

Newsletter

InFocus at DVCC

September 2026



Learn, Develop, Share, Support

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Special Edition

Sport Action and Movement

September is Sport Action Movement month so here is a special edition of the newsletter to focus on that genre.

In terms of a photography genre Sport Action Movement (henceforth in this special edition newsletter referred to a SpAM) is the genre photography genre that captures people or things in motion, especially athletic or dynamic scenes. In judging-body terms, it's usually treated as images of sport, or images where the visual emphasis is on movement: dancing, ballet, gym work, and similar action, plus movement in fauna or objects. A typical "sport" definition is a picture featuring a person or people taking part in a sporting event; "sports photography" covers all types of sports and often overlaps with photojournalism.



In practice, that means the photo should show the action, energy, timing, and movement of the moment – for example a football tackle, runner in stride, cyclist cornering, dancer mid-leap, or a clearly moving subject with motion visible or implied.

What makes a good SpAM photograph is one that shows:

Peak timing; the exact instant of the jump, strike, sprint, tackle, twist, or landing.

Strong subject separation: the athlete stands out clearly from the background.

Visible energy: body position, facial expression, spray, sweat, dust, blur, or tension that shows motion.

Good light: enough detail on the subject, ideally with light that shapes the scene.

Simple background: nothing distracting behind the action.

Story or emotion: struggle, victory, focus, exhaustion, or celebration.

So when you are out and about capturing sport action and movement here are a few things to think about that often make these photos stronger: Freeze the subject

sharply, or use motion blur intentionally.; Shoot from a lower angle if it makes the action feel bigger; Include room in front of the movement; Capture interaction with other players, equipment, or the environment; Choose a moment that shows what is happening, not just that something is happening.

The Exposure Triangle

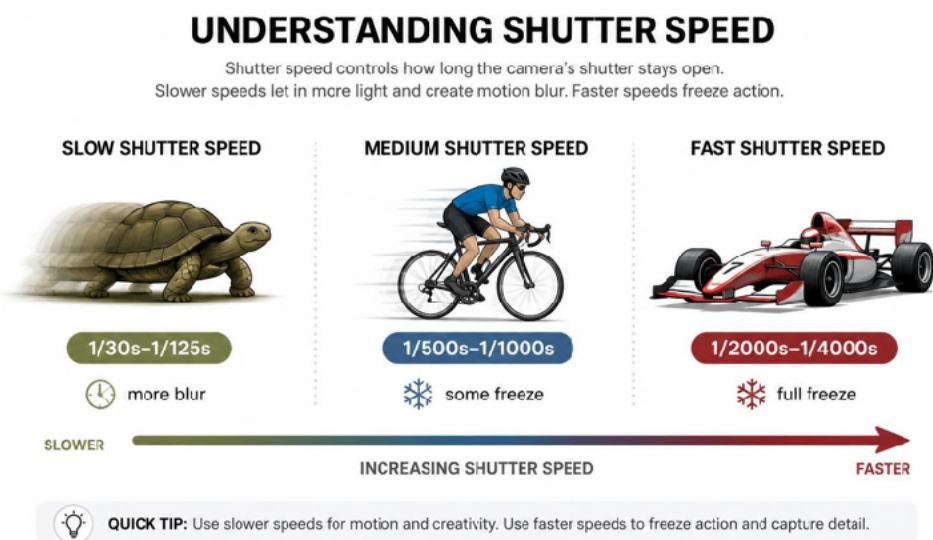
As we all know the 'correct' exposure relies upon the balance and interplay between Shutter Speed, Aperture and ISO. So in capturing SpAM how do we control the Exposure triangle.

Generally speaking we need a fast shutter speed to freeze the moment and importantly eliminate camera shake. However if we have increased our shutter speed we need to balance the triangle by either making the aperture wider (smaller F number) or increasing the ISO.

