

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

P.28 AT THE PITCH
Capturing Women's Soccer

P.38 GO WILD
Sony a7R VI Review

P.48 LIVING HISTORY
Decades in Baseball

Game On



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THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS OF AMERICA

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Exclusive info and images you won't find in this issue
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Rising Stars

FOCUSING ON THE NEXT GENERATION

As a proud member of Gen X, I see the memes, T-shirts, and pins that say, “Please be patient with me. I’m from the 1900s,” and laugh every time. So, it was invigorating to see all the birth years starting with a “2” on the nominations for Professional Photographers of America’s first class of 30 Under 30, rising stars in the photography, film, media, photography entrepreneurship, and photography-adjacent professions. We received about 90 nominations, and it was a privilege, albeit a difficult one, to help narrow the field.

Those who made the cut are inspiring: working on creative projects, taking the initiative to solve problems, overcoming adversity and setbacks, running their own businesses, and beautifully representing the next generation of the industry. You can read about them currently on PPA’s website, which links to each of their social media accounts. I cannot wait for you to see how we feature them in the October issue.

As I read about these rock stars, I was impressed by the diversity of photography genres they represent. For example, we have a few 30 Under 30 honorees who focus solely on sports, which is a cutthroat, highly specialized, high-anxiety genre. This month, along with our impressive cover, you’ll see a few sports photography stories, including how to break in, techniques to effectively photograph major sporting events, and a Q&A with the longtime team photographer of the L.A. Dodgers. Why so many? In part, we are gearing up for Imaging USA 2027 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jan. 31-Feb. 2, and our reimagined Stadium Club for school, sports, and events (SSE) volume photographers. If you fall into this category, you won’t want to miss the new speakers, activations, and opportunities in SSE at Imaging USA 2027! Registration is now open at imagingusa.com.

Another area our 30 Under 30 photographers excel in is “doing good.” PPA has always been about helping photographers succeed in business. Now, we are shining a light on photographers who use their business, art, and skills to help make the world a better place. Many of our young rising stars are already hard at work in this area. For example, one of them has spent more than 10 years interviewing some 400 World War II veterans around the world and documenting their experiences in video and photos. Another experienced a traumatic childhood in foster care before being lovingly adopted, and gives back by taking portraits of older children currently in the system. Our 30 Under 30 honorees and dedicated SSE and sports photographers are just two examples of how bright the future is for photography and visual media. •

Melanie Lasoff Levs

Melanie Lasoff Levs
Director of Publications

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Learn about our first class of 30 Under 30 on PhotoVision at ppa.com



Expand your sports photography knowledge on PhotoVision at ppa.com

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Accidents happen, and many venues require you to be insured to work on-site.

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FOREGROUND

By Amanda Arnold

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Maternity in Motion

ADVENTURE INTO THE THIRD TRIMESTER

Colorado maternity and commercial photographer Ethan Herrold noticed the pregnant women he knew in his home base of Denver were biking, climbing, and running trails into their third trimester. But in portraits, they always seemed to be still. So, he decided to launch a fine art series, “Pregnant Athletes,” to showcase the active pregnant women he knew existed. “I wanted to shoot pregnancy the way I’d shoot any other athletic moment,” he says, “in motion, in real conditions, with the same intensity I’d bring to a commercial shoot for an outdoor brand.”

Finding subjects wasn’t difficult. “Colorado has an unusually high concentration of competitive and recreational athletes, so climbers, runners, and paddleboarders were already booking sessions with me before the series existed,” he says. He also reached out to pregnant professional athletes, including Brooks-sponsored middle distance runner Katie Follett (above), whom he photographed during her first and second pregnancies.

Since clients now come to him for an adventurous, athletic maternity session, he created an adventure maternity brand,

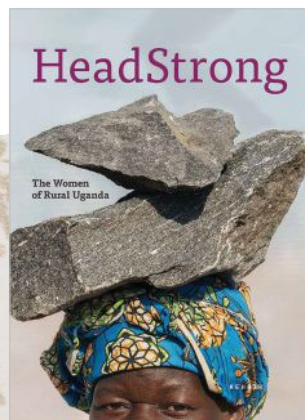


called WanderBump. The series also caught the eye of *Outside* magazine, which experienced record engagement when it featured the photos on its Instagram account for Mother's Day. "When I pitch to outdoor brands, this series is what gets the meeting, not my catalog work," he says. "Commercial and client work pays the bills, but it rarely builds a body of work that says something on its own." His active maternity images are today why brands take his calls and clients seek him out, he explains, which illustrates how personal projects can boost business. "I'd tell any working photographer the same thing: Pick something you'd shoot even if nobody paid you for it and give it time to become undeniable." •



Standing Tall

STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY



New York-based photographer Dan Nelken's new book "HeadStrong: The Women of Rural Uganda" (Kehrer Verlag) is a collection of 62 portraits and 36 stories celebrating the strength of rural Ugandan women, who work hard

to provide for their families despite enduring civil war, insurgencies, and a struggling economy.

Nelken made the portraits during three separate trips between the cities of Layibi, Jinja, and Gulu. He was introduced to some of the subjects via Oysters & Pearls Uganda, a nongovernmental organization his wife volunteers with that supports education and advocates for women. Other subjects he met in markets or through other contacts.

