

Capturing a “Sports” Image for Camera Club Competition



Warning !!

- Guidelines should be broken and ignored
- Guy's Advice is in blue

What is a “Sport Image” ?

- In my ever-so-humble-opinion this is what I think a Sports Image should contain:
 - Does **NOT** have to be fast action team sport
 - Need an element to show **competition**. Without this it’s just people playing around
 - Tells a **story** indicating what just happened and/or what might happen next
 - Need to show it is a recognisable sport, don’t leave the viewer guessing what sport
 - Need to show something happening, event, behaviour, action etc in the chosen sport, ie nothing static
 - Ideally show the human connection, ie eyes, face, emotion etc

What competitive sport might work best for you ?

- Athletics
- Bowls
- Cricket
- Croquet
- Cycling
 - Road
 - Mountain biking
- Equestrian
 - Show jumping
 - Flat racing
 - Dressage
- Fishing
- Golf
- Hang gliding
- Motor racing
 - Cars
 - Bikes
 - Trucks
 - Drag
- Polo
- Rounders
- Running (medium to long distance)
- Tennis
- On the water
 - Rowing
 - Canoeing & kayaking
 - White water
 - Jet Ski
 - Powerboat racing
 - Water skiing
 - Sailing
 - Surfing
 - Swimming
 - Diving
- Volleyball
- Etc etc etc

What are you trying to capture in a “sport” image ?

- Individual athlete or subject
 - Tennis
 - Athletics
 - Swimming
 - Cricket
 - Car timed events, hill climbs, sprints, etc
 - Water sports (jet skis, kayaks, rowing)
 - Equestrian events
 - “Tough Mudder”
- Group action
 - Football (soccer & American)
 - Rugby
 - Hockey (field & ice)
 - Racing (car, bike, horse, dog, etc)
- Emotion, reactions, celebrations
- The crowd

How do you choose a sport ?

- Perhaps you have an idea(s) of your image content
- You need something local - ie not the Highland Games
- You're not interested in fast action sport
- Your camera & lens might limit your options
- Your physical capabilities might limit options
- Stick to outside sports with daylight being the main light source
- Shooting inside is another level of complexity best avoided
- Avoid children - technically if they are there in the crowd etc it's OK, but better to play safe

How do you choose a sport ?

- Most local sport teams will be OK with you taking images
- But it's polite and professional to ask first
- Explain you are learning and nothing will be used on-line or money made from the images
- If you get any good ones you'll share them
- Use your common sense

Stick to a single sport

- Don't go to single game, match, or race and expect to get a great image
- You need to go multiple times to get the images you want to capture
- Doesn't need to be 10 times, but certainly more than twice
- Same as landscape or any photography genre, the better you know the subject, the better images you get

Keep your
expectations
within reason

- Keep in mind the shots you see in the media are taken by experts who do it for a living, often with **VERY** expensive and specialized kit
- One image might have taken them years, and a thousand shots, to obtain



How can I be creative
and find something
different ?

- Remember the image **does not** have to be fast action shot
- Shoot within your
 - Physical limits - take a lightweight stool or foldable seat
 - Camera & lens limits - borrow or hire a lens ?
- Think of what you would like to capture
- Inspiration - Have a look online at images from your chosen sport, pick one or two “types/styles” you’d like to capture
- Think about how you can get that image. Where to stand/crouch/sit/kneel. What do you want/not want in the background.

Happy to discuss any of this with you

Stick to a single sport

- By going to the same sport 2-3 times you will begin to:
 - Predict when and where the action or behaviour occurs
 - Position yourself to capture the action or behaviour
 - Have the camera & lens setup and ready
 - Have a better understanding of your gear and what you can do with it
 - Lens choice(s)
 - Settings etc

Stick to a single sport

- If you already know a sport (for example rugby) then you'll know when something is likely to happen
- If you go to a sport that you've never seen before (for example lacrosse) then you need to put the camera away and watch to get an understanding of what might happen and when

Ideas for image content

- Static image of a sports person might be sharp, well exposed and well composed, but if the competitors not are **doing something** it's a "record shot"
- Same for motor sport, planes in the sky, etc



Elements of the image

- Isolate subject(s) from background
- Composition
- Eye line
- Emotion
- The crowd, officials, etc
- Freezing the action
- Follow the ball
- Panning blur