The guidance for a good sports image says try to eliminate a distracting background, we can seek to do this by having a shallow depth of field, and we do this by making our aperture wider. So if we have a fast shutter speed and a wide aperture the only thing we can change to balance our exposure triangle is the ISO. Therefore you might well need to increase your ISO.

Here is a bit of a graphic to give you some starting points

So, the faster the subject moves across your field of view the faster your shutter speed needs to be. Keep your aperture as wide open as possible.



Camera Settings

Set your camera to Auto Focus Continuous or for Canon users AI-Servo and then if you wish to, put your camera in shutter priority (Tv mode for Canon) and select a suitable shutter speed and let the camera do the work for you. Or if feeling a little more confident opt for Manual mode, set your aperture to a wide open as it will go and then set your shutter speed to freeze the action and either use auto ISO or set a suitable ISO to balance your exposure. Perhaps of for a little over exposed on your in camera exposure meter.



Too dark: set iso higher,
or slower shutter speed
or wider aperture



Shutter speed to slow,
so blurred



Watch the timing

Composition Stop Chasing the Ball – Let the Action Come to You

Great sports photography isn't always about reacting quickly. Sometimes it's about being in the right place before the moment happens. There is something wonderfully addictive about photographing sport.

The whistle blows, players explode into action and suddenly you're trying to keep a fast-moving subject in the viewfinder, maintain focus, choose the right moment and remember whether your shutter speed is fast enough – all while hoping nobody walks in front of you!

But here's a thought that can transform the way you photograph team sports:

“Don't chase the action. Anticipate it – and **let the action come to you.**”

It sounds simple, but it is one of the biggest differences between photographing sport and photographing sport well.

SEE THE PHOTOGRAPH BEFORE IT HAPPENS

Instead of constantly following the ball, spend some time watching the game.

Where are the attacks developing? Which players are creating opportunities? Where are the tackles taking place? Which direction are the players moving? Once you've worked this out, position yourself accordingly.



Scored 13 at YPU, Certificate

You might stand near the goal in football, on the touchline where a rugby attack is developing, or at a bend in an athletics track where runners are going to pass close to you. Then wait. You're not doing nothing. You're **anticipating**. You've already decided where the photograph is going to happen. Now you just have to be ready when it does. "You are not being passive – you are setting a trap for the photograph."

YOUR POSITION IS PART OF YOUR COMPOSITION

One of the easiest mistakes in sports photography is to concentrate entirely on the players and forget about everything else in the frame. Before pressing the shutter, look at the background. Is there a distracting advertising board behind your subject? A car park? A brightly coloured jacket? A goalpost apparently growing out of someone's head? Moving just a few metres can completely change the photograph. A clean, uncluttered background allows the player to stand out. Your position can often make more difference than another £1,000 spent on equipment.

GIVE THE PLAYER SOMEWHERE TO GO

If a player is running, looking or moving towards the right-hand side of the frame, try leaving some space in front of them. That empty space isn't wasted. It gives the viewer somewhere to imagine the player is going and creates a feeling of movement and anticipation. Don't automatically put the subject in the middle. Think about where they are going – not just where they are.

DON'T WORSHIP THE BALL!

Of course, the ball matters. But some of the strongest sports photographs aren't necessarily about the ball at all.

Look for the relationships between people:

- Two players competing for possession

- A defender closing down an attacker
- A teammate encouraging another player
- A coach reacting to an incident
- Players celebrating together
- A goalkeeper anticipating what is about to happen

The ball can be the story – but it can also simply be part of the story.

KEEP SHOOTING AFTER THE ACTION

This is one of the best habits you can develop. The goal goes in: Don't stop. The tackle is completed: Don't stop. The race is finished.: Don't stop.



The moments immediately afterwards can be incredibly expressive.

Victory, disappointment, relief, celebration, frustration and exhaustion can all appear within seconds. "Sometimes the reaction is a better photograph than the action." Watch what happens **after** the moment you've been waiting for.

