

SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY FOR YEARBOOKS

A Quick “How-To”

Indoors or outdoors, here are guidelines for a great set of action photographs.

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Sports Photography for Yearbooks

Starting with these basics, you are guaranteed to come away from a game with good photographs.

Of course, as you become more experienced, please consider finding new angles and locations.

Be artistic!

Basketball

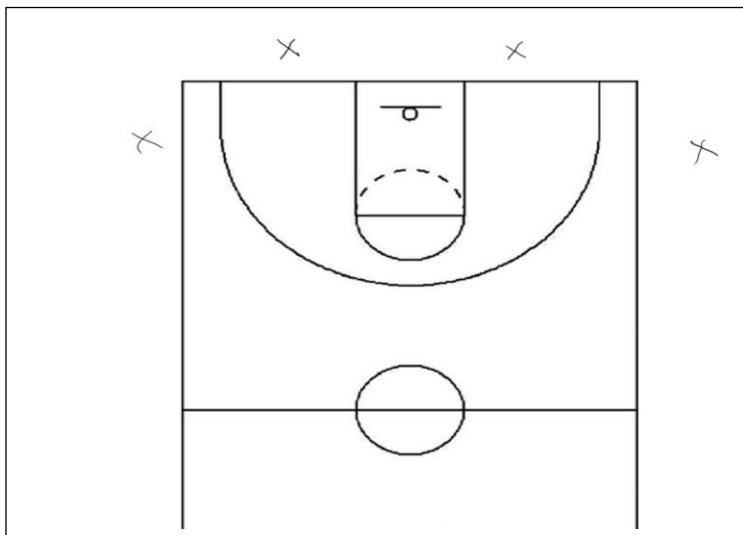
Stand at the end of the court, at a point halfway from the basket to the corner of the court.

Shooting digital, set your ISO at 3200 to as high as 8000 or 10000. Exposure will be about 1/400 at f:4.

Set your camera to high-speed multi-shot and your focus to full servo (for Canon, that's AI servo mode; for Nikon, that's AF-C).

Set your focus point to a single point in the middle of the frame. This will minimize the camera focusing on a person in the background. If available, select the setting for face recognition.

While most cameras will give decent white balance in auto WB mode, you can set custom WB by capturing a photograph of a sheet of white paper, or a white-balance target.



Keep your cropping relatively loose when taking the picture. Because the action is so fast, you want empty space in the frame to allow for flying arms and legs. Crop the final pictures for use in the yearbook.

Stay under the opposing team's basket for the first half, and you'll get great shots of your team.

- Look for a player at the side of the court passing the ball to a player under the basket.
- Capture the player driving up the court toward the basket.
- Capture the player driving in from the side of the court toward the basket.
- Watch for the center or a forward leaping into the air to sink the ball into the basket.

In the second half, try going under your own basket for some neat shots of your team rebounding.

Also in the second half, look for the sideline shots, and photographs of cheerleaders.

Other shots: Capture the scorekeeper(s) at the scorekeepers' table. Get some tight shots of the coach at the sidelines. Get some tight shots of the players sitting on the bench – wait till they are looking in your direction as play moves behind you.

Get some shots of students in the bleachers cheering for their team. Some schools require parental permission to publish a photograph of a student, so confirm that you have permissions for all the students in a photograph.