Sport images, yes. But still pretty “ho-hum” sport images



More "ho-hum" sport images

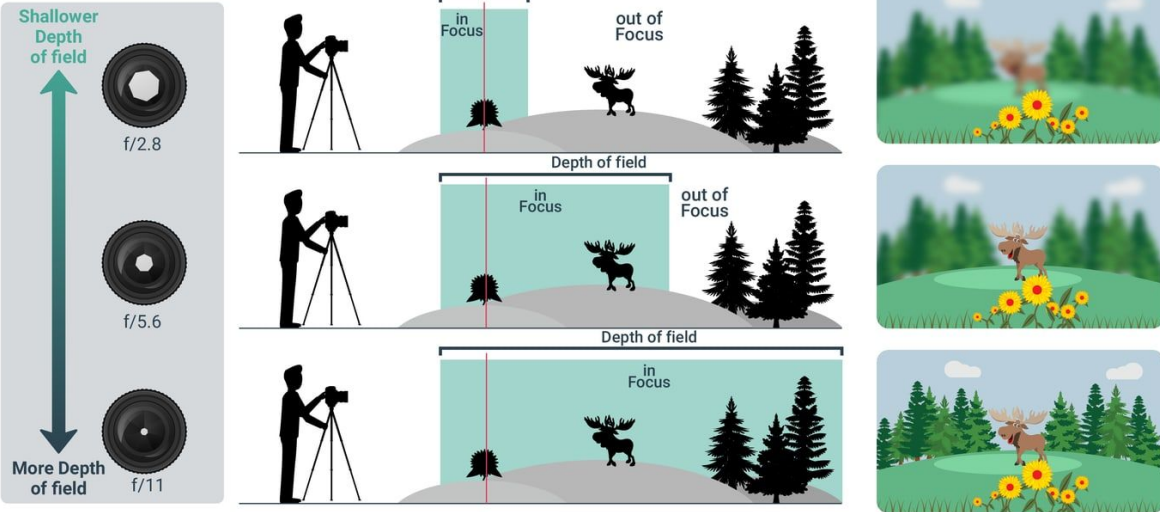
Camera settings

- No magical “one collection of settings” for all sports and all situations
- Next slides go through some content ideas and my associated setting ideas
- Keep in mind the Depth of Field (DOF) to keep your subject in focus. For example, this will vary a lot between a focal length of 3m and 30m

APERTURE



DEPTH OF FIELD



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DOF and focal length

DEPTH OF FIELD AND FOCAL LENGTH



WIDE-ANGLE LENS

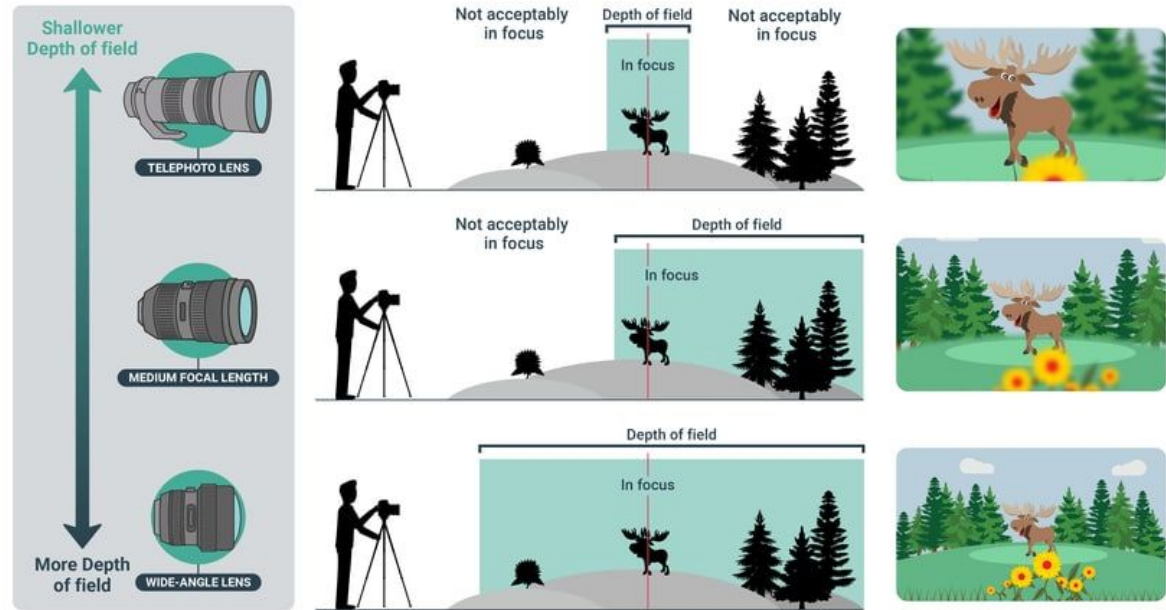


MEDIUM FOCAL LENGTH



TELEPHOTO LENS

- The shorter the focal length, the larger the depth of field
- The larger the focal length, the shallower the depth of field



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Composition

- As with most photography genre, the background of the image is all important
- For sports having the background out of focus is one way to reduce the backgrounds impact
- Position yourself around the event to avoid or reduce the impact of people, adverts, vehicles, bright lights, etc in the background
- Blurring the background using a panning motion can also isolate the subject from a busy background



Poor background



Better background



Colour of the background & clothes are too similar



The light & colour contrasts
“pop” the bike & rider

Composition

- If you're clever (more likely lucky) you can get some symmetry in the athletes movement
- Normal composition rules still apply, leading lines, lighter vs darker to focus attention, etc
- Don't shoot "anything and everything". Try and stick to the plan
- Don't try to capture the story like the MOTD highlights

