stadium.

These parameters have made the job easier for people like Bob Roberts. Roberts, the chief of police at the WVUPD, said from the time the new policy was passed, it has faced fewer issues of drunkenness inside of the stadium.

“The sale of alcohol alone has not made a major impact, but when combined with the other programs and changes, our job has become somewhat easier inside the stadium,” Roberts said.

In 2013, during the months of the college football season, Morgantown police made six total arrests based on drunkenness, an improvement from years prior. DUI’s are still an issue, with 79 in 2013, but those arrests are hard to necessarily connect with the new policy.

The school's concessionaire, Sodexo, heavily monitors beer sales at West Virginia. The vendors are trained to not sell to spectators who are visibly inebriated. A valid ID must be present, and beer will not be sold past the 7:30 mark of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter.

Luck said this policy does not have an underage drinking problem, but acknowledges the truths of college students.

"I would be naïve to say that no one under the age of 21 has taken a sip of beer at a Mountaineer football game," Luck said.

One way that has limited chances for underage drinking is concessions selling beer are not directly located near any student seating. The system is not perfect, Luck said, but it is doing the job it was intended for.

On the first two football weekends of the year for West Virginia, a total of 14 calls were made to WVUPD regarding underage drinking, public intoxication or DUI.

Luck said since 2011 the total number of calls per month has gone down near 30 percent, according to the schools metrics. By those numbers, which would mean from 2011 to 2014, WVUPD has received six less calls per month during game day weekends.

The dominant violation of the statistics is underage drinking, but Luck said solutions would not completely resolve underage drinking. The school can only control the amount of alcohol someone of legal age can drink.

Students at Oklahoma State currently go about game days like most students at any campus do.

Students go out and "pre-game," which typically involves binge drinking and little food intake. Pre-gaming is then followed by a visit to a nearby tailgate where food

and more alcohol is consumed. Many students will then leave the tailgate, drink further and then enter the football stadium.

At this point students have consumed a considerable amount of alcohol, which is what some students are concerned for.

Calvin Mann, a student organization leader at Oklahoma State, said these kind of activities can be deadly if not carefully watched.

“You’re never going to stop underage drinking, or even drinking at all,” Mann said. “When you have people pre-gaming games, everybody wants to consume as much alcohol as they can, which can be deadly.”

Of the schools in the Big 12 conference, only West Virginia has enacted such a policy. Schools such as Texas have considered the idea but have left the proverbial money on the table.

Oklahoma State is much like West Virginia. Both are schools located in a smaller, college-oriented town and has a high achieving athletics program. The idea of Oklahoma State going in line with West Virginia wouldn’t be unheard of, but school officials are adamant that there are no plans or even preliminary discussions for such a policy to be in place at the Stillwater campus.

“Alcohol sales at collegiate sporting events is a topic that has probably been discussed on most campuses,” Oklahoma State Athletic Director Mike Holder said. “However, I don’t think you’ll be seeing it on our campus in the near future.”

Unlike West Virginia’s Luck, Director Holder doesn’t have local authorities asking him to review the current policies and to consider revising. The Morgantown

Police Department and the WVUPD both pushed for changes in the re-entry policy, which initiated the later changes to the overall alcohol policy.

Oklahoma State Police are in line with Holder's remarks.

"At this time, OSU does not allow alcohol sales in the general concession areas of the football stadium, and there are no plans in the near future to change that policy," Carrie Hulsey-Greene, public information officer for OSUPD said.

The business side of the argument is what Mann is unsure as to why the school would not follow through on such a lucrative venture.

"It's only going to increase profit sales, selling alcohol," Mann said. "It gives people the alternative to pace themselves and say, 'Okay, I don't need to get that drunk right now, because once I get in the stadium, I can start ordering drinks.'"

West Virginia generated more than \$500,000 in revenue in its first year of selling beer at sporting events.

The school is gaining money for the athletic program while saving money for the police department with less arrests having to be made.

Every situation is relative to the school. That is the message Luck has been spreading to schools considering going into the world of alcohol sales.

"I get a call every six months from a school's AD asking for advice on passing a similar policy," Luck said.

With the situations being relative, Luck said it is not his place to be giving advice to schools that could be facing a different situation than the one he did in Morgantown.

"My advice would be not to give advice," Luck said.