The Journal of
COLLEGIATE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

ISSN: 2576-3687 (Print) 2576-3695 (Online) | **Journal Website:** www.collegeems.com

Planning for the crowd: How IC-EMS used FirstNet to elevate game day care at Indiana University

Charles Hardnett

Keywords: collegiate-based emergency medical services; comunication; technology

Citation (AMA Style): Hardnett C. Planning for the crowd: How IC-EMS used FirstNet to elevate game day care at Indiana University. J Coll Emerg Med Serv. 2026;8(2):01. doi:10.30542/JCEMS.2026.08.02.01

Electronic Link: https://doi.org/10.30542/JCEMS.2026.08.02.01

Published Online: March 29, 2026

Planning for the crowd: How IC-EMS used FirstNet to elevate game day care at Indiana University

Keywords: collegiate-based emergency medical services, communication, technology

Charles Hardnett

When Indiana University (IU) football entered a historic new era of success, the excitement extended far beyond the field. Sellout crowds, expanded tailgating, and increased national attention transformed game days into complex, campus-wide operations — events that demanded a higher level of coordination and communication.

For the Intra-Collegiate Emergency Medical Service (IC-EMS) at Indiana University, this shift reinforced the principle that effective emergency medical response at large events happens through intentional planning, strong partnerships, and reliable communication.

A student-led organization with a big responsibility

IC-EMS is a fully student-led emergency medical service organization that provides event coverage across campus and throughout the community. While guided by faculty and medical leadership, students manage nearly every aspect of operations — from staffing and training to protocols and logistics.

"All our students typically come in with little to no clinical experience, and IC-EMS trains them to provide event coverage at both IU and Bloomington community events," said Adhitya Balaji, IC-EMS graduate advisor and third-year medical student.

That responsibility grew significantly during the 2024-2025 football season. IU football games draw tens of thousands of fans to Memorial Stadium and the surrounding tailgate areas, requiring IC-EMS to coordinate closely with the University's athletic department and multiple public safety partners.

Charles Hardnett is an Applications Architect in the Stakeholder Collaboration Division at the FirstNet Authority. He has more than 25 years of experience in software development, applications architecture, research, software project management, and higher education. He has worked at organizations such as Nortel, Georgia Institute of Technology, Spelman College, and Gwinnett Technical College. Today, his primary responsibilities fall within managing solution experience engagements with public safety and developing technical content for the FirstNet Authority's stakeholders. In addition, he provides technical expertise to the FirstNet applications ecosystem, which includes mobile, web, and desktop applications, Internet of Things, location-based services, push-to-talk, FirstNet developer program, and FirstNet App Catalog.

Why pre-planning mattered more than ever

The 2025-2026 football season marked a turning point. Success on the field translated into increased attendance and activity well beyond the stadium gates. Recognizing this shift early, IC-EMS began planning nearly a year in advance — well before the season concluded.

"This really started upon the conclusion of the last regular season home game … we realized that we had a larger responsibility to ensure that we were providing adequate medical coverage at these games," Balaji explained.

Recognizing the importance of reliable communication, IC-EMS worked with the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) to navigate the process of gaining access to FirstNet, the nationwide public safety broadband network.

After presenting their State of Indiana EMS certification, FirstNet Authority, in collaboration with its network partner AT&T, provided demo devices with appropriate licenses, allowing IC-EMS to experience the FirstNet service firsthand. This not only ensured their preparedness for the football season but also allowed them to offer valuable feedback on the FirstNet service.

Through the FirstNet Authority's pre-planning support, the federal agency worked with IC-EMS to evaluate responder location mapping, assess coverage, and explore broadband solutions that could support expanded operations. These conversations with experts laid the groundwork for integrating FirstNet into IC-EMS's game-day strategy — which would later help the organization score big wins.

Turning planning into practice with broadband

As crowds grew, so did the strain on commercial wireless networks. Thousands of fans using their devices simultaneously created connectivity challenges, especially inside a large concrete stadium and across sprawling tailgater areas. For IC-EMS, reliable communications were no longer optional but necessary for the task at hand.

"With the capabilities of FirstNet, with priority and preemption, we wanted to make sure we had the best communication possibilities we could … to make sure the teams could talk with each other and talk with the command center," said Dr. David Rodgers, IC-EMS faculty advisor.

Through a unique partnership with IU RedLab, a crisis technology research group based at the Luddy School of Informatics, IC-EMS utilized Team Awareness Kit (TAK), which is a mapping and situational awareness tool developed by Air Force Research Library that allowed command staff to see the real-time location of EMS crews across the stadium, parking lots, and tailgate fields. Instead of relying on radio descriptions in a sea of tents and similar jerseys, responders could navigate directly to patients and other units.

"Deploying TAK, with the help of IU RedLab, really helped us out a lot. TAK relies on a steady broadband connection. And without FirstNet resources, we would not have a stable signal to have that 100% reliability with the system," Rodgers explained. "There was a lot of versatility when it came to our use of TAK, but it was all dependent upon connectivity."

Expanding care through technology and partnerships

The enhanced communications environment created the need for an expansion of IC-EMS's role at football games. In addition to providing traditional first aid coverage, IC-EMS deployed multiple basic life support roaming units — using golf carts to respond to calls across a wider geographical footprint, only calling advanced life support resources as needed so they could remain available.

FirstNet-enabled devices also supported on-scene medical diagnostics. IC-EMS used FirstNet phones as hotspots to transmit EKGs from cardiac monitors directly to on-site medical professionals for real-time interpretation; these capabilities would not have been feasible without FirstNet.

"Without FirstNet resources, we would not have a stable signal to have 100% reliability with the system … and we're able to dispatch resources more efficiently and take care of patients better and faster," Rodgers said.

Together, these tools improved response times, expanded situational awareness, and elevated patient care for all game-day attendees.

A model for large events and collegiate EMS

IC-EMS's experience demonstrates how early engagement, thoughtful pre-planning, and the right communications tools can transform EMS operations at events. By combining student leadership with advanced technology and strong collaboration, IC-EMS not only met the moment of a historic football season but set a model for how preparedness and connectivity can be scaled to meet the needs of a growing community.

If you are interested in learning more about the FirstNet Authority and how FirstNet may be able to help with public safety's operations on your campus, please email Charles Hardnett at Charles.Hardnett@firstnet.gov.

Author Affiliations: From First Responder Network Authority (C.H.)
Address for Correspondence: Charles Hardnett | Charles.Hardnett@firstnet.gov
Conflicts of Interest/Funding Sources: By the JCEMS Submission Declaration Form, all authors are required to disclose all potential conflicts of interest and funding sources. No conflicts or interest or funding sources were disclosed.
Authorship Criteria: By the JCEMS Submission Declaration Form, all authors are required to attest to meeting the four ICMJE.org authorship criteria: (1) Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND (2) Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND (3) Final approval of the version to be published; AND (4) Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.
Submission History: Received March 06, 2026; accepted for publication March 21, 2026
Published Online: March 29, 2026
Reviewer Information: In accordance with JCEMS editorial policy, Advice & Practices manuscripts undergo editorial review by at least two reviewers. JCEMS thanks the reviewers who contributed to the review of this work.

Electronic Link: https://doi.org/10.30542/JCEMS.2026.08.02.01