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# 8 Tips for Taking Sports Photos Like a Pro

by [Dak Dillon](#) 2 Dec 2016

Difficulty: Intermediate Length: Medium Languages:

[Sports Shooting Telephoto Lens Lens Selection Shutter Speed Freezing Action Motion Blur](#)

This post is part of a series called [Sports Photography](#).

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[Your Guide to Stunning Surf Photography](#)

Are you looking to shoot better sports photos, and make an impact? Sports photography presents you with many opportunities to capture dramatic and vivid imagery that will last a lifetime. No other medium presents you with heart-pounding action, vivid color patterns and unique shooting opportunities.

The steps and guidance featured in this tutorial cover a broad range of areas - from perfecting shutter speed, to making sure you don't miss the action.

Following these eight tips should greatly improve your photography, and have you become the envy of all your friends. The key, above and beyond these eight tips, is to always keep shooting!

Practice makes perfect, ensuring you have a steady hand and are ready when the big play happens.

## 1. Prepare to Use High ISO

Looking to capture the perfect shot but maybe the lighting isn't great? Trying to stop the action at a little league game and needing a higher shutter speed? Raising the ISO on your camera will allow you to shoot at a higher shutter speed, giving you a better chance of getting the perfect shot.

Professional sports photographers use a shutter speed of around 1/1000 of a second to stop motion. During the day this is simple. At night however, you may need a faster F Stop than your lens is suited for. To compromise, you increase the ISO (what used to be film speed) of your camera. This now allows your camera to see more light.



At night, you need to use a higher ISO. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

So, how high do you go? If you are shooting with the latest and greatest cameras, such as the Nikon D810 or Canon 5d Mark III, you can actually use ISO up to its highest levels and your pictures will still look good. In the past, higher ISO meant more noise in your photos. With newer camera systems, though, pictures look great at any level.

With that said, I usually shoot at 1600 ISO. It provides a good happy medium between 800 ISO and 3200 ISO and allows me to shoot at a much faster shutter speed for sports.

Depending on the camera, you may also want to use Auto ISO to allow your camera to automatically choose the best ISO settings for you. The one unique feature about this is that the auto system doesn't change your ISO at full steps, such as 400 ISO to 800 ISO, instead it can change your ISO from 200 ISO to 210 ISO. Consider this setting if you are just starting to use ISO settings for improved night shooting.

## 2. Try Something Different

Every sports picture doesn't have to look the same. A few years ago, several photographers from a little American magazine tried something different for football. Instead of shooting at eye level, they laid as low to the ground as they could in the end zone with a wide angle lens. What did this do to their pictures? It presented them with a new angle to help tell the story. Who were these people, you ask? Sports Illustrated photographers. Now, everyone does it.

When shooting, be original and try something different. At each event I cover, I look for as many new ways to approach it as possible. I primarily work as a professional motorsports photographer, shooting mainly NASCAR, but at each event there is a new setup. This allows me to try new backgrounds, new angles, and new shooting locations.



Try something different from time to time. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

You don't have to be shooting professional sports to try something different. Even when I photographed high school football, I would always look for new angles and ideas.

By trying something different, you allow your creativity to flourish and capture something that everyone else doesn't have. In the picture below I shot through a racecar's windshield and caught the driver preparing to hit the track.

### **3. Don't Forget the Surroundings**

This may seem like a no-brainer, but don't forget your surroundings. Whether it be a stadium full of cheering fans, to the tailgating outside, the surroundings present unique opportunities to capture the spirit of the game without shooting the action itself.

Before kick-off, tailgating is a great place to capture shots of true fans before the game.





Don't forget about your surroundings. The crowd is as important. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

Before tip off of a basketball game, court side is also a great place to shoot pictures of team spirit.

