INTRODUCTION

Is the home advantage real or imagined? Can it really influence the outcome of a game? What factors contribute to the phenomenon?

We needed to find out, undertaking extensive research to uncover what it is that creates and enhances the atmosphere in some stadia and reduces it in others.

Using a combination of traditional survey techniques and data captured using our specially developed in-house technology, we have discovered how good design can improve the fan experience, boost a team’s success, and realise a signature stadium with sustainable business benefits.

MATTHEW BIRCHALL
GLOBAL SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT SECTOR DIRECTOR
UNDERSTANDING ATMOSPHERE
WHAT IS ATMOSPHERE?

Here at BuroHappold, as engineers and sports fans, we believe that a good atmosphere is created by energetic fans who are emotionally connected to both the event and the venue in which it is being played.

This emotional connection is the key motivation for attending sports events because, however plush we make our stadia, it is the only thing that can’t be replicated in the comfort of our own homes.

It is the irresistible need that drives us as humans to come together in our tribes, united by a common passion and purpose.

“Atmosphere is the emotional response to the entirety of stimuli in a particular environment.”

UHRICH AND KOENIGSTORFER
EFFECTS OF ATMOSPHERE AT MAJOR SPORTS EVENTS
2009
Creating a venue with a great atmosphere scores the hat-trick of advantages needed to secure a sustainable business model:

**Competitive advantage** - our research shows that there is a definite home advantage for teams that play at stadia with the most charged atmospheres.

**Improved spectator experience** – a lively atmosphere in the venue, combined with a good result on the pitch, leads to an outstanding overall spectator experience.

**Commercial benefits** – success on the pitch boosts ticket sales and sponsorship, and improved spectator experience is linked to increased spending and revenue. In addition, engaged fans create the energetic, high quality live match environment that attracts lucrative television and advertising deals.
Our survey highlighted the links between the design and operational features of venues and the atmosphere experienced by fans. However, we wanted to take this evidence-based approach one step further and try to quantify atmosphere, to understand how it can be affected by everything from the time of the match to the design of the venue itself.

Our research indicated that a match with a great atmosphere is characterised by spectators responding positively to events on and off the pitch. The key reactions of the crowd that contributed to atmosphere were movement and sound, both of which we could measure and analyse scientifically.

This enabled us to observe the difference between stadia and events with good atmosphere, and those with poor atmosphere. Used in conjunction with our ground breaking fan survey, this data allowed us to identify the ingredients that create a venue with atmosphere, and those which do the opposite.

**HOW DID WE QUANTIFY ATMOSPHERE?**
CREATING THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE
ENGINEERING THE HOME ADVANTAGE

Previous work by our acoustic engineering partners, Vanguardia, had identified that the atmosphere in a football stadium was largely the product of four features:

1. ACTION ON THE PITCH AND INTERACTION WITH THE PLAYERS
2. THE INTERACTION WITH OTHER SPECTATORS
3. THE OPERATION OF THE VENUE
4. THE VENUE ITSELF

Our research also identified another contributing factor, and that was the experiential context of the fans at the event which could, for instance, be positively or negatively influenced by the journey to the venue and the importance of the match. Because of this, it is important to understand the complete experience of the fans, from sofa to sofa – with a match in between, of course – and how this whole journey can be enhanced through thoughtful planning and good design.

Similarly, we identified specific things that stadium owners and operators can do to make sure fans have a positive experience inside and outside the venue, resulting in stronger engagement, a better atmosphere and overall experience, and increased revenue. These include providing good quality spaces for spectators to congregate in before and after events, and personalising venues to establish an identity and sense of place that fans can relate to.

Individually and together, these factors all help to improve the atmosphere of a venue, creating a welcoming and charged environment for the spectators, which in turn intimidates the away team and inspires the home players to achieve even greater success.
In today’s competitive commercial climate, many stadium owners are looking to establish multifunction venues that can support everything from football matches, to corporate events, to rock concerts.

However, our research indicated that the history and identity of the ground are incredibly important in making fans feel connected with the stadium and the event. Because of this, building new, multipurpose stadia could be at odds with achieving a good atmosphere.

The danger is that making a new venue ‘loose fit’ and capable of accommodating a wide range of events and teams will dilute the sense of ownership and atmosphere for fans, and reduce the home advantage for teams.

This risk can be reduced by ensuring the stadium has one dominant use or tenant, by building multiple conjoined facilities on the same site, or by making it truly adaptable in layout, operation and feel for a specific range of sports and entertainment events.

There is a suite of active and passive technologies that can transform the field of play, including reconfiguration of the seating bowl and improvement of the circulation spaces. Even the appearance of the stadium can be personalised for different events, so that the venue can adapt perfectly to the role it has to perform on any given day.
A GAME OF TWO HALVES

The majority of match day income is made from corporate hospitality, which has led to an increasing pressure to provide a greater proportion of this seating in our stadia. This can create a real conundrum for stadium owners.

While increasing the number of corporate seats may make financial sense in the short term, if it decreases the atmosphere of the venue it could result in a poorer overall experience for all the spectators, reduced quality of television product, and a competitive disadvantage for the home team – all factors that could impact the commercial performance of the club over time.

Poor atmosphere is not inevitable, however, and sensitive design and good stadium operation can mitigate this issue. While the ideal blend of corporate versus general admission will vary from venue to venue, there does appear to be a clear advantage in not breaking up spectator seating tiers with mid-level corporate accommodation, for instance, and in providing large, single tiers for committed home and away general admission fans.
OUR RESEARCH IN PRACTICE
Built on the footprint of legendary White Hart Lane, this UEFA/FIFA compliant stadium is fine-tuned to generate an incredible experience for football fans, and yet at the flick of a switch it can transform into a unique venue for American Football, or even a rock concert.
We crowned this 2 million ft², 80,000 seat arena with an innovative 60m² oculus roof that establishes the venue as a new icon for Atlanta.

Watch the animation to see how opening this innovative roof creates a dramatic and dynamic spectator event in itself.
DON’T LET THE GAME END HERE

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