

Hip-Hop Rap Concert A 'Disappointment

Written by Robert ID1258

Monday, 25 April 2005 01:28 -

The 15-year-old grudgingly dialed his mother's number on his cell phone as he slouched in the first-aid room at the Casper Events Center. Detective Tim Weinhandl then spoke, telling the woman he caught the boy "red handed" as he tried to smoke marijuana using a slightly modified soda bottle.

"What, were you standing right behind me?" the boy asked, shedding for a moment the sullenness with which he greeted his new companions at Wednesday night's hip-hop & rap Spring Bling concert.

"Yes," Weinhandl replied. The woman eventually agreed to pick up her son, who was one of five people cited by undercover police officers during the event on suspicion of possessing marijuana.

In all, it was a busy night for Casper Events Center staff and police as several performers -- some of them showing up late -- arrived in Casper for the second night of rap performances in less than a month.

The crowd Wednesday night was smaller than the one that rollicked in March to rap artists Bone Thugs n' Harmony and Tech N9ne. Sgt. Larry Baker, who supervised a team of eight officers for the event, said the crowd seemed intent on making up for its size.

"It was normally the kind of activity we'd see with much larger crowds," Baker said.

Police arrested three people on assault charges and two on suspicion of interfering with police who worked the event. Three people were ejected from the concert for "causing problems" and three were cited for underage drinking.

Max Torbert, director of the events center, said Wednesday's concert with hip-hop and rap artists Trick Daddy, Blaze, the Outlawz and Too Short is the sixth rap concert that has been brought to Casper. It may also be the last one featuring "raunchy, gang-type rap."

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"I was disappointed pretty much all the way around," Torbert said. With weak ticket sales and the performers arriving late, "we'll be lucky to break even on this one."

For police, a night of breaking up fights and questioning those too young to drink alcohol started before the first performer took the stage about 25 minutes after the scheduled starting time of 7:30 p.m.

An eruption of ice cubes out of the dense throng gathered on the center's floor marked this first scuffle, the apparent result of a hair-pulling episode. The main combatant was promptly handcuffed and taken to the building's first-aid room, the spot where police spent the evening writing tickets and sorting out who was at fault in various squabbles.

This man was ultimately released and allowed to leave the concert, short only what he spent on admission.

Dressed in hooded sweatshirts and jean jackets, the five plain-clothes officers who patrolled the concert were not quite inconspicuous even before they were forced to pull out their handcuffs.

Few others in attendance sported mustaches, for one thing. And even among those who were legally able to drink alcohol, few were outside the age range where they wouldn't expect scrutiny from most bartenders.

Three officers looked out over the floor of the events center as the first performer led the crowd in a chant of "F - - - the police!" A spotlight played across the revellers, occasionally leaving them in darkness.

"When the lights go out, you can see their pipes glowing," one officer said.

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While some who smoked marijuana went unpunished, police ticketed the boy who fashioned his own pipe. They said they later watched two girls passing a glass pipe back and forth. Those two, likewise, were ticketed.

Underage drinkers were a bit more difficult to spot. A woman who looked not a day over 17 pulled out identification saying she was at least 21. A phone call confirmed she was telling the truth.

Two girls who looked no younger than the woman openly carried the plastic beer bottles sold at the events center. They tried to walk away from police when asked for IDs.

Later, apparently resigned to her fate, one asked, "How'd you guys know we weren't old enough?"

Police say they look for people who simply look too young. They also watch for people of legal age looking to pass on extra drinks out of friendship or an interest in minor profits.

Sgt. Baker said he thinks police efforts have a "big effect" on underage drinking and other illegal activities at the concerts, at least.

"It keeps things from being worse," he said.

Advice to parents

A number of fights were reported at Wednesday's Casper rap concert, and police ticketed several people for drug use and underage drinking. Events Center officials advise parents to know what they are getting into by sending their children to concerts unsupervised, particularly to those that carry -- as did the Spring Bling -- a "parental advisory."