Martin Audio WP for Show at St. Andrews Stadium



Within 15 minutes of completing victory over Preston North End on Easter Monday, Birmingham City's St. Andrews stadium had been transformed into a rock concert venue. The production team behind the staging - enabling local legends UB40 to kick off their world tour and announce their new UB45 album release - was Martin Audio partner, 22live. At the same time the football club was able to reveal its new branding. Henceforth known as St Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, the stadium provided the perfect setting for this post match entertainment. But first 22live, led by Paul Timmins, had many challenges to overcome - not least where to site the 15 ground stacks of Martin Audio WPC and WPS line array, as well as the speed of deployment to get the show underway immediately after the final whistle.

"I always wanted to do this really unique event with the Martin Audio option," Timmins admitted. "Over the years I've put out many perimeter pitch-side systems, delivered half-time shows, and presented playback gigs at sports events … but there has been nothing quite like this." The story begins when UB40 production manager Sean Busby-Little, having been approached by the football club about the proposed event, contacted 22live. "We've worked a lot together in the past,

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including military work in Afghanistan, so I've known Sean a long time," continued Timmins. "The fact we were based locally helped, as with the odd timings there was always likely to be a lot of running around." The fact that the date was suddenly brought forward 12 days from the originally scheduled April 13th date.

Two days' rehearsal in Digbeth helped new monitor engineer Harry Le Masurier settle in, while staging options were debated and the fact that 56 channels were required, choice of stage was paramount. He also knew this was no mere playback event … the band were going to perform live- After dismissing other options they decided to construct the staging in the 'sterile' area - or empty block of seating - segregating the home and away fans in the Gil Merrick stand.

"The seats were removed, and the staging company built a two tiered stage because of the raking - set high up to avoid obscuring sightlines. Although big LED screens and lighting were able to be flown from the roof, in view of weight loading, audio was always going to be a pitch side perimeter speaker system." From past experience Paul Timmins was aware of safety implications, cabling challenges and the fact the speakers would need to be located behind the LED wall or advertising hoardings without blocking the access.



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But because of distance variations each stand required its own unique treatment. The Main Stand is quite shallow and didn't need as much power as the Kop side, so I chose WPS, four stacks high. On the Kop stand I used WPCs, four high because I needed more power. At the Tilton End I used WPC, three high, because I knew I could get away with less, with just two stacks WPS four high required on the Gil Merrick stage end - because coverage was only required on either side of the large centre section." Each stack was supported by an SXH218 sub.

TORUS T1230 speakers filled dead spots in corners between the Gil Merrick and the Kop stands and further T1230s and an SX118 subwoofer provided reference sound at the FOH mix position, which was located underneath the stands. Critical to the success of the optimisation was tilt angles. 22live knew that since they would be raking the system back into the stands, rather than have it tip forwards as would be customary, they could dispense with the standard WP grids in favour of straps. After verifying this custom approach with Martin Audio deployed this ingenuous solution, which would also ensure each stack could be deployed swiftly as a single self-contained unit.

Crew boss Glen Little worked closely with extra local crew, who were experienced in dealing with Martin Audio boxes. "The beauty with the weight of the Martin Audio system, was that with four people we could move each stack as a single block, keeping the bottom box strapped to the sub." Unlike a typical average home gate of around 19,000 this event drew 25,000 (since there was no increase in ticket price). This double header was clearly a success as the best part of 20,000 returned from the bars within 15 minutes of the end of the match to be confronted by a different scenario, with DJ Jenny Powell leading into the band, who played a full hour long set.

Summing up Paul Timmins said "It was one of those days where everything worked. To have the PA rig built and deployed in just 12 minutes from the final whistle was remarkable." Production also had to remain nimble, and responsive to 11th hour requests. "In addition to the live sound we discovered we had to provide a broadcast mixdown from stems to Birmingham FC TV, and at the last minute they also wanted to record it - so we brought in Phil Wright, who is such a safe pair of hands, with his own kit to do the streaming.

"On top of it all, Birmingham City, after a wretched run of form, won the game, the sun came out for the concert and UB40 played a blinding set. Sean was over the moon and I'm happy for the club because they went out on a limb to do this." Other key personnel who contributed to the event's success included experienced tour manager Yaron Levy, with Russ Tite mixing at front of house. Jason McAvoy was control tech, Rylan Machin and Ryan Bass were the two system techs on duty, while other techs were Chris Wilcock and Jack Davis.

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