

Introduction to Sports and Action Photography

Guy Wills

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Why are you
trying to capture a
“sport” image ?

- Family member playing a team sport ?
- Taking the camera “just in case” ?
- f/5.6 @ max 1/500sec
- Lowest ISO you can get away with (or use Auto ISO)
- Continuous auto focus, if you have it
- **Fire away and enjoy the day** 😊

Be prepared

- Have a look online at typical images from your chosen sport and pick one or two “types/styles” you’d like to capture.
- Find/work out the approx camera & lens settings. It’s not an exact science.
- **Stick to you’re chosen “types/styles” for that event. Have patience and try to learn why you didn’t get it the first, second or third time.**
- Know at least some of the rules and you’ll quickly be able to predict the action.
- Don’t shoot “anything and everything”. Try and stick to the plan.
- Don’t try to capture the story like a MOTD highlights.

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

- **Action**
 - 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**

Styles

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

Isolate subject(s) from background

- Wide aperture (low f number) “pops” the action in front of the out-of-focus background.
- Start with the “widest” aperture your lens/camera combo will allow.
 - For example I have mine set to:
 - **f/2.8** for close action
 - **f/4 or 5.6** for longer distance



Wide open aperture



Wide open aperture

Goal mouth action

- I use f/6.3 - f/11.0 for goal mouth action to increase my hit rate for in-focus images.
- Lot's of fast random action where a wide aperture would miss the important action.



Better depth of field in focus
with f/8 for goal mouth action



Better depth of field in focus
with f/8 for goal mouth action

Composition

- As with most photography genre, the background of the image is all important.
- For sports/action having this out of focus is one way to reduce it's impact.
- Position yourself around the pitch 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.
- If you're clever/lucky you can get some symmetry in the athletes movement.
- Normal composition rules still apply, leading lines, lighter vs darker to focus attention, etc.



Poor background



Better background



Colour of the background & clothes are too similar



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

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 pitch edge is less intrusive in the image.
- Next time you open a newspaper or look at a sport image on the TV or internet, 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

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



The eyes tell the story 😊

Emotion

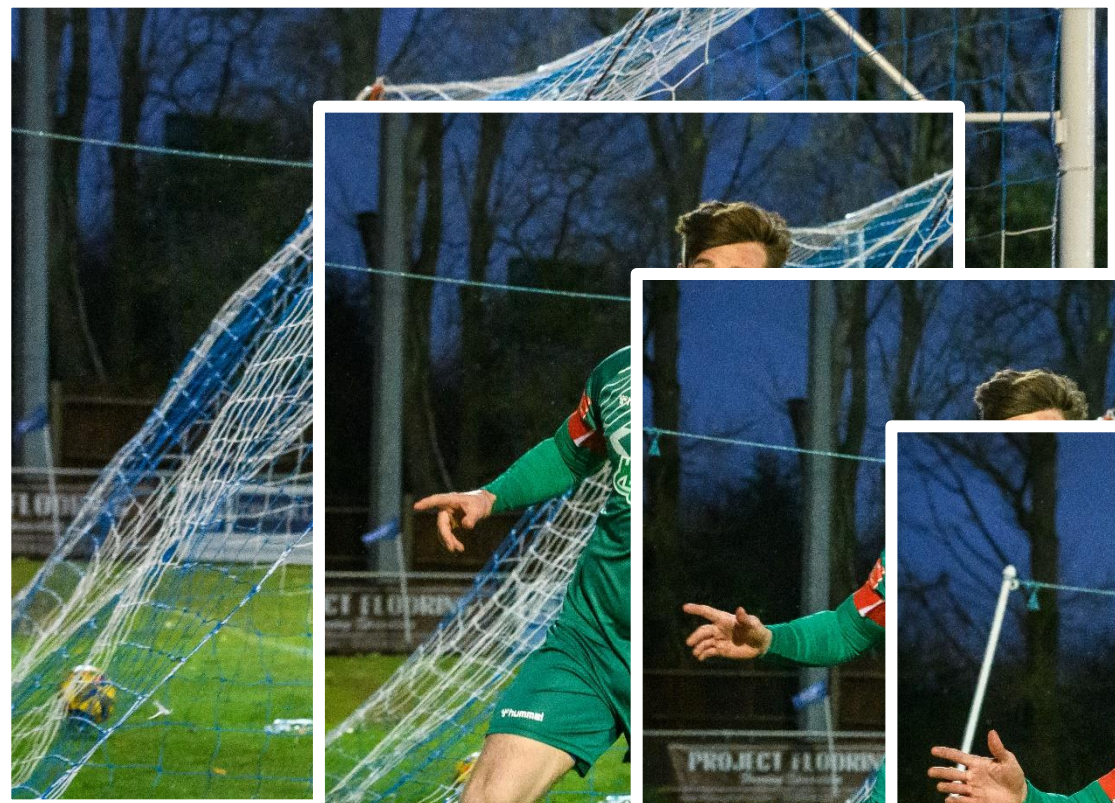
- “You're not shooting a sport, you're shooting people playing a sport”
- By capturing emotion in your images you connect your audience with the players, their glee, joy, excitement, determination, pain, despondency, anger, etc.
- Body language also express's emotion.