On his second trip, he began collaborating with Ugandan author Beatrice Lamwaka. While he set up his portable studio, Lamwaka spoke with each portrait subject and earned their trust, which helped Nelken capture more engaging photos, he writes. For each portrait, he tried to include items that represented the subject's work, and when possible, he used a mosquito net as a backdrop so that their surroundings were softly obscured but still visible.

His intention is to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges these women face, he writes. "It was an honor to be present for them." •



Learn more about
portrait photography
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The Maze of Motherhood

A LOT OF EVERYTHING



Motherhood is nuanced, says Norman, Oklahoma-based conceptual photographer Alex Eischeid. It's beautiful, invigorating, challenging, exhausting, lonely. Her motherhood-themed conceptual self-portraits, which she creates in her home often with her own family members, seek to assure mothers they're not alone in their experiences, she says. "We can celebrate motherhood and laugh at all the absurdities it holds, but we can also talk about how difficult and isolating it is," she says. "All of it can be true at the same time."



IMAGES ©ALEX EISCHEID / alexeischeid.com



Eischeid describes the making of her conceptual image “Groundhog Day” (above):

Inspiration: The image was inspired by the 1949 painting by Steven Dohanos titled, “After Dinner Dishes,” and draws from Eischeid’s “own voice and lived experience.”

Staging: To create the image, she had to photograph through two large rooms: her kitchen and formal dining room. “I wanted there to be a clear separation of space but paired with a feeling of chaos

and tension,” she says. She chose primary colors for props that represent children not present in the photo.

Equipment: She made two images: one of herself sitting in the chair and one with the water running and PMI Smoke Ninja fog to create the look of hot steam. She used her Canon Camera Connect app on her phone to capture both images, which were made with her Canon EOS R6 Mark II and Sigma ART 50mm DG HSM lens at 1/125 second at f/16, ISO 640.

Lighting: She first set her exposure

for the window light. “I like being able to see color and detail outside the window to give a sense of space and time,” she says. To light foreground, middle ground, and background, she used five Geekoto strobes, a MagnetMod Dome Gel 1/4 CTO gel, and two Geekoto continuous lights.

Post-production: First, she composited the two images together in Adobe Photoshop, taming down the glare on the appliances. She then took the image into Lightroom for global adjustments, color grading, and to add in a subtle grain. •

From the Mouths of Babes

TAKE A STEP BACK TO SEE WHAT YOU BUILT

By Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP

©PHANEENDRA GUDAPATI



It was a late August morning and my house was a disaster: dirty clothes on the floor, cereal bowls in the sink, client product orders taking over most of my office. The neighbor kids were over, and I was running around like a maniac. After microwaving my coffee in the kitchen for the third time, I walked back into my office to see an album open on the floor with four kids around it, and whatever was on their hands was now on the pages.

Thankfully, it wasn't a client's album. It was a family album from about two years before, the most recent one I'd managed to print, and there were my two kids, showing it off to their friends. They were pointing at the cliff jumping, the sandcastles, and the ice cream all over their faces, and narrating their whole year out loud. Then they came to a photo of their great grandparents.

My daughter Lia studied it and said, very seriously, "I think this one's still alive." My son Blake didn't miss a beat. "That's Great Grandpa Peter," he shouted. "He's still alive!"

I stood in the doorway and laughed until I had to sit down.

My kids didn't know what that photo actually represented. It was the first time their Great Grandpa Peter had come to see our studio. He'd stood in the hallway and looked at the name on the door, The Harris Company. He is Peter Harris: a name, a business, and our legacy. His look of pride was something I never wanted to forget, so I took his portrait.

Watching the kids share the photo with their friends, I realized I had forgotten that day, and it reminded me what Septembers used to look like. We would drop our kids at my parents' house every weekend on our way

to photograph another wedding. When they were little, we would hand over a diaper bag, frozen milk, and three pages of instructions, and tell ourselves it would get easier when they were older. It doesn't. It gets harder, because they notice you're gone. From the outside, it looked like we were thriving: six-figure income, our own schedule,

vacations whenever we wanted. Yet I still felt like I was drowning.

For many, September resets everything. School starts and the calendar stops asking permission. For some, fall is stacked so high with work you're already behind. For others, it's a hustle to fill a nearly empty business calendar. Both are exhausting. Watching my kids narrating the images in that album, I noticed they weren't talking about those September moments I missed. They were sharing memories we had—together. That photo album was proof I'm a good mom. It

was proof of what our family built. I couldn't see either of those truths until the photograph was printed and in their hands.

You will not get that view from inside your day-to-day. It comes from stopping long enough to look at what you already have. So, take time to revisit your own albums, even if you're two years behind. You never know when a bunch of kids will find themselves telling their version of those stories, and you'll be very glad the book was there. •

Bonita Springs, Florida-based Makayla Harris is co-founder of The Harris Company, and founder/CEO of ASET: Album & Art Sales and the Printographers Society.

That photo album
was proof I'm a good
mom. It was proof
of what our family
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either of those truths
until the photograph
was printed and in
their hands.



See more from
Makayla Harris,
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with Seth Miranda

Seth Miranda is a photographer, educator, host, and content producer known for bold lighting, fast problem-solving, and a no-fluff approach to creative education. Drawing from his roots in BMX and skate culture, his current focus captures special effects makeup, commercial work, and multimedia projects. Seth's live demos help photographers understand the principles behind the image so they can adapt, create, and deliver under pressure.