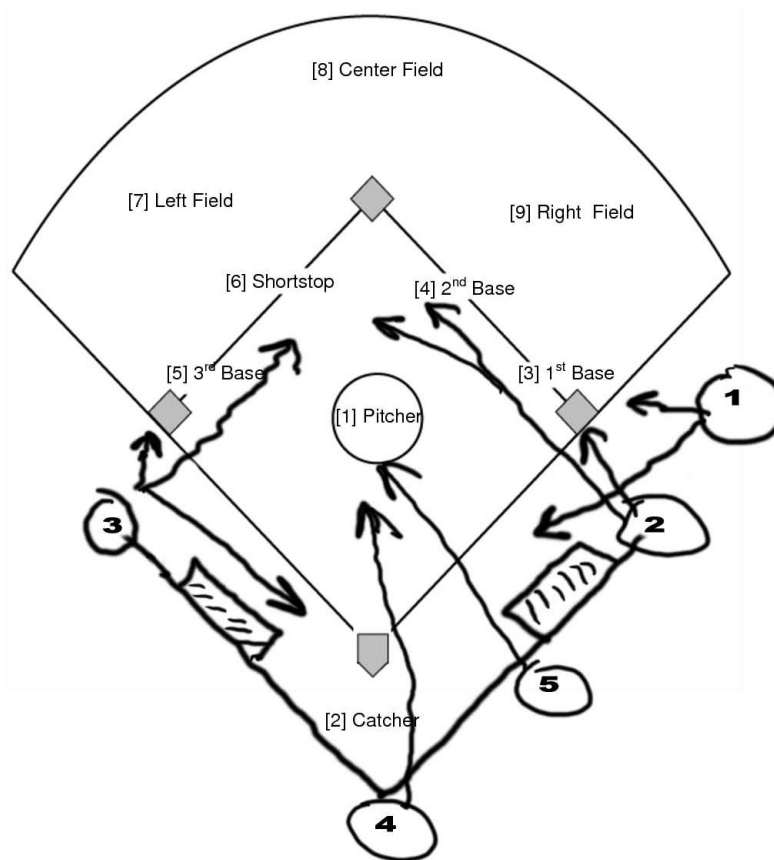
At halftime, get action shots of the cheerleaders doing their halftime presentation. They usually do a pyramid to finish, so stand back or zoom to wide angle to capture the whole formation for a final shot. Try for an action shot of the cheerleaders at the sidelines during the game. When your players score, a cheerleader often will do a jump or a flip, and you can capture the cheerleader in the air for an exciting action shot.

Baseball/Softball

For sunny days, ISO 400 will allow for a shutter speed of at least 1/1,000. Consider going to ISO 800 or 1600 on overcast days. To freeze the runners, you'll want a shutter speed of 1/500 or higher.

Freezing the ball as it comes off the bat requires a shutter speed of 1/1,000 or higher.

WARNING – The ball is very hard and will leave a big bruise if you get hit. When inside the safety fence, keep your body turned to protect important body parts in case of an errant ball!



For action shots of the batter, pick a spot just before first base (2). Since most batters are righties, you'll have a good view of their faces. Hit your shutter release just as the batter starts to swing, which should capture the ball as it passes the batter. (This is due to the half-second delay it takes for you to actually squeeze the shutter release once you see the bat start to move). This is also a

good angle to catch action around the shortstop, and this angle works well to capture the second-baseman trying to tag out the runner.

For action at first base, stand at about position (3). You'll get great shots of the runner leading off the bag, and some neat shots as the runner slides into second base. Try position (1) for really neat shots as he/she dives back to first base when scared by the pitcher.

For shots of the runner heading to first, pick a spot about 20 feet beyond first base (1). Photograph the batter as he/she reaches about halfway from the plate to first base. Any closer, and the runner often turns his/her head to make the turn to second base.

To capture the runner at second base, find a spot just inside the line from second to third (3). You'll get the runner's face rounding second, and some great action as the runner slides into second or third. This is also a great angle to capture the catcher at home plate, especially when he/she is trying to block a runner at the plate.

The best angle to capture the pitcher is over the umpire's shoulder (4). You can usually shoot through the chain link fence behind the plate, although some umpires may chase you away. Cup the lens with your hand, rather than holding the lens directly against the chain link to prevent damage to the lens if the ball skips off the bat and hits your spot of fence. Focus on the pitcher a couple of feet in front of the rubber. Try capturing the ball halfway to the plate for a neat perspective.

