

SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

By Kent DuFault

Sports is the epitome of human interaction and drama. Nowhere else in photography are the rewards of storytelling so easy to cultivate.

The happiness of a win or the sadness of defeat –it's all there and everything in between.

This creativity prompt is titled Sports and Activities because not all of us want to photograph sports.

However, the information discussed here will be equally applicable to other activities where humans interact.

In sports and action photography, these are your primary considerations:

- Self-challenge
- Group challenge
- Mentoring and coaching
- Human bonding
- Physical and mental prowess
- Strength and speed



Image 001 – Photograph by Vince Fleming



Image 002 – Photograph by Abigail Keenan

This photograph works perfectly as a 'self-challenge' photograph. There is a sense of isolation and going at it alone due to the use of negative space in the composition. The

use of a telephoto lens from a lower camera position accentuates that impression. The body language and the man's open mouth are crucial to telling this story.

Self-Challenge

This type of photography tends to focus in on the individual. You want the sport or activity to be evident without drawing too much attention away from the subject.



Image 003 – Photograph by Bruske Dede

Self-challenge does not always have to be serious or painful.

Self-challenge is best shown through body language and facial expression.

Compose your picture to highlight a particular subject while leaving the activity as a secondary storytelling element.

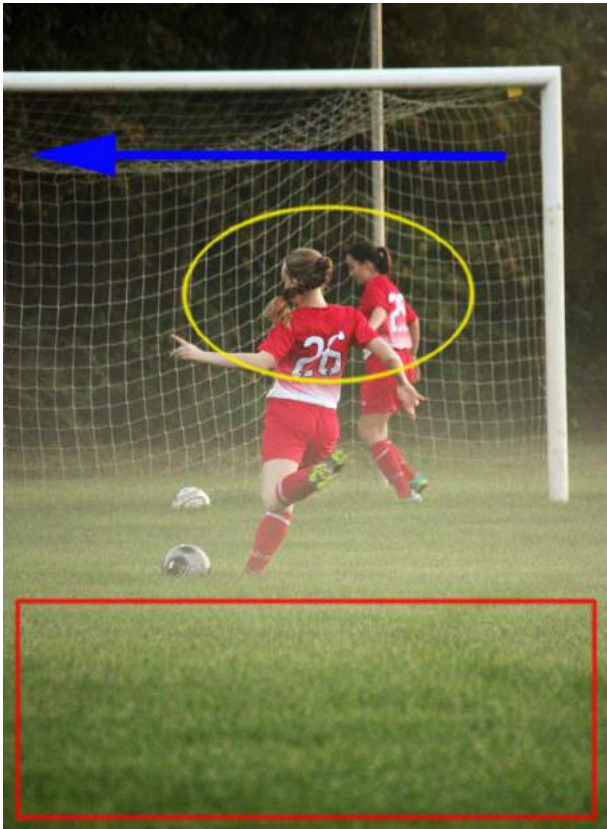


Image 004 – Photograph by Sheri Hooley



Remember:

Negative space should add to the story and be relative to the composition. If it doesn't satisfy those two elements, then it is simply wasted space in the frame.



Key Point:

Camera position is critical to effective storytelling sports and action photography. Image 004 had fantastic potential. However, the camera position is wrong, and all of the drama is lost. The blue arrow points to what would have been a better camera position. The yellow oval tells us where the storytelling drama is located. The red box is wasted space in the frame.



Assignment:

Pick an activity. It can be a sport or your children playing in the yard. Practice capturing this self-challenge with a variety of lenses and settings. Always compose to highlight your subject and let the activity 'fill in' as a story element. Carefully choose your camera positions. Don't let unneeded background take up your valuable frame.



Image 005 – Photograph by Xuan Nguyen

Mentoring and coaching are very intimate aspects of the sporting world. These are relationships that are often as close as children to parents.

When telling a sports or activity story about a coach or mentor, aim for peak action in facial expressions. These types of shots often work best when you can see both faces, but not always, so stay on your toes.



Image 006 – Photograph by Jesse Orrico

Image 006 depicts no meaningful facial expressions. Yet, the story of coaching and mentoring is quite apparent through the hands and arms. Be alert to moments when a team comes together.



Image 007 – Photograph by Jeffrey F Lin

Image 007 falls short as a storytelling sports photo because there are no pertinent expressions and no outstanding body language. There is also a notable amount of empty frame to the left that hurts the composition.



Remember:

For your coaching and mentoring storytelling photos, you want some type of eye contact between a participant and the coach or between us as a viewer and either a participant or a coach (see Image 008).



Image 008 – Photograph (L) by [Zhu Liang](#) and Photograph (R) by [Adria Crehuet Cano](#)

In the left of Image 008 is an example of eye contact between us as viewers of the photograph and the coach.

Eye contact doesn't necessarily mean that the eyes are looking at each other. It means that the eyes are directing us to the source of the story. The right side of Image 008 is an example of this.



Assignment:

Photograph sports or an activity where your theme is on the coach and mentoring story. Keep in mind the eyes. Where are they looking and why? Try to capture peak action with facial expressions and body language. A fun alternative to this prompt would be to concentrate on a single coach for an entire event. See how many different expressions and mood swings you can capture.



Image 009 – Photograph by [Olga Guryanova](#)

Team sports is about working together and forming a bond. Capturing fabulous storytelling images for team sports often requires some knowledge of the sport, so that you can anticipate moments of action.