*"We always say pros deliver.
That's what it is. There's no excuse."*



Five TIPS:

- 1. START WITH THE SHOT.**
Know what the image needs to say before you start building the setup.
- 2. CONTROL THE LIGHT.**
Learn the principles so you can adapt in any situation.
- 3. RESPECT THE SET.**
Watch stands, cables, backdrops, and anything a client or model could trip over.
- 4. BRING A BACKUP PLAN.**
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Brotherly Love

Matthew Sewell, M.Photog., CPP

Matthew Sewell Photography

Little Rock, Arkansas

CAMERA & LENS: Canon EOS R5 Mark II, Canon RF70-200mm F2.8 L IS USM lens

EXPOSURE: 1/16,00 second at f/2.8, ISO 100

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Minor color corrections were made in Capture One.



OUR COVERS: *Professional Photographer* staff chooses each month's cover image from the top 32 images across each category in the International Photographic Competition. Learn more about the International Photographic Competition on **PhotoVision** at **ppa.com**.

Pressure From the Peloton

Wayne Flanagan

Flanagan Images

Sunapee, New Hampshire

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PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE: While in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to participate in a cycling event, Wayne Flanagan decided to watch the Pros Criterium. "As always, I had my camera and a small kit with me. I loved the combination of color, motion, and human expression taking place as the riders completed their circuit. The pace line lengthened and created a natural curve and I was able to dial in the correct panning speed to not completely blur the riders when the leaders rode up and past me."

CAMERA & LENS: Nikon D850, Nikkor AF-S 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6G ED VR lens

EXPOSURE: 1/250 second at f/5.6, ISO 200

LIGHTING: Natural light

POST-CAPTURE: Minor edits, including cropping, sharpening, and adjustments to exposure were made in Adobe Lightroom.



ABOUT THE IMAGING EXCELLENCE COLLECTION: The Imaging Excellence Collection comprises photographs chosen by trained jurors as being the best of the best in PPA's Merit Image Review. The Imaging Excellence distinction is awarded to compositions that successfully address the 12 elements of a merit image. **NOTE:** Lighting diagrams shown here are not to scale. ppa.com/mir
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—JEREMY SAFFER
2027 IMAGING USA SPEAKER



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JEREMY SAFFER
Rock Photography with Jeremy Saffer:
Photographing Bands Off-Stage Using
LED Lighting



New Speaker

Pre-Con

RAY ALVAREZ

From Shoot to Delivery: How to Build a Fast and
Personalized Workflow That Clients Remember



Pre-Con

JENN LEWIS CR.PHOTOG.
The Profit Shift: Pricing and Sales



New Speaker

Pre-Con

MATIAS EZCURRA

El Poder Tranquilo del Flash: Un Workflow
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The Quiet Power of Flash: An Introductory,
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Creating Editorial Boudoir Imagery That Demands Attention



New Speaker

CHLOE RAMIREZ

Lighting on Purpose:

Stop Guessing, Start Shaping

I loved meeting in person the photographers who have been instrumental in teaching, mentoring & supporting my journey to become a better photographer.

—PAM JACOBSON
2026 IMAGING USA ATTENDEE



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- Expert-led, hands-on learning
- Test gear, try new techniques and create alongside fellow photographers

I did the Nanlite photo walk with Jeremy Saffer and learned so much about continuous lighting.

—MELISSA ANDREWS
2026 IMAGING USA ATTENDEE

ACCESS INSPIRATION



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Make your Charlotte plans early for the best hotel options. Imaging USA has 14 official hotel choices near the Charlotte Convention Center, with a range of rates and styles to fit your trip.

Book directly through ImagingUSA.com to access official hotel rates and avoid third-party booking scams. The closest hotels and lowest rates are likely to go quickly, so coordinate with friends, classmates or coworkers now if you want to stay together.

Imaging USA is heading to Charlotte for the first time, bringing the photography community to a city full of creative energy, walkable Uptown experiences, dining, public art, nightlife and photo-worthy spaces.

Between classes, demos, networking and the Expo, take time to explore a destination built for inspiration—from skyline views and colorful neighborhoods to restaurants, murals, culture and moments waiting to be captured.

