



Ron Sandelli,  
director of team safety  
for the Toronto Blue Jays

## ROGERS CENTRE GETS ACCESS CONTROL MAKEOVER

Toronto stadium beefs up security features at former SkyDome facility • By Vawn Himmelsbach

**W**hen Rogers Communications, owners of the Toronto Blue Jays, bought the SkyDome last year from Sportsco International, they decided the stadium needed a makeover.

"That's when we started looking at changing the facility and upgrading all of the equipment," says Mario Coutinho, director of operations for the Rogers Centre.

The stadium in downtown Toronto has 65,000 seats at full capacity, is home to the Blue Jays and Argonauts, and holds numerous sporting and entertainment events. It features removable turf and a retractable roof, and can be converted from a baseball field to a monster truck show to a concert theatre.

The Rogers Centre is in its first year of improving the infrastructure throughout the building. As part of the makeover, the operations department is beefing up security, including access control with magnetic stripe cards, which will be upgraded to proximity cards over the next two to three years. The facility is outfitted with a wireless network that supports ticket access control in addition to employee access to restricted areas.

A direct print-to-card printer, the Fargo DTC 525 from IDenticam, is used to print magnetic stripe ID cards for full- and part-time employees. When the photo ID is scanned with a handheld computer, the employee's photo shows up on the handheld to verify the identity of the cardholder.

Restrictions are pre-loaded onto the

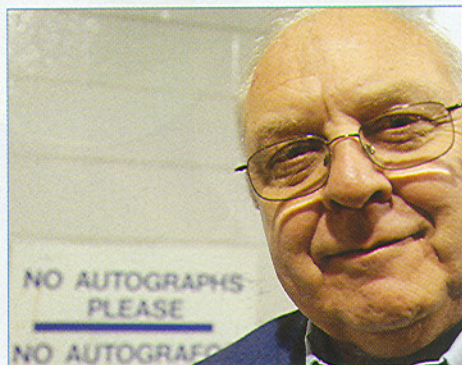
cards. "If you don't have access to the club house or the press box, then it doesn't allow you to enter," says Coutinho. "We're actually able to print a report of who entered what location at what time."

The Rogers Centre is also using ID cards for day-game employees and media, but these cards don't have a magnetic stripe. Instead, an internal card reader scans a bar code on the front of the cards to verify credentials and track admittance into restricted areas. The clubhouse, for example, is considered the players' sanctuary, and media are only permitted inside at specific times. By using the cards, the media relations department is able to track the media's whereabouts — and save the expense of magnetic card readers and magnetic stripe cards.

Currently the Rogers Centre is not issuing magnetic stripe cards to players or opposing teams' players because there are other rules and regulations that apply to Major League baseball in terms of credentials.

"This is based on the Rogers Centre requirements for our staff and our local media," says Coutinho, adding they also provide courtesy cards to the players' wives and senior sponsors to give them easy access to the building.

"I would love to see the access cards be used for access to the club house because it would certainly resolve a lot of our issues there," says Ron Sandelli, director of team safety for the Blue Jays. "But at this point, they haven't been done."



They have been used, however, at the Blue Jays' spring training facility in Florida. Only a few designated people can use their access cards to disconnect the facility's alarm system, which means anyone else with an access card can't get in during off-hours when the alarm is set. If they had keys, they'd be able to get in whenever they wanted. It would also be harder to keep track of those keys because employees come and go.

"If they leave and you don't get their keys back, and even if you did, there's always a concern that somebody's going to have a copy of that key," says Sandelli. "What you end up with is a very expensive venture of re-keying some of your doors. By going to the card system, one little bang on the computer and they're out of the system." If an employee loses their card, that card is deleted out of the system and a new one is issued.

"The savings in those instances, I don't know if you can put a number on it," he says. "It's much easier to control a card system through the computer, than giving everyone sets of keys for, say, 20 different doors."

The Rogers Centre purchased a networked system for the cards, the **EPI Suite Pro Version 6** from IDenticam, though it hasn't rolled it out yet. Part of its plan is to upgrade the facility with new fibre and, when this happens, every office will be connected to the network.

Each department would have access to the system and be able to print photo IDs for new hires off the main printer. They could also bring up employee data at any point in the building. "Rather

than having a standalone system in each office, this allows them to interconnect and simply have a camera and access to the software at each of the sub-offices," says Newman Mallon, marketing manager for IDenticam in Markham, Ont.

The Rogers Centre will eventually replace its magnetic stripe cards with proximity cards, but their current card printer allows them to create both magnetic stripe and proximity ID cards.

Bar codes are the cheapest way to go, says Mallon, but they're not widely used for access. Magnetic stripe cards are the most popular form of access card, similar to a debit or credit card, and require physical contact with a reader. Proximity cards are the next step up, and allow access by passing the card close to a reader, without actually swiping it. They're more secure than a magnetic stripe, but also more expensive.

Most organizations are moving toward proximity cards because they're more convenient and don't require swiping, says Mallon.

For the Rogers Centre, this is a work in progress. "It gave us an opportunity to update everyone's photo on file, so we also updated our database," says Coutinho. "Previously we had photos that were 16 years old."

With plans to move to proximity cards and roll out a networked system, it's also an opportunity to improve access control throughout Toronto's landmark stadium. ♣

*Vawn Himmelsbach is a Toronto-based freelance writer.*

**"I would love to see the access cards be used for access to the club house because it would certainly resolve a lot of our issues there."**