Another nice angle on the pitcher is from the inside corner of the dugout (5). You'll get a better angle on the pitcher's stretch at this angle. Prefocus a couple of feet in front of the rubber. Watch for southpaws and choose the proper side of the plate to keep the arm on the far side of the pitcher's face.

Football

When photographing football, you are generally restricted from the team area at the center of the field. You'll be able to stand in the areas noted as 1 and 2 in the diagram.

Stay about 5 feet back from the sideline to give you room to run if the play heads your way.

A good lens to use for football is a 70-200 zoom lens. When working at night, you could use flash, but will only be able to get plays that are literally right in front of you. Remember . . . even modern flash units aren't much good beyond about 30 feet.

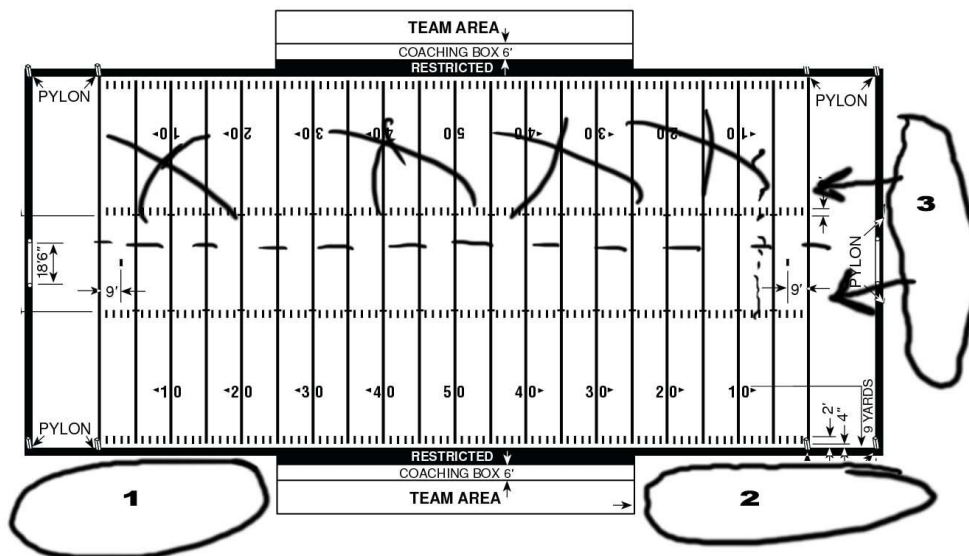
You'll have better results with a "fast" f:2.8 or f:4 lens. Set your ISO to about 10000 and you will usually be able to get shutter speeds around 1/500 with the lens wide open (largest aperture = lowest f-stop number).

Regardless of the lens you are using, don't try to capture action past midfield. Not only do you need a super telephoto to fill the frame beyond midfield, but you will usually have too many players running in front of you to get a good shot.

Set your camera on the fastest multi-shot setting so the camera captures a series of pictures quickly when you hold down the shutter release. Set your focus on continuous autofocus (for Canon, that's AI servo mode; for Nikon, that's AF-C).

In continuous autofocus mode, your camera will often grab focus on the background. Set your focus point to a central point in the viewfinder, since you will generally be centered on the primary action. This will give you the best chance for proper focus. Be prepared to discard many images due to poor focus. But also be prepared for some amazing shots as autofocus rises to the challenge!

You will generally want to get about 10-20 yards in front or behind the line of scrimmage, since the action begins behind the scrimmage line and quickly moves up the field.



For offensive action:

Stay behind the line of scrimmage to capture the quarterback as he hands off or throws a pass. This is also a good place to capture the punter.

Get up-field to grab action shots of the ball carrier charging through the line, or the pass receiver. Prepare for action to move quickly across the field!

Stand behind the end zone (position 3 in the diagram) to get neat shots of your players charging over the goal line. This is great for the PAT (Point After Touchdown), especially if your team prefers to stay on the ground.