Panning

Have you see those photos where the motorbike, car, runner is sharp but the background is blurred - ok if you wanted to your could mimic this in photoshop but to create it in camera is much more rewarding. So what is panning, Panning is the technique of **moving the camera with a moving subject while using a relatively slow shutter speed**. Instead of freezing everything, the subject remains relatively sharp while the background becomes a streak of movement. The result can feel much more dynamic than a conventional 1/1000-second sports photograph.

How to achieve a good panning result. For faster subjects such as cyclists or runners, you might need around **1/125-1/250 sec**. For slower movement, try **1/30-1/60 sec**. The slower the shutter speed, the greater the amount of movement blur – but also the harder it becomes to keep the subject sharp.

The secret is smooth movement.

1. Find the subject early.
2. Start following it before pressing the shutter.
3. Keep your focus point on the subject.

4. Press the shutter while continuing to follow the subject.
5. Keep moving the camera **after** the shutter has fired.
6. Try to rotate your upper body smoothly rather than flicking the camera with your arms. Swing at the hips !

But remember panning is very difficult to achieve in camera so don't be disappointed if you don't get it first time.

Dance Photography: Capturing the Moment

There is something special about photographing a dancer. For a fraction of a second, a human body can create shapes, lines and expressions that simply cannot be held for long. Studio dance photography gives us the opportunity to capture those moments in a controlled environment, but getting the best from the session requires more than simply pointing the camera and pressing the shutter.

When working with studio flash, start with a simple exposure such as **ISO 100, 1/125 sec at f/8**. This provides a clean, high-quality file and gives you useful depth of field. The flash power can then be adjusted to produce the required exposure. Remember that it is the very short duration of the flash, rather than the shutter speed, that normally freezes the dancer's movement.

Lighting is where you can really become creative. A large softbox positioned to one side can produce beautiful modelling across the dancer, while moving the light further around the subject can create stronger shadows and a more dramatic image. Don't forget the background. Changing the dancer's position in relation to it can completely alter the feel of the photograph.

Perhaps the biggest skill is timing. Watch the dancer and learn the movement. Instead of relying entirely on continuous shooting, anticipate the peak of the jump, turn or extension and press the shutter at precisely the right



Although the dancers will wear colourful outfits, no reason not to do monochrome images

moment.

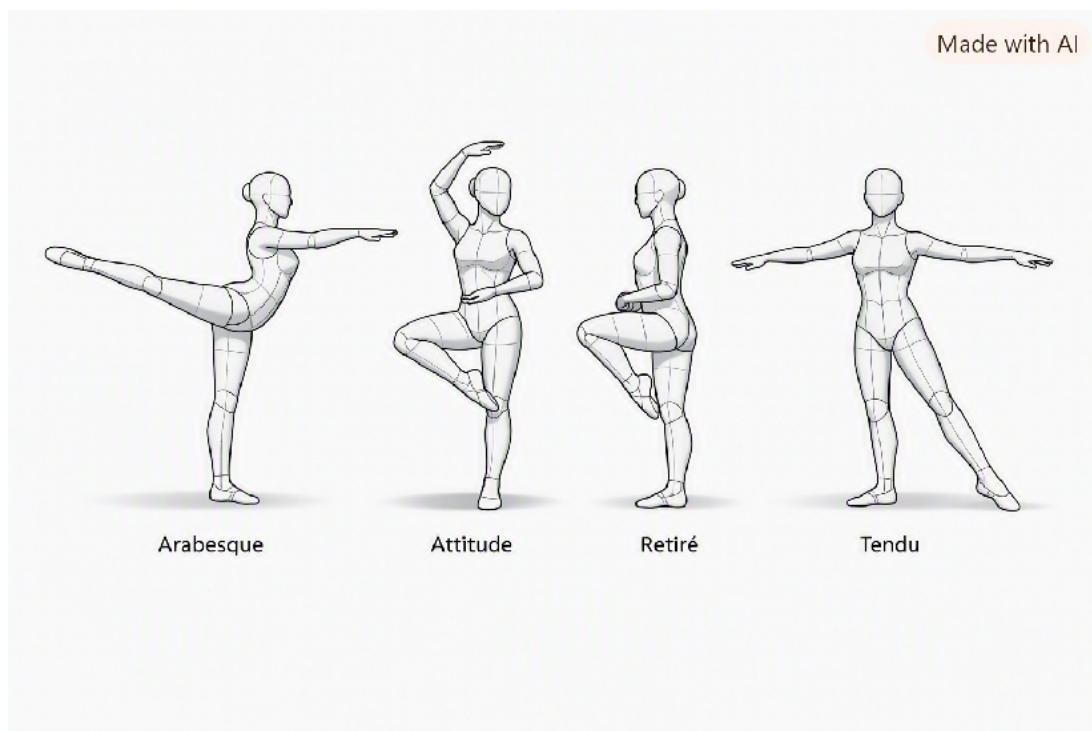
Try different viewpoints too. A low camera position can make a leap appear more powerful, while shooting from the side can emphasise the shape and extension of the body.

