

CASE STUDY

The Carolina Panthers Use Fortinet Unified SASE to Secure Both On-Premises and Remote Users

Tepper Sports & Entertainment (TSE) is the parent company of the Carolina Panthers, Major League Soccer's (MLS) Charlotte FC, and Bank of America Stadium where both teams play. The stadium also regularly hosts concerts and other events.

The company operates in two locations. The Panthers have offices and practice facilities at Bank of America Stadium, but most of Charlotte FC's facilities are a few miles away at Atrium Health Performance Park. The technology and cybersecurity team is responsible for ensuring that both locations have the seamless connectivity employees, guests, and vendors need; while also protecting the assets the organization requires to maintain a competitive advantage on and off the field.

"We need to create a seamless, secure, high-performance environment that supports the diverse needs of the large venues and sports franchises that we operate," says Rob Bence, vice president of technology and cybersecurity for TSE. "Our network needs to meet both NFL and MLS standards for delivering a secure networking environment for our employees, fans, and athletes. Our goal is to provide a robust perimeter defense so that we can stop cyberthreats and secure everything in our network."

Security Must Stay Vigilant

One key challenge for the TSE team is that much of the organization's most important intellectual property (IP) is in the hands of remote users—the player scouts. "Our scouts, carry a lot of intellectual property," he says. "For example, they have report reviews on players and sensitive data about potential schemes the team has come up with."

"We cannot risk having scouting information stolen," he adds. "Football operations are constantly traversing different locations, working from universities, hotels, airplanes, stadiums, and the scouting combine. We cannot lose sight of how crucial it is to protect the team from loss of data, malicious attacks, and IP theft, regardless of where the scout is located."

TSE set two key priorities. First, it wanted to deploy a secure access service edge (SASE) solution to ensure that remote users are as well-protected as those on-site. Fortinet Unified SASE combines Secure SD-WAN with cloud-delivered security service edge (SSE) to extend the convergence of networking and security from the network edge to remote users. And second, it wanted to streamline the company's infrastructure by consolidating its networking and security vendors. At the time, the organization used an assortment of technology vendors Fortinet secured access to the wireless network within the stadium, as well as provided VPN tunneling between the stadium and Atrium Health Performance Park. This multivendor complexity made network security more difficult to manage.



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VP, Technology and Cybersecurity
Tepper Sports & Entertainment

Details

Customer: Tepper Sports & Entertainment/Carolina Panthers

Industry: Entertainment

Headquarters: Charlotte, North Carolina

Number of SASE Users: 500

"I did not have a great sense of our security posture in the multivendor environment," Rob says. "There was no single console where I could see what was going on in our environment. Did we have the right intrusion protection? What were we catching with web filtering? Were our controls and application security considered best practice? The goal of our improvement initiative was to strengthen the security posture—and our visibility into the security posture."

Fortinet came to the TSE team's attention as a provider offering everything they needed: a FortiSASE solution that integrates tightly with FortiGate Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs). As the team held meetings and design sessions with Fortinet, they came to understand that Fortinet Unified SASE would meet all their needs, and then some.

"We are a lean organization, with a limited engineering staff," Rob says. "We needed a simple solution so that we could maintain and manage it in-house. When we looked at how the FortiOS crosses from the firewalls to the SASE seamlessly, it was clear we would not need training on multiple different tools. The consistency of the interface across the Fortinet solutions gives us a pure foundation for our future security environment as well, as MLS and NFL requirements change and other needs arise."

Standardizing on Fortinet

TSE engaged FortiCare Professional Services to help design a network that would be easier to manage, while also integrating with SASE to protect remote users. The company decided to deploy FortiSASE, replace its edge firewalls with FortiGates, and roll out the Fortinet management stack of FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer. The meetings with FortiCare Professional Services convinced TSE to deploy FortiSASE not just to remote users, but to everyone.

"We were impressed that FortiSASE is universal, always on, and always protecting," Rob says. "We decided to make FortiSASE our end-users' new normal. That way, they are always seamlessly connected on all their devices, whether they are on-site or remote, with all traffic going through FortiSASE. This consistency is beneficial—both for the IT group as we manage the environment and for the end-users. Our users need security to be frictionless, even as they securely access whatever they need."

FortiCare Professional Services helped the company roll out FortiSASE to a pilot group of users, including the technology team, some back-office workers, and some remote staff. "We are working with everyone in this alpha group to make sure that everything is working properly, and we are gathering data," Rob reports. So far, the testing is going well.

FortiCare Professional Services also helped install a high-availability (HA) pair of FortiGate NGFWs in both Bank of America Stadium and Atrium Health Performance Park. All the firewalls are currently running in monitoring mode. "We have them observing our network traffic right now, and that is going great," Rob says. "We are getting excellent support from Fortinet as a partner, which is helping us knock out some of our use cases. Our relationship with FortiCare Professional Services is giving us exposure to best practices and opportunities to improve security in other areas."