For defensive action:

Depending on the strength of your team against the opposing squad, choose a position that will have your players moving towards the camera. If the opposing team is dominating, stay behind your players to capture them as they bring down the ball carrier. If your team controls the field, stay behind the opposing team to capture your players as they sack the QB!

Other action shots:

Look for neat closeups of players on the sidelines. And try to capture the coaches, both watching the action and talking to players.

Take a few minutes to photograph the cheerleaders, and consider getting some shots of the trainer working with an injured player. Get photographs of the players grabbing a drink from a water bottle.

These are important in telling the story of the game.

Track and Field

Indoor and outdoor track have similar events - running, hurdles, pole vault, high jump. You'll use the same techniques and angles for both.

Track-and-field photography requires Serve Focus mode, and some events might be better captured by prefocusing in manual focus mode. Because the participants are moving so fast, autofocus will often “grab focus” on the background, ruining your picture. Prefocus solves this problem. You can set your camera back on autofocus to “chase” a participant, but be prepared to discard photos that have bad focus.

Try to achieve a shutter speed of 1/250 or higher. For indoor track, this may require setting ISO 6400 or higher. With a high ISO, you will tend to have a lot of noise in the finished image. This is a compromise you will have to consider. You can try using a lower ISO, but that may lead to blurred images because of a slower shutter speed.

Be sure to custom white balance for indoor track and field events.

High Jump –

High jumpers throw themselves over the pole backwards, so the best angle for photographs is from behind the “bag” (the big landing area). Stand beyond the corner at the opposite side from where the person starts their run, since they will launch off their strong leg and turn toward you slightly as they clear the crossbar. Set your focus on manual focus, and focus on the center of the crossbar. Capture images as the jumper clears the pole. Generally, a jumper will arch their back, giving you a good view of their face.

Long Jump –

Long jumpers look down as they fly through the air, so you will want to sit or lie on the ground/floor at the end of the landing pit. This will give you a good view up towards their face. Cameras released in the last few years now have good servo focus with facial recognition. I've achieved great results using those settings, without the need for manual prefocus. With older cameras, prefocus in manual focus on a spot in the sand about 2-feet into the pit. Capture images as the jumper flies through the air. Another nice shot is the runner approaching their launch point. Prefocus on the running area and capture the image as the runner hits that point.

Hurdles –

Choose a hurdle at which to catch the action. If needed, prefocus on a hurdle in manual focus mode. Capture the image as the hurdler clears the hurdle. Watch out for arms across faces - since hurdlers bring up the arm opposite of their leading leg as they fly over the hurdle. A safe bet is to shoot as straight on as possible, Shooting from the side will often see you capturing images with

the arm covering the face! If you are able to determine which arm comes up, try to shoot from the opposite side.

Running –

Try to use a telephoto lens to “squeeze” runners together in the image. Shoot down the length of the track for a neat shot! A shorter lens works well for shots of individual runners. Try to crop close-up for some shots to capture the expressions on runners’ faces. Vertical cropping allows you to fill the frame for a better picture.

Pole Vault –

Shoot from the landing-bag end, to capture the vaulter’s face as they clear the crossbar. Depending on the expertise of the vaulter, you may have to watch their first run, then move to a different side to capture their face. Focus on the crossbar, then take a step or two forward or backward to adjust for the vaulter’s position on the side of the crossbar as you capture the image. Use a telephoto lens to capture the vaulter on their run to the pit – they will usually have an intense look of concentration on their face! You should try to include the pole as a neat leading-line in the image. Crop vertical or horizontal, depending on how tight you are cropping.

Ice Hockey

Set your ISO as high as possible. You want to achieve a shutter speed of 1/250 or higher to freeze the action.

If shooting through the Plexi, hold your lens against the Plexi to avoid reflections. Be sure to pull back as players approach, since they will often bang against the Plexi, which will jam the camera back into your face!

