

Master of ceremonies

Short time scales meant that designing and implementing the audio and comms systems for the Qatar Handball World Cup was a sprint that turned into a marathon. **James Ling** reports

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Pro Audio Middle East, we led the magazine with the story of the ceremony sound system for the recent Handball World Cup in Qatar. While that news article covered much of the equipment that was used by Auditoria for the event, there is a larger story to tell about getting to the point where the ceremonies could take place.

Rather than an office, a tradeshow floor or even an equipment filled warehouse, the tale of Auditoria's involvement with the ceremonies starts at a celebration. 'I was attending a wedding in Doha in November last year, I knew loads of people attending, some of whom were from David Atkins Enterprises (DAE),' recalls Auditoria director Scott Willsallen. 'DAE had just been contracted to create and deliver the ceremonies for the Qatar 2015 World Men's Handball Championships in January, only a couple of short months away.'

During the wedding Mr Willsallen was asked to become involved with the ceremonies and for Auditoria to take on the audio element. This saw the company take responsibility for the design, supply and operation of the audio and comms for the ceremonies and a further agreement with Great Big Events (GBE) saw

the company fill the same role for the sports presentations.

Due to the short time-scale, Mr Willsallen decided to move rapidly to start the process. 'I made a trip out to the venue the following day to get moving as quickly as possible. Finding equipment and crew is relatively easy, but there are certain essentials such as frequency licensing and understanding the restrictions of the venue that required immediate attention,' he explains.

'When I arrived at the venue, it was a building site with a daily workforce of approximately 12,000 and an overnight team of 2,000 with the aim of finishing the venue as quickly as possible. A reasonable guess would suggest there was at least four months' work required to finish the venue, they had a few weeks. However, I've said that at many Olympic projects in the past and been proved wrong,' he continues. 'I collected a drawing package from the building project managers, walked around the site to understand the layout and began work on the audio system and communications system.'

The design itself went through a number of stages before the final system was agreed. 'My initial design was based on a complete



The competition took place at Lusail

loudspeaker system for the whole venue as we had not received any details about the fixed house system,' says the Auditoria director. 'During the first couple of weeks it became clear that the house system was of sufficient performance to only require a stacked loudspeaker system to provide localisation to the projection content on the field of play.'

This resulted in a ground-stacked 36-element L-Acoustics K2 loudspeaker system being supplied for the event by Dubai-based rental house, Delta Sound. Low end support was via 24 SB28 placed beneath the seating, and the whole solution was powered by LA-Racks. Control included DiGiCo SD7 and SD11 consoles that drove the system over an Optocore network.

'Time was against us and I wanted a loudspeaker system I was familiar with to ensure the design would translate well from paper to venue, and to ensure the commissioning time was as short as possible,' explains Mr Willsallen. 'K2 is a product that I am very familiar with, and it performed perfectly.'

Further specialist equipment came from Italian company, Agora. It supplied the Fairlight replay systems, timecode readers, Shure Axient wireless microphones and the in-ear monitor system with customised RF amplification hardware.

Completing the equipment requirements was the comms system sourced through The PA People in Australia. This was based on a Clear-Com Eclipse matrix with around 40 V-Series key stations, 16 HelixNet digital beltpacks, a five-user Tempest system, 16 analogue duplex repeaters, eight simplex interfaces and about 200 two-way radios. 'We had two-way radios on the ground within 10 days to assist the operational and technical teams with their preparations,' recalls Mr Willsallen. 'The communications system was shipped in from Australia. The PA People prepared the system

'My initial design was based on a complete loudspeaker system for the whole venue as we had not received any details about the fixed house system'



Scott Willsallen was responsible for the audio design of the events



The World Handball Championships in Doha saw Auditoria call in support from around the region and the world

to our requirements and were ready to ship the goods within a couple of days of finalising the design.'

While most of this equipment is relatively common in the region, it is interesting to note that it was supplied by different companies based in different areas of the world. The reason behind this was one fairly unique to the Middle East.

'Equipment availability near the end of December is difficult in

Caitlyn Horne and the team at EFM did a brilliant job in getting the goods into Doha and to the venues ahead of schedule.'

Equally, there were other areas where preparing for the event was a lot easier than expected. 'I believed frequency licensing would be difficult, but the Communications Regulatory Authority were very supportive and reacted quickly to our submissions ensuring we were not held up by red



A DiGiCo SD7 was part of the control system

the region due to National Day celebrations in Doha and New Year's Eve celebrations in Dubai,' explains Mr Willsallen. 'Our goal was to be ready for rehearsals to commence on January 1st so we implemented a basic audio control system to manage the early rehearsals. We then transitioned to our preferred control system as soon as the equipment arrived in Doha following New Year's Eve.'

While sourcing the equipment was an early challenge, the whole process was a lot smoother than Mr Willsallen had initially thought. 'I expected freight transit times and clearance would be an issue but Dylan Owen,

tape,' says Mr Willsallen.

This is not to say that there were no challenges for the ceremonies. 'We had all sorts of problems,' recalls the Auditoria director. 'Perhaps the biggest challenge was keeping our crew informed and updated in the face of constant changes to our scope and the schedule.'

'Although this project began as a sprint, once the systems were installed and rehearsals began, it was more of a marathon which can be a difficult transition to manage,' he continues. 'Combine that with the uncertainty of change, and keeping our team informed and updated was of utmost importance.'



A busy FOH during the event

It is the crew itself that Mr Willsallen reserves special praise for. In terms of Auditoria staff, the team consisted of Steve Logan and Luis Miranda on replay, Chris Johnson was the senior systems engineer, Martyn Ward mixed, Marie White managed the team, Rachel Caldwell and Tracey Bravo took care of the distribution of radios and the management of wireless in-ears and microphones. In addition to this, Andrea Tesini was the RF engineer and managed Agora's contribution to the event,

while the crew from Delta was led by Craig Harvey and Andy Jackson. Finally Campbell Waller, Liam McKeown and Scott Davidson from The PA People were responsible for installing, engineering and programming the comms system.

'They all did an amazing job in keeping up with the changes, remaining consistently positive and willing to do anything to make it work,' says Mr Willsallen. 'We all worked extremely well as a team in some often difficult circumstances.'

With the system installed and the show rehearsed and ready, all that was left was the performance itself. Again, this is something that Mr Willsallen was pleased with. 'It sounded great. The music for the ceremonies was by David Pierce who I have worked with previously on the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics and the Doha 2011 Arab Games, and he did a fantastic job. The music was really well produced and he worked closely with us during the mixing to deliver a great sounding show,' he recalls. 'Our clients (DAE and GBE) were both full of praise for how well everything went and were amazed at how well we handled the changes.'

Sporting ceremonies always provide their own unique challenges, and the Handball World Cup was no different. Experience counts for these events, and Auditoria showed once again why its services have been called upon for so many ceremonies.

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The technical setup for the ceremonies