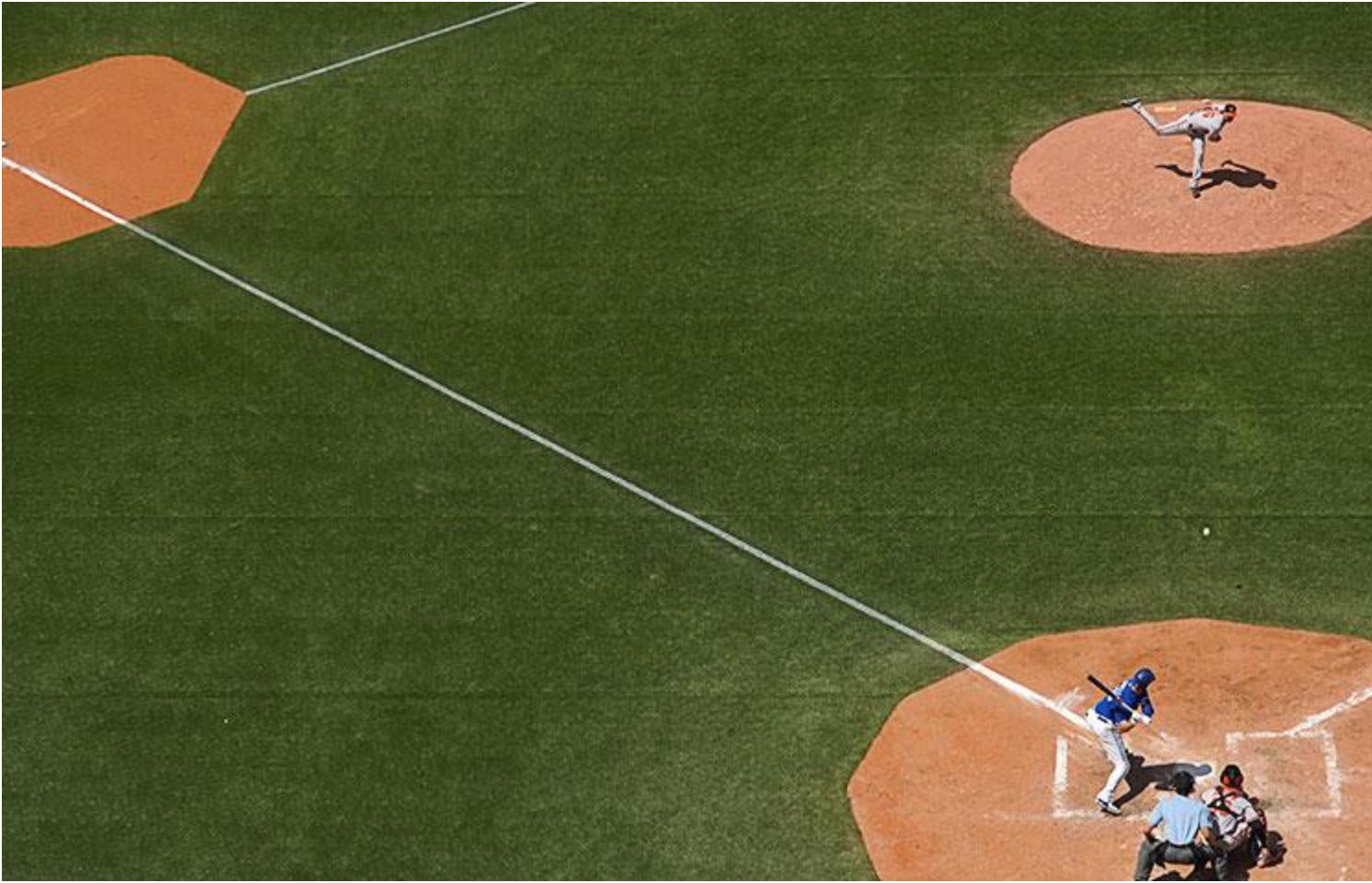
Even after the game begins, don't forget the surroundings. If you have a wider lens, such as a 10.5mm or 14mm, climb as high as you can and take a shot showing the whole stadium full of cheering fans.

## **4. Be Prepared With an Equipment Belt or Bag**

Ever wonder why sports photographers carry so much equipment? It's because we like to build bigger muscles while walking.

All joking aside, once you are on the sidelines or in the middle of the action it's hard to run to your bag and change equipment. Many sports photographers use one of three things to carry their equipment while working on the sidelines: a fanny pack, a belt system or a photo vest.

Photo vests were cool a few years ago (I had one) but now they are impractical with all the lenses you need to carry and quickly have access to. I prefer using a good belt system. My belt system has 6 holsters that can be used at any one time, each ranging from large lens holders to one meant just for a flash.