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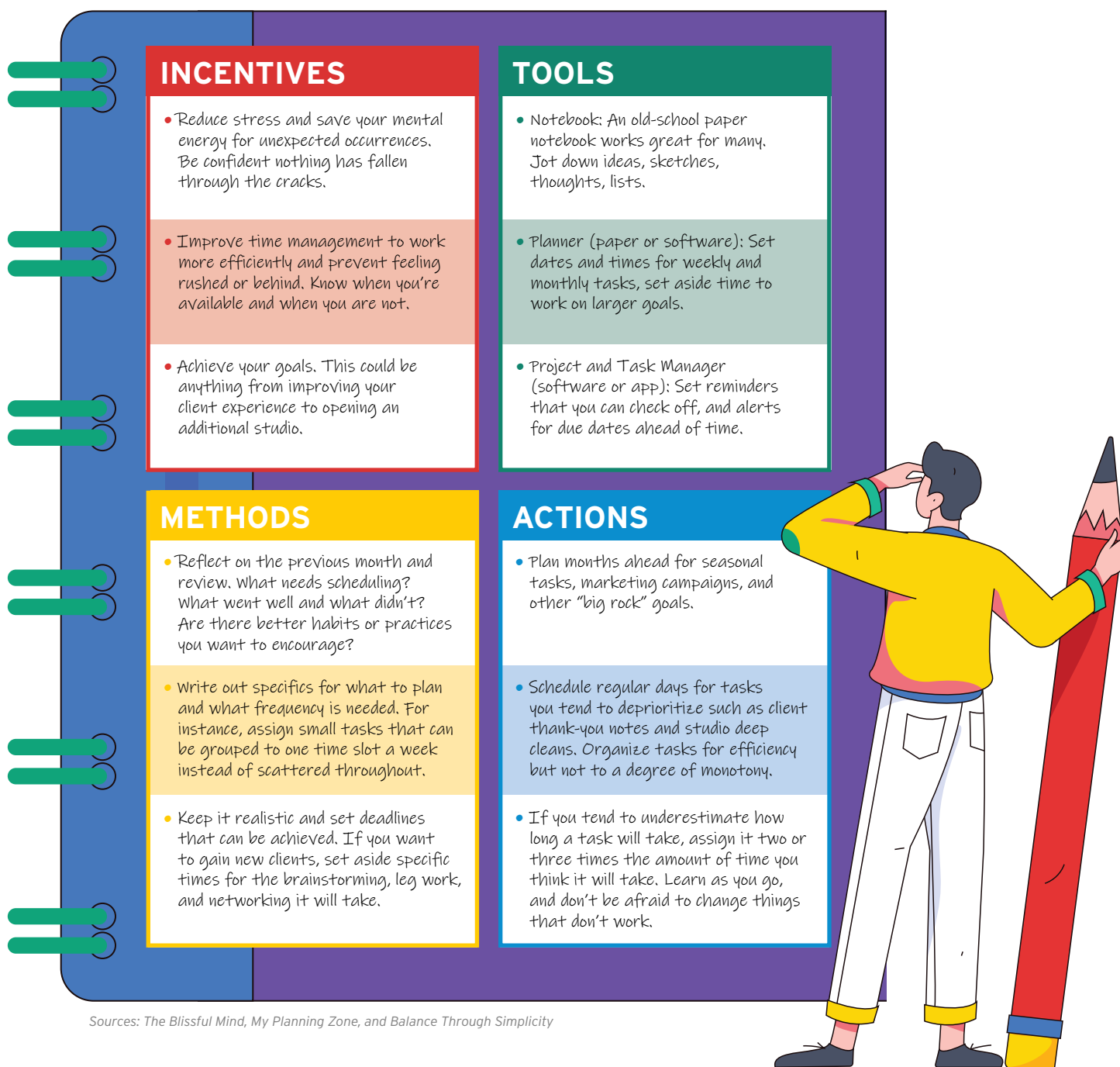
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Make Your Month

While some people are adept at “winging it,” most could use some organization in their workdays. Planning out the month ahead has many benefits, including peace of mind. Start by reviewing the software you already use; your studio management and client relation software may have planning and management functions that you’re not using. If you need new software, take advantage of free trial periods to explore what might work best for you.



Sources: The Blissful Mind, My Planning Zone, and Balance Through Simplicity

Match Ready

TAPPING INTO THE FAST-PACED WORLD OF WOMEN'S SOCCER

By Jeff Kent



IMAGES ©KEVIN GILLIGAN / photosbykag.com

Kevin Gilligan started his career as a prosecutor in Los Angeles, a job that involved a “steady diet of crime and nuisance.” For his own mental health, he needed an artistic outlet. So, he picked up a camera and started photographing landscapes, then portraiture, and eventually sports. He assisted established photographers and traded his labor for lessons in lighting, composition, and technical details.

A former high-level soccer player with a daughter currently playing Division I soccer in college, Torrance, California-based Gilligan was intrigued by women's soccer. He worked his way onto photographing the sidelines at college soccer matches and local tournaments before eventually earning credentials to photograph Angel City FC, L.A.'s National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) team. Today, Gilligan is a regular fixture on the Angel City sidelines, and he offers a playbook for other photographers who want to break into one of America's fastest-growing professional sports.

GETTING ACCESS

Before Gilligan could capture a play on the pitch, he had to get into the stadium, which is no easy feat. Gilligan's first application to shoot NWSL was rejected outright, “but I'm not someone who's bothered by the word ‘no,’” he says. “So, I kept trying different angles to get credentials.”

The fix, he found, is understanding that credentialing runs through editorial access. Most professional soccer organizations publish media policies, and nearly all of them require a sponsoring news outlet or publication, because access is granted primarily for reporting purposes. Gilligan eventually found a magazine willing to sponsor him; an editor wrote



KEVIN GILLIGAN



the letter that got him his first credentials. From there, he worked hard to become a valuable contributor to the publication and continue making connections for access to future games.

Gilligan's advice for photographers navigating that same maze:

Read the media policy first. Every professional club and governing body posts one, and requirements vary by organization.

Find an editorial sponsor. Approach local papers, magazines, or online outlets

and pitch a specific story idea, not just a request for access.

Expect rejection, but don't let it stop you. "It's important to keep looking and not quit," Gilligan says. "Take no as a suggestion. Understand that's going to happen. Treat it as a learning process and keep trying."

Consider a smaller market. Competition for credentials is fierce in major cities with deep benches of photographers. A club in a smaller city may offer an easier entry point, as do some college

teams and youth clubs. Build your portfolio photographing at those levels and use those images to validate your claims for access to top-tier professional games.

THE ROAD TO MONETIZATION

Aside from getting paid assignments from media outlets or public relations companies, Gilligan notes there's no single path to monetizing sports photography. In his experience, once you have a viable portfolio, you can pursue multiple pathways, including stock sales, gallery

exhibitions, teaching workshops, and private photography coaching. However, using game images for anything beyond the original editorial purpose usually requires separate permissions from the sponsoring organization, so understand the terms of your credential and maintain a good relationship with the team's media department.