Business Impact

- Improved security of intellectual property for scouts and other remote workers
- Unified security management enables quicker reaction in the event of an attack
- Better visibility to threats supports requests for additional security tools, justifies prior investments
- Reduced staff training and faster resolution of issues, due to consistency of interface across SASE and NGFWs

Solutions

- Fortinet Unified SASE
- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiGate Next-Generation Firewall
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiManager

Services

- FortiGuard AI-Powered Security Services Enterprise Protection Bundle
- FortiCare Professional Services
- FortiGuard Data Loss Prevention (DLP) Service
- FortiGuard OT Security Service
- FortiGuard Attack Surface Security Service



Each NGFW has the FortiGuard AI-Powered Security Services Enterprise Protection Bundle. The FortiGuard Data Loss Prevention (DLP) Service and FortiGuard OT Security Service are already proving valuable. Likewise, the FortiGuard Attack Surface Security Service, which continuously assesses and rates the organization's security posture, is making TSE more secure. The team is particularly enthused about its coverage of IoT devices—crucial for a venue that has many different devices plugging in all the time.

Soon, the company will roll out the FortiManager management platform. Being able to manage the FortiGates and FortiSASE through FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer will simplify network administrators' lives. "The Fortinet solutions will give us a simplified management environment so that we can look at what is going on without logging into multiple systems and multiple dash-boards," Rob says. "Having that single pane of glass will make it easier to see threat intelligence, as well as which devices are responding and which are not. We will be able to quickly handle exceptions, without having to hunt for information."

"FortiGate virtual machines [VMs] have been successfully deployed in Microsoft Azure as part of our integrated security strategy. Working with FortiCare Professional Services, we've implemented a well-engineered network design spanning our on-premises locations and Azure environment. This extension of the Fortinet ecosystem ensures unified security across our cloud platform, optimizing protection without compromising performance," Rob says. "We had to extend the Fortinet ecosystem to our cloud platforms so that our security has more cohesiveness companywide. Bringing Azure into the Fortinet Security Fabric helps ensure that all our security solutions are optimized, while not slowing down end-user traffic."

In the Foxhole with Fortinet

The result is a network security architecture that is transparent to end-users, manageable in-house for the IT team, and highly secure. "When we rolled out FortiSASE, we expected three outcomes, and we are achieving all of them," Rob says. "First, we have enhanced our security posture, with consistent security policies that are enforced on all the network edges. Second, we can now see real-time threat information disseminated among all the Fortinet devices, which provides for better protection and response. And third, we have built a unified approach to network security that has closed the security gaps that existed in our multivendor environment." Visibility is key to this unified security management.

"Before, we had limited visibility of what people were connecting to from our devices," Rob says. "Now, with Fortinet Unified SASE, we have clear visibility to the number of true attempted intrusions on a day-to-day basis," he continues. This data enables the team to shore up security, justify investments they have already made, and demonstrate the need for additional protection in some areas. "Identifying our key attack vectors has provided valuable insights. This evidence reinforces the reality of cyberthreats and strengthens the case for continued security awareness and investment," says Rob.

He adds, "The integration of FortiSASE into the Fortinet Security Fabric will serve as the foundation of our strategy as we take on additional security controls. Our leagues are maturing, and more cybersecurity controls are coming into play. Complying with MLS and NFL rules may require us to deploy additional security solutions down the road, and the Fortinet Security Fabric streamlines our ability to implement different components."

"Fortinet is a true partner to Tepper Sports & Entertainment. The Fortinet team has helped us 'keep pounding' on our security posture. Fortinet Unified SASE and the FortiGates prevent data leakage and help us stay ahead of the game so that if a malicious attack arrives, they are prepared to respond."

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Meanwhile, training for IT staff has also gone well. "Having a consistent interface between FortiSASE and the FortiGates has been amazing," Rob says. "We did not have to learn multiple operating systems, and we can navigate both solutions with confidence. That not only makes us more efficient, but it has removed some of the guesswork of troubleshooting, so we can resolve issues internally more quickly. We looked at cobbling together SASE and firewalls from different vendors, but the cost of support would have gone up. With FortiSASE and the FortiGates, we have significantly increased our security without adding extra work and inefficiencies for the support team."

Rob concludes, "Fortinet is a true partner to Tepper Sports & Entertainment. The Fortinet team has helped us with our security posture. Fortinet Unified SASE and FortiGates prevent data leakage and help us stay ahead of the game so that if a malicious attack arrives, we are prepared to respond. We are ahead of the curve when it comes to getting the best possible protection."

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