Please be aware that photographing ice hockey can be dangerous if you are shooting from an area without the protective Plexiglas. You can be hit by the puck, or by players as they skate past.

Try to shoot from about mid-rink, using a telephoto zoom. Capture the action at the goal, and look for shots on the opposite side as players fight for the puck.

Autofocus will be your friend with the fast action on the ice. However, be prepared to discard images where the autofocus “grabs focus” on the background. Prefocus will not work, due to the fast nature of the game.

The ice reflects light up into the faces of the players, so you will have some very nice results!

Horizontal cropping is best, since players generally have their stick stretched out to control the puck.

Although dangerous, the best place to work from is near the penalty boxes. You will be exposed to flying pucks and players, but won't have to contend with the Plexiglas. Be sure to keep an eye on the action! Keep back from the ice, since players will fly up the ice to get in position for a play and may clip you as they pass!

Soccer

Choose at least ISO 400 to ensure a shutter speed of 1/500 or higher. Set your autofocus on continuous, and select a central focus point in the viewfinder to ensure the best results. Select the shutter mode for multi-shot when you hold down the shutter release.

For field action, you'll want a lens that reaches out to 200mm. However, a lot of action happens on the sidelines, so a 35mm to 200mm zoom range is helpful. Try working with a longer zoom for part of the game, then switching to a shorter zoom to catch the close action.

Work the sideline opposite the player benches. Teams generally have benches on the same side of the field.

Stay toward the goal of the opposing team to get faces as your players move the ball toward you. You can work towards your team's goal to grab some great defensive shots.

Don't try to get action past midfield, since the players will be too small in your frame. Also, too many other players will cross in front of your lens to make for a good picture.

Watch for players to run the ball up the sideline, then get ready to catch a pass to another player.

Try getting some shots of the goalie blocking a kick, or punting the ball back upfield. I generally try to capture goalie action during the warm-ups before the game begins.

Look for neat action on a corner kick – either your player kicking, or your team defending. This is a great chance to get some shots of a head ball.

While not as dramatic, you can get a very nice shot of the throw as a player puts the ball back on the field after an out-of-bounds. Stay close to the sideline and fire the shutter as the player lifts the ball over his or her head. Then grab a shot of the player who receives the ball.

After you have enough field action, move over to the bench side of the field and capture some photographs of players on the bench. Look for the coach talking to players during a time out, and look for players using a water bottle or watching the game.

Tennis/Badminton/Volleyball

You will use similar angles for tennis, badminton, and volleyball, since they are played on courts with nets.

To start, get as close to the side of the court as possible, on the same side of the net as the player(s) you are photographing. Use an ISO to achieve a shutter speed of 1/500 or faster. Shoot with a medium zoom for full-body shots, or a telephoto for tight shots to show the expression on the face. Autofocus will be fine for these sports.

For Tennis and Badminton:

You can work from the far end of the court with a very long lens, standing on a ladder or up on the bleachers. You will be shooting over the net, so look for shots where the net doesn't block the player and racket and ball.

Capture sideline action with the coach talking to the players.

For Volleyball:

Stand near the net on the same side of the court as your team. To capture photographs of the server, you may need to work from the opposite side of the court from the server, to avoid the arm across the face. The server usually throws the ball overhead to hit it across the net, so you can still capture great photographs on the same side of the server, just before the arm goes fully forward.

When the opposing team is serving, look for one your players in the middle to deflect the ball first. Keep as close to the net as the referees allow to capture your players spiking the ball over the net.

Try using a telephoto lens from high up in the stands to get a good angle on your team returning the ball.

Wrestling

You are going to get down and dirty! For wrestling, the best angles are captured laying on the floor on your side or belly.

Choose an ISO for shutter speeds of 1/250 or higher. Check your exposure with your histogram for shots of the wrestlers on the mat, since faces may be in heavy shadow. Adjust exposure to ensure detail in the shadow areas.