Try This at Your Next Shoot

Ask your dancer to perform one simple movement several times. Keep the camera position and exposure the same, but experiment with the position of your main light. Look carefully at how the shadows and highlights change the shape of the dancer. You may discover that the best photograph isn't the most complicated one, but the one where the light, movement and timing come together perfectly.

Not sure how to pose the dancer?

Try some of these dance positions (these are positions for the dancer not the photographer!)



Remember, it's about getting your timing right, and being ready for when the dancer 'just right'. Like these example shots...



Timing



Slower shutter speed to capture movement



Ask the dancer to adopt the pose when she is ready then take the photo at the perfect time



Timing, Timing, Timing!

YPU and competitions

Sport Action and Movement is one of the YPU categories for both print and digital submissions. If you'd like to enter in the YPU and would like some critique then let us know and we will arrange a zoom critique session.

Here are some observations about a couple of photographs made by a senior sports photographer at the Society of International Sport and Leisure Photographers. The observations may help you.



Observations

A good moment again with this picture, but your shooting position is letting the image down. You are capturing so much in the background, and it's brighter and more colourful than the rider and my eye instantly goes to the people in the background. Your shooting position is not the best to isolate the main subject, and it may be a case that was all that was available to you, but having cleaner backgrounds is all important to avoid distractions. A position more to the right if available, or getting really low down to lift the rider up in the frame would have helped to isolate him.

Observations

Good action and the composition works well. Can you burn the highlights in the background down slightly, would help alleviate them pulling the eye. Image is slightly over exposed and is flat on contrast. Adjusting both will help with colour saturation and perceived sharpness.



Scored 12 at YPU, not selected

Ian's Challenge

Critical to sport action and movement photography are anticipation and timing, as well of course the correct camera settings.

Ian's Challenge this month is fiendishly simple! There is a small prize for person adjudged to have met the brief to best effect. Pop your entry in to the Member's Showcase for Sport Action Movement. (Judges decision is final) You will need to anticipate your shot and get the perfect timing and you'll have to try different settings on your camera to meet all of the challenges. To assist you it will be helpful if you have a flash to hand.

Working in pairs, one person is tasked with dropping a tennis ball in front of a piece of white card - its got a cross marked on the front of it. The side of the card with the cross needs to face the photographer. The second person is tasked with meeting these three challenges.

Challenge 1

Capture the tennis ball as close to the centre (horizontal line) as possible, extra points for capturing the tennis ball in the centre of the cross.

Challenge 2

Capture the tennis ball as close to the centre (horizontal line) as possible, extra points for capturing the tennis ball in the centre of the cross but this time make sure that the tennis ball is perfectly in focus and is 'frozen' in space.

Challenge 3

Capture the tennis ball as close to the centre (horizontal line) as possible, extra points for capturing the tennis ball in the centre of the cross but make sure that the tennis ball is perfectly in focus and is 'frozen' in space and there is a blur of the motion of the tennis ball above it. (Hint look up rear curtain synch for your flash and look up capturing movement with flash).