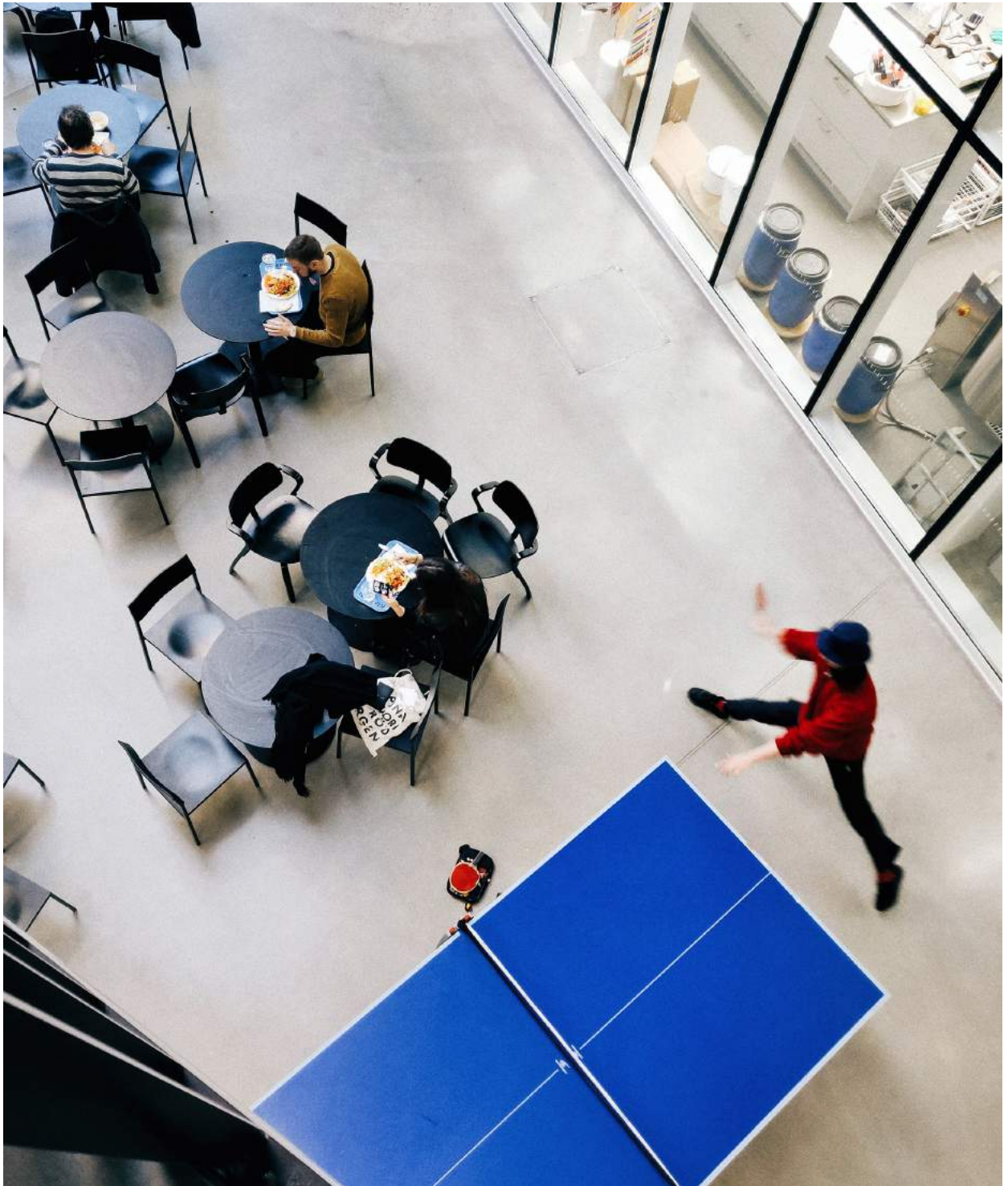
Image 010 – Photograph by [Bruno Kelzer](#)

Just as important as the action on the field, you will find exciting stories of bonding on the sidelines.



Assignment:

Photograph sports and action-oriented activities with your story theme as bonding. Show participant interaction. Capture body language and peak action moments both on the field of play and off on the sidelines.

Image 011 – Photograph by [Mika Korhonen](#)

Don't despair if you aren't particularly interested in sports. The opportunities to tell a photography action story are all around you.



Image 012 – Photograph (L) by [Pixabay](#) and Photograph (R) by [Miles Tan](#)

Here are some suggested camera settings to get you started in photographing action:

- A telephoto or telephoto zoom lens is a huge advantage. It allows you to get close the action. The minimum focal length would be 100mm. The best lens would be a long-range zoom like a 70-200mm or even longer like a 100-400mm. Obviously, we don't all have those lenses, so start with what you can. Get as close as you safely can to the action.
- Use Shutter Priority mode. This type of photography is exactly what shutter priority was designed for. Don't let anyone tell you any different.
- The minimum shutter speed for fast action should be 1/250th. You can photograph sideline action as low as 1/125th depending on the focal length of your lens. Follow the Reciprocal Rule for the minimum shutter speed.
- Set your aperture to f/8. You can adjust this as you see fit. Open up the aperture for less depth of field and close it down for more depth of field. f/8 is a good starting point for most sports photography.
- Set your ISO to auto. If your camera allows you to designate a maximum ISO setting, I would set this to ISO 1600 if you're in lower light or ISO 1000 if you're in bright daylight.
- Shoot in the camera RAW file format. If your cards or camera seem to be slowing down the drive mode, then switch to .jpg.
- Set your drive mode to low or high speed continuous depending on your preferences.
- Set the focus mode to continuous or automatic if your camera allows it.
- Set the focus points to a center cluster.
- Set the metering mode to match the focus points.
- Turn on image stabilization if available. Turn it off if using a tripod.



Image 013 – Photograph by [Oliver Sjostrom](#)



Assignment:

You now have the tools to go out and tell fabulous sports and action stories with your camera. Go out and get started! I would love to see you assemble a portfolio of at least thirty to forty dramatic award-winning photos, and I know you can do it.