Be prepared to take lots of different shots. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

The belt system allows me to quickly change between lens and keep all my compact flash cards together in safe place. On the sidelines, this allows me stay prepared for the action with a variety of lenses and, since it has covers for each holster, also offers rain protection for outdoor sports.

Some companies also offer a "sideline bag" which is meant to be used for sports photography.

The key to having a good system is finding one that fits well and works for your specific needs. Visit your local camera store, try them out, and see what works best for you.

## 5. Long Glass Goes a Long Way

The key to capturing the perfect shot in sports comes down to relatively few things. One of the most important things is glass. Sports photography, unlike any other type, occasionally requires the biggest and most expensive equipment available. This allows you to shot from anywhere around the stadium, including the end zones in football, creating the perfect head on shot.

I say occasionally for a key reason. As we mentioned earlier, cameras now can do cool things with high ISO settings. This now allows people to use slower lenses for shooting sports, such as an f/4.





A long lens lets you isolate individual people on the pitch. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

When looking for good glass for sports photography, consider these factors:

- Consider a long lens such as a 300mm or 400mm if you can afford it. If not get a 70-200mm.
- Choose a lens with an f/stop of f/2.8 or f/4. Try and avoid f/5.6 like the plague.
- The bigger and heavier the lens, the better it usually is.
- Make sure the lens has a tripod mount built in.
- Look for lenses that have stood the test of time: there is a reason Nikon and Canon don't change their lens line up often.

When buying good glass, it's not like buying a new camera body. A good lens will last at least 10 years with proper care and maintenance.

## 6. Don't Chimp, Please.

Every sports photographer is guilty of "chimping". If you're unfamiliar with the term, this definition will clear everything up.

Essentially, chimping is when you check every photo you take on the LCD. Why is this bad? It takes your eye off the action and puts it on the camera. This is bad for two reasons: (1) you can get hurt more easily, and (2) you may miss a good shot.



If you look away from the action, you might miss great shots. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

When you chimp, you take your eyes off the field and the action. If you're shooting football, you can easily be run over on the sideline when not paying attention.

While reviewing your pictures is ok, there is a time and a place to do so. In sports, after the shutter clicks there's no second chance. You must move on to the next play.

## 7. Use a Slow Shutter Speed

A slow shutter speed? Earlier I said to use 1/1000 of a second to capture the action and stop it...

Along with trying something different you should try a different shutter speed sometimes. If you're shooting baseball and want to capture the swing in a perfect silhouette, I don't suggest shooting at 1/60 of a second. If, however, you want a cool blurry background shot, it works great.





A slow shutter speed creates energy. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

Many professional photographers from Getty Images and Reuters use this technique to add energy to their pictures and create great looking clean backgrounds. Shooting at 1/100 of a second or 1/80 of a second allows the player to be in focus and sharp but the background to be very blurry and creates a cool effect.

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## 8. Avoid Using a Flash

When shooting professional or college sports, flash photography is typically strictly prohibited. Flash can distract the players and cause coaches to go crazy. There are a few exceptions, including basketball and other indoor sports, but on-camera flash is usually never allowed.

For indoor sports, schools typically have very powerful flashes (or strobes) installed in the rafters of the gym, allowing an ideal amount of light to fall on the playing surface. These flashes are then synced to your camera using a Pocket Wizard.

When shooting outdoor sports such as football or baseball, you should never use an on-camera flash. This is why ISO settings are so important.





What ever the sport, it's best to get used to working without flashes. [Image via Unsplash.](#)

Now, if you are shooting a local sports event or a lower-level event, such as high school football, then flash is usually acceptable. I always check with either the coaches or the school's athletic director to ensure no one gets upset when the flashes start popping.

Many sanctioning bodies have specific rules for photographers, so before you shoot an event be sure to read these so you know what is OK and not OK.

## Need Help With Editing Your Shots?

Once you've taken the perfect shot, you need the perfect edit too. You can find a wide range of popular, affordable [photo editing services](#)[Photo editing services on Envato Studio](#)

<https://photography.tutsplus.com/tutorials/8-tips-for-taking-sports-photos-like-a-pro--photo-296>