The Crowd

- The crowd are not so inhibited
 - when their team is doing well, or
 - some exciting action has just happened
- Combining the crowd with some action, or the sport competitors doing something, can make a great image
- Crowd can be a bit out of focus in the background, without taking attention from the subject



The Crowd





The crowd & action



Freezing the action

- Predict or anticipate the action
- Start shooting as the players begin to jump for the ball, or charge in for the tackle – this way you will catch them as they make contact
 - “Controlled” spray and pray 😊
- Fill the frame as much as possible
 - Wait for players to come closer, zoom in, or move to a position closer to the action
 - Trust the camera to capture focus
- Example settings: f/4 @ 1/1600 sec



Taken with ~100mm focal length near the goal

Freezing the action

- A snapshot of action frozen in time is not interesting unless the viewer can tell, or infer:
 - what's just happened before the image was taken
 - what's happening at the instance the image was taken
 - what will happen after the image was taken
- This is telling a story, and we know the judges love a story 😊



Freezing the action, telling a story or asking the viewer to guess what's going to happen next

Follow the ball

- What ever is the center of attention for the competitors (ball, puck, etc) try and keep it in focus within image. This means needs to be within the DOF range
- It helps to tell the story of the action, gives a focal point to the image



Follow the ball





Follow the ball



Better depth of field with f/8 for goalmouth action

Emotion

- “You're not shooting a sport, you're shooting people playing a sport”
- By capturing emotion in your images you connect your audience with the competitors, their glee, joy, excitement, determination, pain, despondency, anger, etc
- Body language also expresses emotion



The celebrations - but note no story in the images



The disappointments - more of a story ?

Panning blur

- This is another technique to pop the action from the background
- Gives an impression of speed and action. Good for Camera Club comps, and wall prints
- Use when the action is predictable (generally from side to side) like motor & water sports.
- Can work in other sports but more difficult to get a successful shot
- Start with f/4 @ 1/100 sec and see how the images look. Adjust speed to get the result you want
- Avoid any bright things in the background (cars, ads, banners or lights) as they add a bright streak to the background when blurred. Unless of course, that's the effect you're after



Panning blur



Panning blur

The Eyes

- Capturing the players eyes gives the viewer a connection to the player, their intentions, what they might be thinking about
- The eyes add interest to the image, in a similar way to wildlife photography
- The eyes help to tell the story within the image



The eyes don't have it





The eyes do have it



The eyes have it



The eyes have it

Below the eye line

- Photographer needs to be below the eye line of the players
- People naturally look downwards, so you're more likely to catch their eyes and expression
- Background looks more "natural" from below the eye line perspective. The background is also generally better
- Next time you look at a media sport image and most will have this perspective
- But not all, as we know photography rules are to be broken



Above the eye line

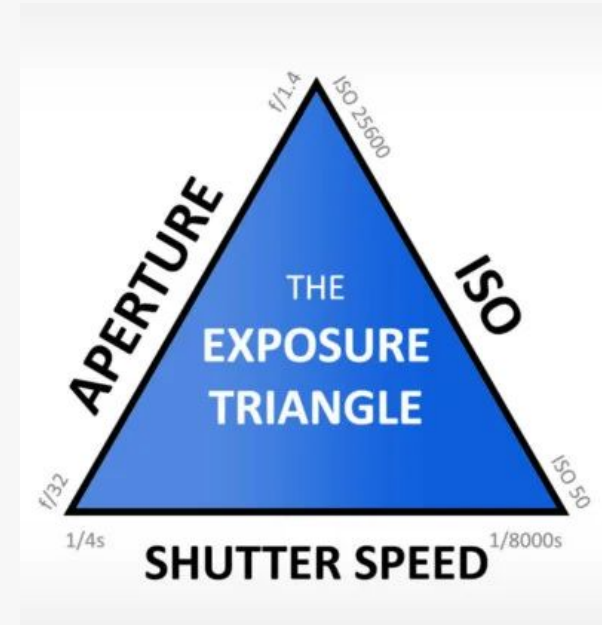


Below the eye line

Note the very different backgrounds

ISO & image noise

- Generally to balance shutter & aperture you have chosen to get a well exposed image, you'll have to use higher ISO than you're used to
- Use **Auto-ISO** if your camera has it
- If not, then take a few shots with different ISO's to get something about right. You might need to go to 3000
- Lightroom Denoise or Topaz Denoise will help reduce the noise for the final image
- But maybe the noise can be part of the creative shot ?



Final thoughts

- Shoot lots and often. Pixels are cheap. Take a spare charged battery & memory card
- Dress to be comfortable & dry. If you're cold, hot or uncomfortable you won't enjoy it
- Hopefully you'll learn a little more about your camera and a new skill
- Fire away and enjoy the day 