

World Cup working dogs sniff out threats, send security signal

By Ed White

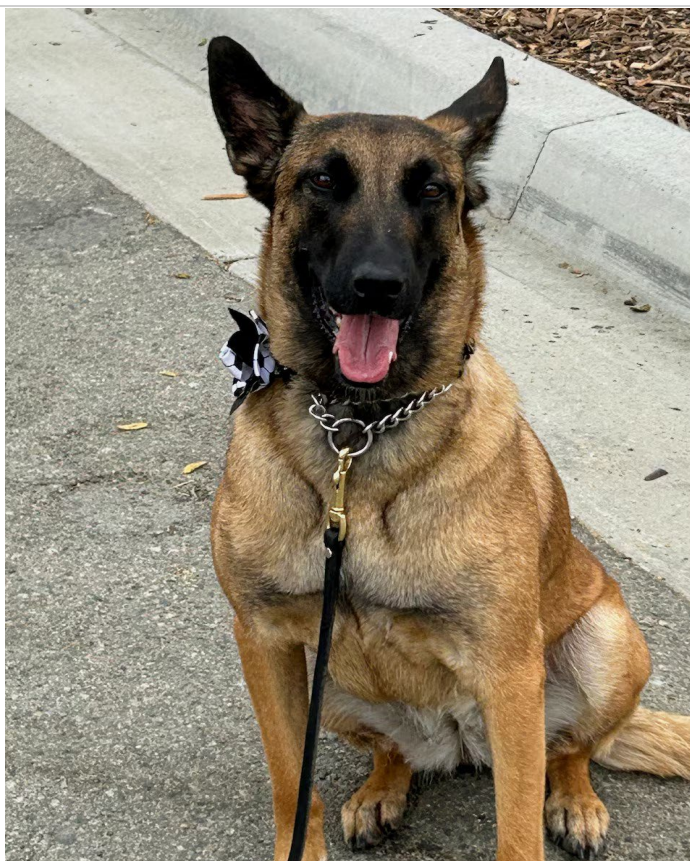
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[1/4] A security dog works at the perimeter of the Los Angeles stadium on game day during the 2026 FIFA World Cup in Inglewood, California, U.S., June 28, 2026. Picture taken with a mobile phone.... [Purchase Licensing Rights](#) ☐ Read more



Summary



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- Dogs serve as deterrent, with one expert saying it's 90% visual
- Officials also screen for supporters' celebratory fireworks
- Organisers favour Labradors over German Shepherds as they appear less threatening to international fans

INGLEWOOD, California, July 18 (Reuters) - Kali, a sweet and well-behaved five-year-old Labrador Retriever, is not scaring anybody. She also is not letting anyone sneak into the Los Angeles Stadium with explosives, fireworks, firearms or other sniffable threats at the [World Cup](#).

Stationed near one of the stadium entrances, Kali was among hundreds of police and security dogs marshaled across North America to provide a first line of defence against the ill-intended in a tournament fraught with geopolitical tensions.

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Not only were co-hosts the United States at war with Iran, whose team played their group stage matches in the U.S., but the Trump administration had strained relations with numerous other nations involved in the sprawling soccer event.

These were all situations presenting potential risks to organisers, as were inter-country tensions between teams playing each other. In Mexico, a raid by government forces against a cartel sparked violence a few months before the kick off.

POLITICAL PROTESTS

In Los Angeles, large political protests occurred during Iran's matches in the stadium.

"There's a different threat level when that's happening," said Glen Kucera, President of Allied Universal Enhanced Protection Services, the biggest provider of private canine security services in the U.S.

About 300 of his firm's 1,000 dog teams have been employed in World Cup security, he said.

The scale of the World Cup co-hosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico has presented challenges for security organisers.

Not only have there been matches at stadiums in 16 cities in the three countries, but security has been needed for training grounds, hotels and transportation routes. Some matches, like the Iran games in L.A., have been accompanied by protests.

That has meant the dog-security resources of the U.S. have been stretched, which explains why there have been dogs from so many different sources around matches.

SNIFFER DOGS ON PATROL

Kali represents the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and has a keen nose for things that could go boom. Dogs from the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, including Buck and his handler Anthony Meyers, were nearby.

Private security teams were around the perimeter, with dogs sniffing at vehicles. Anybody going into the stadium was going to have to pass close by a public safety dog.

"That's the point. Everybody attending is likely to realise they're being assessed by the nose of a security dog, something which provides a key deterrent to a terrorist or any other person planning something dangerous," Kucera said. "Ninety-five percent of what we do is a visual deterrent."

Not all security risks are from terror threats. Fans in many countries commonly celebrate goals or wins with fireworks, so security officials were keen to stop such items being brought into stadiums by well-meaning supporters.

COMFORTABLE DOG SECURITY

Across the tournament, security organisers have been keen to both provide the visual security of dogs and make fans from across the globe feel comfortable.

That is not always an easy balance, with dogs a fearful sight to people from countries where they are not widely owned as pets and can be associated with oppressive state security.

Kucera said that was why his firm had used mostly friendly dogs like Labradors to provide security, rather than German Shepherds or more intimidating breeds.

"People aren't afraid of Labs," said Kucera. "The organisation was trying to make it look like it wasn't a dangerous situation."

Different countries and cities provided different canine approaches. In Guadalajara, Mexico, robot dogs helped sniff out explosive threats. In Vancouver, Canadian agencies developed a multi-layered strategy to make dogs a key part of detecting threats.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

The Iran matches brought unique challenges, Kucera said.

The Iran team was required to stay in Mexico, fly in soon before games and leave immediately afterwards, creating a shifting schedule that needed to be managed.

Iran's matches were also accompanied by protests outside the L.A. stadium and there was the potential for political action during their games against New Zealand and Belgium, as well as their final match versus Egypt in Seattle.

So far everything has gone well. Covering big events is nothing new for security organisations. The difference with the World Cup is the vast scale of the tournament and the need to manage so many dog teams at the same time.

What the dogs have thought of their experience securing the biggest sporting event in history is hard to assess. But Reuters found that not one who was approached was unwilling to sit like a good boy or girl to have their picture taken.

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