PREPARATION IS KEY

"My work actually starts at least the day before the game, if not two days before," he says. He cleans and charges gear, clears memory cards, and packs backups of everything ahead of a match. He also arrives at the stadium at least two hours early, partly for logistics, but also because the quietest moments, before other photographers show up, often produce some of the most unexpectedly poignant images. "I've taken some really cool shots when no other photographers were there," says Gilligan. "Just the players on the field meditating, or spending time juggling or doing something that you wouldn't otherwise see."

FIND THE NARRATIVE

"As photographers, we're storytellers," says Gilligan. "So, it's important to find the story behind the images. Do we have a great rivalry? Is a certain player returning from a long injury or a pregnancy? Do we have old teammates that are now competitors fighting each other? Is this a battle for the playoffs? Finding those storylines gives the images context and meaning."

It also helps Gilligan know where to point his lens before the action even starts. For example, he recalls tracking Angel City star Jun Endo's return from injury. He knew the crowd would erupt when her name was announced during her first game back, and he was ready to



capture some images of her basking in that excitement.

Beyond the action shots, Gilligan recommends keeping a shot list for every game. His standard list includes:

A wide, establishing image of the stadium: Bonus if he can frame the L.A. skyline in the distance.

Crowd reactions after a goal: In L.A., these celebrations typically include pink smoke and a "GOAL" scoreboard graphic (above).

The team's pregame walkout: Capturing multiple angles can help set the scene.

Candid crowd moments: The supporter section, often located behind

one of the goals, usually provides the most enthusiastic fan moments.

Faces in the crowd: Add some personality to the coverage by photographing compelling faces in the crowd during breaks in the action.

SIDELINE ETIQUETTE GETS YOU INVITED BACK

Gilligan emphasizes that the way photographers treat each other and the stadium staff will determine their access to future games. The same core group of photographers tends to show up at every game, and reputations travel fast. His standards for himself:

GROW YOUR SKILLS. EXPAND YOUR CIRCLE.

Follow the rules. Adhere to the seating and movement protocols the venue sets.

Stay off the pitch. Never venture onto the playing surface while the game is happening.

Be polite. Be respectful and courteous to other photographers, the team's staff, and the security personnel.

Ask for guidance. If you're unsure of local customs or club protocols, seek advice from more veteran photographers.

Show gratitude. "I make a point of always saying thank you," says Gilligan. "I also send handwritten thank-you notes to those who help me. You would be amazed at the doors a handwritten thank-you note opens for you."

A GROWING OPPORTUNITY

With the NWSL roughly doubling in size over the past decade and the FIFA Women's World Cup coming up in Brazil in 2027, Gilligan sees opportunity ahead for photographers to ride a wave of enthusiasm for women's professional soccer. His advice to other photographers is to make your own market. "Don't wait to be assigned the work you want to do," he says. "If you have an interest in a particular sport, do a self assignment. Go out and make it happen."

Once you've assigned yourself the inspiration, consider the kinds of images that will set your work apart and open doors for your sports photography. "Strive to create images with feeling," he says. "The best images, the ones that really resonate, demonstrate real emotion. They show you what it feels like to be there in the moment. You want your viewers to feel like they're not just witnessing something from afar but feel like they're actually there." •

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Pitch Fever

WORLD CUP PHOTOGRAPHY TECHNIQUES FOR MULTIPLE GENRES

By Mark Edward Harris



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With my Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR S lens, I captured Belgium's Youri Tielemans attempting a shot in a match that ended in a 0-0 draw with Iran.

Soccer (or football/*fútbol*) is one of the most difficult sports to cover for several reasons. The first is the amount of real estate to cover. Though the size can vary, a soccer pitch is typically 105x68 meters, roughly 115x74 yards. For comparison, an American football field, including the end zones, is 120 yards long and 53 yards wide, and photographers have more freedom to move with

the action than they do covering soccer. The second issue is the lack of scoring. Two of the eight FIFA World Cup 2026 matches I covered in Los Angeles ended 0-0 and 1-0. Field-credentialed photographers can choose a fixed position on three sides of the pitch: one along the sidelines opposite the team benches or on either side of the two goals. This means that in a 1-0 match, you have a

one in five chance of being in the right location to capture the match-determining goal. If I'm on the right side of the goal and the goalkeeper jumps to his left to block the shot, I will be out of position.

The lessons I learned covering the 2026 FIFA World Cup can be applied to many sports, as well as other photographic genres.

REMOTE CAMERAS

For example, using a remote camera greatly increases the odds of capturing a goal. At a wedding, a remote camera can offer unique angle positions, such as above the altar.

PocketWizards are the industry standard when it comes to triggering remote cameras. Their latest version, the PocketWizard Plus Ve, works with an internal lithium-ion battery that lasts approximately 35 hours per charge. During the games, I slipped one of the paired transceivers in receiver mode onto a Nikon Z 9 hot shoe then plugged a N10-ACC remote camera cable into the camera's 10-pin remote port. I placed the camera with a Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8 lens on a base plate with a Benro ball-head behind the net and pre-focused on the goal line in manual mode. I set the shutter to 1/2,500 second, the sweet spot for action on the pitch. Part of the magic of photography is its ability to freeze a moment in time, and I like to go the full distance with that concept. I set my f/stop to f/5.6 and ISO to auto with +.3 exposure compensation since I was photographing up into a brighter translucent dome-topped stadium with supplemented bright lights. On top of my Nikon Z 8 with a Z 70-200mm f/2.8 lens, I set the PocketWizard Plus Ve to transmitter mode with a remote camera cable going into the camera's remote port. With my behind-the-net setup complete and remotes paired, I settled into my assigned folding chair with the Z 8 and my other Nikon Z 9 with a Z 400mm f/2.8 lens attached to a Benro SupaDupa72 Carbon Fiber Monopod.