You will want to be close to the mat area to capture a clear shot, but be very aware of the wrestlers as they move across the mat . . . they will often push each other out of bounds. Watch their movements to avoid being trampled.

You will have to work quickly. Capture the wrestlers at the start, then stand or kneel or lie down to capture the faces of your team members. Be ready to move quickly as the wrestlers scramble around on the mat.

Bowling and Curling

Bowling and curling are very similar, since both are in a “lane”.

Choose an ISO for a shutter speed of 1/250 or higher.

For Bowling:

After getting permission from the bowling alley, take off your shoes and work your way down the alley beside the alley being used by your team members. Get low to capture the bowler releasing the ball. Be careful when walking, since the alley is highly polished. You can walk in the gutter for more secure footing. Capture the shot with ball still in the bowler’s hand. Then capture a shot with the ball closer to you and the bowler with arm extended.

For Curling:

Lighting should be similar to ice hockey, with good reflection off the ice to fill shadows. Use an ISO for shutter speeds of 1/250 or higher. Check your histogram to ensure you don’t under- or over-expose your photographs.

Work your way down the sheet for a good angle of the player throwing the curling stone. Then move further down to capture the sweepers. Finally, find a position at the end of the sheet for shots of the sweepers as the rocks reach the house.

Work from a low angle to capture faces, since the curler will be low on the ice and the sweepers will be looking down.

Competitive Shooting

Photographing on a shooting range is very dangerous. Your safest option is to pose shots during warmups.

Ask the shooter to remove any rounds from the rifle or pistol, then step about 10 feet towards the target to capture the shooter as he or she aims their weapon. A long lens will give a neat perspective from this angle. Or use a wideangle lens and step toward the rifle to capture a large barrel leading to a smaller face of the marksman.

During the competition, capture photographs from behind the marksman with the target in the distance. Also capture photographs as he or she reloads.

Photographs of skeet shooting require you to move partially onto the range to keep a face in the photograph. Once again, this should be a “posed candid” for your own safety. Other photographs from behind the shooter can be taken during competition.

Wear hearing protection! I use the foam ear-stoppers that fit into the ear, so I don’t have to contend with the large earmuff protectors.

Swimming

If the meet is taking place indoors, bring your camera gear into the pool area at least 30 minutes before you plan to start your photography. Indoor swimming is a winter sport in many of the northern states, and your camera will need to warm up to avoid condensation. DO NOT swap lenses on your camera until it has warmed up. Your best bet is to set up your lens and body combinations before arriving at the pool area, then leaving your gear as-is for the meet.

Select an ISO for a shutter speed of 1/500 or faster. For diving, a shutter speed of 1/1000 or faster will freeze the motion.

Work from the side of the pool and stay low to capture the start of a race. For the backstroke, swimmers face to the outside of the pool, so you can work from the end of the pool for shots of them before the starting gun.

For the breaststroke, walk down the pool parallel to the swimmer to capture them with an arm out of the water as they take a breath. Set your auto focus to use a sensor or sensors in the center of your frame. Try to get as close to the water as possible for the best perspective, since the swimmer’s head is sideways when out of the water.

For the breaststroke, move well ahead of the swimmer, get down low (kneeling or lying down) and capture the swimmer as they rise up out of the water. You can also take a position at the end of the pool, but be sure to stay down low to capture the face when the swimmer lifts out of the water.

For diving, watch the warm-ups to determine which way the diver will be facing during a given dive, then choose a position that will show their face in the finished photograph. Capture the diver bouncing off the board, then capture photographs as the diver is coming down towards the water. Finally, you could create a neat photograph of the diver entering the water, and then just the feet sticking out of the water.

Look for photographs of swimmers talking to each other before and after an event. Capture photographs of the coaches and scorekeepers.

**For questions about sports action photography, please contact
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