

Beginners' Guide to

digital photography



[Part 9: Sports]

Tips for shooting sport

The decisive moment

Adding impact to an image

Expressing movement

part nine



Part 9: Sport

Sports photography

A good deal of patience and skill is required in order to produce consistently good sporting images however continual leaps in digital technology is making it easier for just about everyone to be able to achieve some fantastic results if they are willing to put in a bit of effort.

For dramatic sporting images, you'll need to concentrate on capturing the decisive moment, the peak of action as it's being played out. The goalkeeper lunging for the ball as it goes into the nets. The player sailing over the goal line a split second before the ball hits the ground. The basketball just leaving the players' hand as he leaps into the air toward the hoop. For every single dramatic image captured, expect to take hundreds more.

For professional sporting photographers, one of the most important pieces of equipment they will possess is a "fast" lens. A fast lens is one that can achieve a very wide aperture (ie f1.8) which in turn, means a faster shutter speed. The wider the maximum aperture, the faster the lens is considered to be. With Zoom lenses, it is important to remember that they don't all have a constant maximum aperture, and those that do are often larger and more expensive. Sporting photographers need to be able to achieve very wide apertures at maximum zoom if they are going to be able to capture continuous action as it happens. If you don't have a fast lens, plan to shoot on bright sunny day to improve your shutter speed capabilities.

Many digital cameras today offer a continuous-shooting mode which enables you to capture a number of frames in quick succession. This is a handy option for the amateur sporting photographer, however it does have a major drawback. When it's done shooting, the camera usually takes a long pause to save all those images to the memory, which, in many cases will cause you to miss any fresh action being playing out on the field.

When photographing sports action, don't always zoom in tight. Pull back a little and

leave a bit of space around the action.

This will allow you more flexibility in your cropping later on and remember to use a lossless file format so you don't lose too much data in the process.

Location is vital for good sporting images so get there early to seek the best vantage points and study photographs taken by professional sporting photographers to get ideas for your shots. Be careful not to place yourself in a position that's likely to put the participants off their game and think before using flash. Sudden bursts of light can cause distraction which, in some sporting instances, can be extremely dangerous.

Whilst freezing action does produce dramatic results, you can create your own drama in the less dynamic sports by expressing movement. By selecting a slower shutter speed and panning your camera, you blur the movement whilst keeping your subject sharp. This is also an effective way to convey an impression of speed.

You can also create a strong sense of motion in an image by changing the focal length of a zoom lens during an exposure. This technique, known as 'zooming', produces streaks of colour thrown outwards from the centre of the frame. I recommend you use a tripod when using this technique.

Even though you'll most likely to be working with very shallow depth of field, remember to stay aware of distracting backgrounds. It's very easy to be focused wholly on the action and forget about surrounding elements. Don't limit your images to action either as there are many other great moments in sport. A deeply emotional facial expression on a competitor is often more compelling and moving than the action itself. These are easy captures if you're in the right place and paying attention.





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Team sports

One of the best pieces of advice I can offer anyone going out there to photograph a team match is to know the game really well. Having a good knowledge of the rules of the game and player positions will help you to anticipate the action so you have a better chance of capturing it when it happens.

As these matches play over a large field area, it's impossible to find one single viewpoint to cover all circumstances. Move around a bit and consider interesting angles such as shooting down low on tackles.

At a football match, don't position yourself near the halfway line as the players will be facing away from you too much of the time. Instead stay close to the corners so you can capture action being played out at the goals. If one team is considered stronger, position yourself at the opponent's goal end. Use a zoom lens that gives you flexibility over the varied distances.



Athletics

Photographing athletics carnivals can afford some fantastic images as the action is extremely predictable. For long jump, get down low and use a zoom to capture the split second the athlete lands in the sand. The sand is thrown up and the jumper begins to fall backwards with facial expressions full of emotion. For discus, capture the moment the thrower stops spinning and releases the disc and for hurdles and high jump, capture the athlete as he sails over the bar.

To improve your chances for success, shoot on continuous shooting mode commencing just prior to the peak of action and continue shooting until just after. Use a zoom lens so you are not shooting so close to the participants that you put them off their game.



Motor sports

There are no shortage of motor sport opportunities for an enthusiast to capture, with each affording a great number of vantage points however, safety must always be your first priority. Never put yourself in a dangerous position. Remain behind the barriers and never cross a track during a race and use a telephoto lens in order to get in close.

Don't always position yourself on a fast straight as a slow corner can be just as dramatic if not more interesting. Tires bouncing off the curb or motorcyclist leaning into the bend can improve interest.

Experiment using a variety of different of shutter speeds, angles and techniques as described earlier.





Part 9: Sport

Horse racing, campdrafts and rodeo

For good action shots at the racetrack, get in as close to the action as possible and shoot from front on. Get down low in order to increase the impact of speed and height but be aware of unsightly railings.

Rodeo's and campdrafts afford the keen photographer plenty of opportunity for capturing 'peek of action' images but that's not to say it's an easy task. There is so much

unpredictable movement that staying with the subject can be challenging and you'll find that a lot of the action occurs when the subject is facing away from the camera. Watch for the instant the rider is thrown from the beast and is still in mid-air or as the rope encircles the calf. Keep an eye on the clowns as well as they often cop more than their fair share of the action.



Swimming

The poolside presents another excellent sporting opportunity with predictable action. Capture the swimmers as they dive from the blocks, the breaststroker as they come up for breath and butterfly from front-on as they launch themselves out of the water.

Shoot as low as possible to waterline but be careful to protect your camera from splashing. A simple plastic bag wrapped around the body can be of enormous benefit so long it's tightly wrapped and allows the lens to move freely.

Use a skylight or uv filter to protect your lens and clean all your equipment thoroughly after use.



Put Your Best Image Forward

Email us the best sporting pic you've taken. Files should be approx 1MB and received before deadline of 5pm Thursday. Entries can be emailed to photo@dailyexaminer.com.au.

The best images will appear in the next installment of Beginners' Guide to Digital Photography, published on Monday 18th April. Prize for the best image each week will be a 7" Digital Photo Frame.

All photographs appearing in the paper will win the photographer 50 free 6x4 prints in store at Harvey Norman Grafton.

At the end of the course, the best image will win the photographer a Panasonic Digital SLR twin lens camera Kit (DMC-G10KTWIN) VALUED AT \$900.00. **ALL PRIZES COURTESY OF HARVEY NORMAN.**



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