The Plus Ve has 112 channels and 6 zones for less interference in crowded, multi-photographer settings such as the World Cup, Olympics, or other major



With the Nikkor Z 400mm f/2.8 TC VR S lens with a built-in 1.4x teleconverter, I have the equivalent of a 560mm lens and captured Canadian goalkeeper Maxime Crépeau from the other side of the pitch as he stopped a South African goal attempt. Note all the remote cameras on the field behind the net.



Credentialed photographers set up their remote cameras behind the net before the Spain vs. Belgium quarter final World Cup match in Los Angeles Stadium.

sporting events. For photographers working in less crowded venues, a pair of easy-to-use 10-channel PocketWizard PlusX Transceivers is a less expensive option. Either way, when working with remotes, it's vital to turn the sleep mode off on the camera body. If not, by the time the camera wakes up, you may have missed the peak moment of action.

POSITION FLEXIBILITY

For FIFA World Cup soccer, credentialed photographers are packed tightly together, especially on the goal sides of the pitch, so cooperation is a must. The first step to coexistence is removing or reversing lens hoods on longer lenses. While I'm a strong advocate of using a lens hood to avoid lens flare and ensure rich colors, there's simply no choice.

In other sports, there are varying levels of position flexibility. Golf is on



USA goalkeeper Matt Turner tries to block a Turkish shot on goal in a World Cup 2026 match. This is why I set my shutter speed to 1/2,500 second for action. If I had gotten a spot on the other side of the goal, I would have missed it.



Spain's Álex Baena attempts a shot that was deflected by Belgian Timothy Castagne in their quarter final World Cup 2026 match.

the opposite side of the spectrum from soccer because of the nature of the game. With “inside-the-ropes” credentials, we can move around the golf course to get the most dramatic angles of the players. The one restriction, up until the advent of the mirrorless camera, was that we could only depress the shutter after ball impact to avoid disturbing the players on their backswings. That rule is being updated. Shooting in silent mode on a Nikon Z 9 does not reduce image quality, since the camera uses an ultra-fast electronic

shutter. But banding can become an issue under arena and stadium lighting because of the flicker in LED lights. The Z 9 has a High-Frequency Flicker Reduction feature to eliminate banding with micro-adjustments to the shutter speed.

In terms of getting the images you want, a bit of homework can go a long way. While it's a photographer's goal to capture the perfect images of World Cup soccer stars like Argentina's Lionel Messi, Norway's Erling Haaland, or Spain's Lamine Yamal, knowing the names and

jersey numbers of other players, and how and where they play, will pay off. When you visit the online portal the day before the match to pick a position for photographing, you can use this knowledge to select the best angle to follow those you would most like to document. I use a photo-essay-style approach to expand my coverage by documenting spectators with their signs, flags, and painted faces, as well as making establishing shots of the stadium. I also pull my Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 out



Players going for a header makes a great photo op. Paraguay's Álex Arce and USA's Sebastian Berhalter go after the ball during a Group D match in Los Angeles Stadium.

for team photos near the normally off-limits team bench areas just before kick-off.

To further extend the scope of my on-the-pitch coverage, I often engage the built-in 1.4x teleconverter on my Nikkor Z 400mm f/2.8 for midfield and backfield action. Players jumping for a header is a good photo op. Typically it's more interesting if they're facing toward my camera. I can anticipate the action by watching the goalkeeper and pointing my camera downfield in continuous focus. To capture the action in front of the goal on the far side of the pitch, I switch to single focus, aim at the goalkeeper, and press and hold the shutter button halfway down so that I maintain that focus when other players move in front of him. I use the same technique when covering golf, when the player is going to hit out of the rough or sand in my direction. In continuous focus, the sand or grass can pull the focus away from the player even if I have subject "people" selected.

For those without press credentials, stadiums have varying rules about what type of photo equipment is allowed. MLB teams, for instance, do not have identical photography rules, and restrictions on lens sizes and support gear vary between venues.

There are pathways to enter the professional sports photography arena. Covering high school, college, and minor league sports for local papers or news organizations, for instance, is great training to get a shot at covering major league teams. •

Mark Edward Harris is an award-winning photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.

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Achieving a New Level

SONY A7R VI

By Tyler Rickenbach

What first intrigued me about the Sony a7R VI camera is that it can capture 30 frames per second at 66.8 megapixels, which is remarkable. Add pre-capture to the equation and it becomes something else entirely. Say you're photographing a bird or other animal. You're waiting for that decisive moment when the best image reveals itself and timing is everything. Pre-capture lets you essentially capture frames before you fully press the shutter.

That speaks to what Sony is trying to achieve with this camera. Until now, there hasn't been a model that delivered both that speed and that file size, which makes the Sony a7R VI special. Can the



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camera use speed and deliver the resolution exceptionally well while shooting at a high ISO—say, 12,800—and still hand you usable files you can push further in post? Let's see.