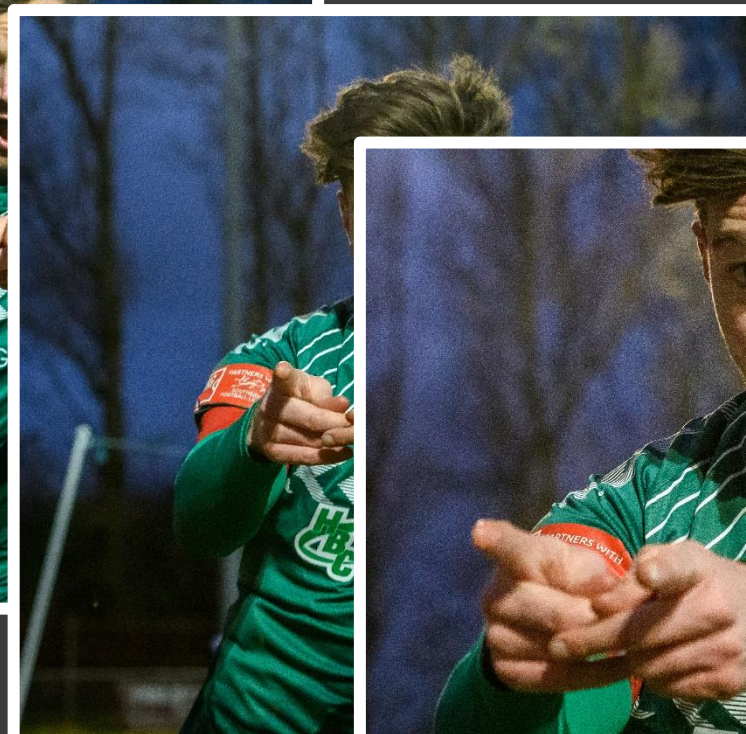
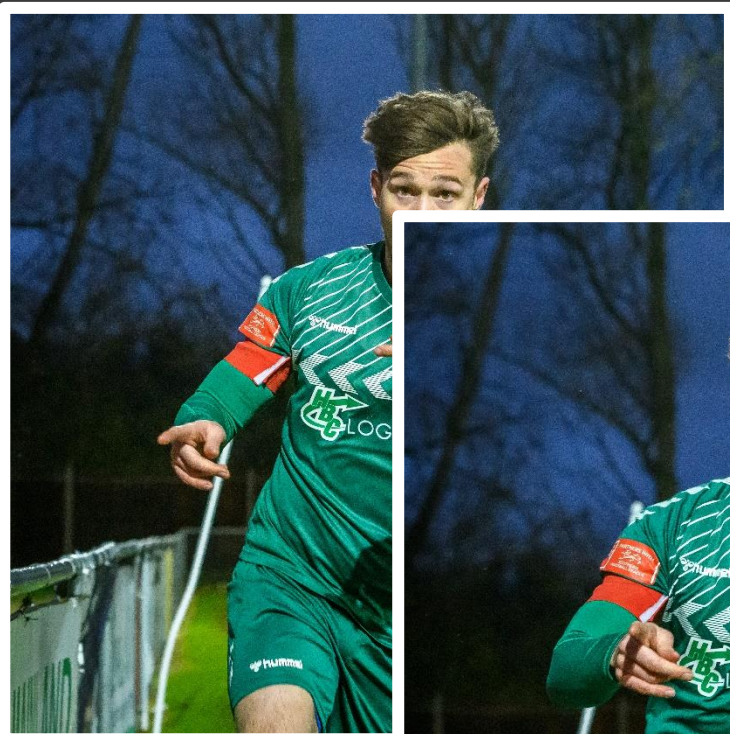
The celebrations



The disappointments



Showing off



Showing off

The Crowd

- The crowd are not so inhibited
 - a) when their team is doing well, or
 - b) some exciting action has just happened
- Teams like this sort of image.



The Crowd

Freezing the action

- Sports photography is usually about capturing a very fast snapshot in time.
- Predict or anticipate the action
 - Know the sport and some of the rules
- 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.
 - Anticipate the action. Shoot before, during and after the action.
 - “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.

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
 - and what will happen after the image was taken
- This is telling a story, within a picture.



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



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



Some ho-hum images



Some more “ho-hum” images

Follow the ball

- Try and keep the ball in the image.
- It helps to tell the story of the action, gives a focal point to the image.



Follow the ball





Follow the ball

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 sport.
- Start with $> f/6.3$ @ $1/100$ 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 that's the effect you're after.



Panning blur





Panning blur

Be professional.

Think safety.

- If in doubt, ask permission.
- Offer the club/team some good (not average) images, and you'll be welcomed back.
- Don't try and compete with the "team photographer", or someone who thinks they are the local expert 😊
- Be aware of where you are wrt to the action. Assess the risk to you, your kit and the athletes.
- Dress to be comfortable & dry. If you're cold or hot and uncomfortable you won't enjoy it.

Final Thoughts

- Shoot lots and often. Pixels are cheap.
- Don't be afraid to swing the camera around when shooting. It's amazing how you can freeze the action at 1/1000 sec.
- Don't be afraid to zoom in/out during a burst of images.
- Keep checking your settings.
- As always with photography, all rules are made to be broken.



Thank You !