For this review I used only one lens, the Sony 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G. In the early mornings and late nights, I needed to push the ISO to 12,800 to hold a sharp image with a shutter speed around 1/400 to 1/500 second.

THE COYOTE

Grand Teton National Park is one of those places where I wouldn't call the wildlife predictable, but there are certain spots where it's almost guaranteed you'll see

something. What I wasn't expecting was a coyote. This was the first time I'd seen one there. It was around six in the morning on an overcast day. As the coyote slipped through the brush, I caught a few glimpses where everything aligned for a second. Before the animal vanished into the brush (left, inset), as it was crossing the road, it stopped and just looked at me. The moment felt surreal.

That's the frame (left) I kept coming back to. It was shot in Super 35 mode, which on this body still lands a little north of 24 megapixels, far more than enough for printing, and it was captured at ISO 12,800. I was astounded. I couldn't believe how clean the files were, and

I hadn't applied any noise reduction in Lightroom. To achieve this image, I switched to continuous autofocus. The a7R VI gives you several frame-rate options: low, mid, high, and high plus. I had it set to mid, which still put me somewhere around 10 to 15 frames per second. That's a lot of frames when shooting full-frame raw uncompressed.

SHOOTING IN THE DARK

I was sitting on the beach at Colter Bay where an osprey was perched in a tree. If you photograph birds, you learn to read their body language. Head bobs signal that something's about to happen. This osprey was doing exactly that, so I knew it could launch at any moment.

The Sony a7R VI has an animal recognition autofocus feature, and when it gets a good read, it will lock onto the eyes. If you have a clean composition lined up and the camera identifies the subject as an animal, the eye-detection box appears in the viewfinder.

The instant the osprey leapt from the tree, I started firing. Comically—though not at the time—a little girl on the beach stepped right in front of me just as the bird hit the water and came up with a fish (top left). Did I get the shot I wanted? Absolutely not. But I have kids, so I understand.

What the moment taught me about this camera is that it can practically see in the dark. It was around nine o'clock at night, and there was very little light left in the sky except what lingered in the clouds. I was, in effect, shooting in the dark, so the fact that the camera found the bird, found focus, and pulled out a decent frame far exceeded my expectations. Even shooting with the 200-600mm at f/6.3, you can still walk away with very usable images.



A STUDY IN CONTRAST

I faced a challenge with the a7R VI due to a combination of things, but it's worth noting, because the contrast between two subjects, a mother black bear and her cub in Yellowstone, couldn't have been more extreme.

This was one of the most adorable things I've ever witnessed in the wild, a mom playing with her cub, the two of them rolling around in the grass. The reason it was so hard for the camera and lens to land a sharp image came down to contrast.

They were tucked behind a tree, poking their heads out every so often, and the camera never really caught focus on the mother or the cub (a frame taken from video, left). The light was harsh,

mid-afternoon sun with very little shade. The background was shaded, the foreground was blown out bright, and that split made it difficult for the camera to recognize the bear as a subject. It kept locking onto the bright foreground instead. It was discouraging to get back to my computer, comb through the images, and realize there was nothing usable.

When you want to capture an image that evokes what you saw and felt, it's frustrating when the gear or the conditions don't cooperate. This was one of those moments where my family and I got to be present and enjoy what we were seeing rather than walk away with a trophy photo for the wall.

THREE IMAGES

I captured three frames in Yellowstone with the a7R VI and the Sony 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 G that stand out to me. The first is a mother bison with her head down in the grass, but her eyes are up and vigilant because her newborn calf is beside her. That, to me, was a tender moment (top left). The light was soft, and the camera recognized the bison's eyes immediately, even though her face was partially obscured by grass. Bison are some of the hardest animals to photograph well because they almost always have their head down, and they're either chewing, walking, or lying down.

The second image is of a bull bison walking across the horizon (page 42, top). It stands on top of a small hill, and behind it is a soft magenta sky. With such a minimalist background, the camera locked on immediately. I was photographing at a low burst rate because I had a feeling the bison wasn't going to change much and I didn't need the speed. Taking only two or three frames a second, I watched it move its head slightly and look up before heading down the hill.

With subjects like bison, it's the little changes, the subtle movements, that make



LORENA DE COSIO

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I initially found PPA when looking to get insurance for my business, but quickly realized there are so many other benefits of membership like certification, educational resources, and the opportunity to explore the different photography styles I hadn't considered before.

When I moved to Michigan, I felt like I left a part of my life behind. I started photography as a form of therapy. Looking back on the images I took helped me to see the beautiful life I created around me and taught me to pause, notice my surroundings and see things from different angles.

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or break an image. The frame rate you choose plays directly into that. Having the ability to shoot at varied frame rates is extremely helpful.

The third image is of two elk crossing a ravine (bottom right). For this image, I was zoomed out at 200mm. Even at wide, landscape-scale framing, the camera locked onto the elk. It recognized that there were subjects moving in the frame and held focus on them. That's one of the great features of the Sony a7R VI. Eye and facial recognition on humans makes sense, and most new mirrorless cameras can do it, but the autofocus's ability to recognize animals and other subjects is remarkable, and it's only going to get better.

If you need speed, you can have it. If you need the resolution at 66.8 megapixels, you can have it. If you want to photograph in Super 35 mode and still walk away with a large file to work with, you can have it. If you need a higher ISO to capture the last bit of light or freeze a subject's motion, you can have it. Because of the Sony a7R VI, you don't have to compromise. Everything you need to be successful is contained in one convenient, small package.

CONSIDER THIS

If you're a wildlife, event, or sports photographer who needs the best in resolution, speed, and the ability to perform—even when the ISO is pushed past 6,400—this is the Sony you should consider. It isn't built like the Alpha 9 series or the A1 series, but it serves a role within the Sony lineup. The "R" stands for resolution, and that's what this camera delivers. The file sizes deliver tons of information to work with, and the dynamic range is unheard of. When Sony says you're getting 15 stops, in my experience,



you really are. I haven't tested this against charts or gone as in-depth as some reviewers have. However, from putting it through its paces, I know this is a camera I would confidently take back into the

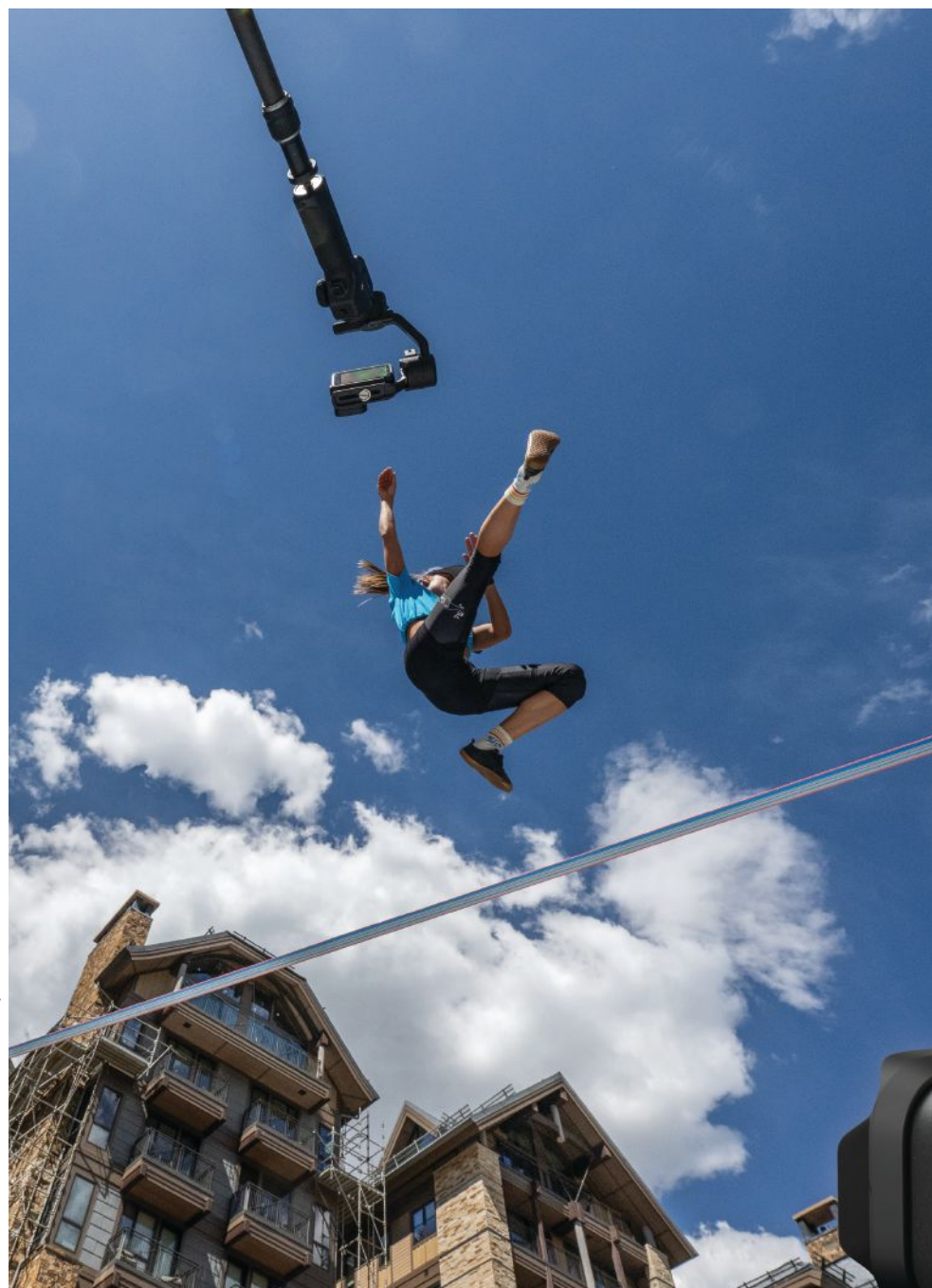
field. The Sony a7R VI body is priced at \$4,499. •

Tyler Rickenbach is a filmmaker and photographer based in Idaho.

Fine-tunable for Filmmakers

GOPRO MISSION 1 PRO

By Mark Edward Harris



IMAGES ©MARK EDWARD HARRIS / markedwardharris.com

I documented photographer Henry Hougen's technique of attaching a GoPro Mission 1 Pro to a boom pole to get much closer to the action of Giada Regoli performing her slackline acrobatics at the GoPro Mountain Games.

The introduction of the GoPro Mission line of cameras—the Mission 1, the Mission 1 Pro, and the Mission 1 ILS (for interchangeable Micro Four Thirds lenses)—is the beginning of a new, more powerful era for GoPro, known for its ultra-rugged, compact POV cameras.

I put the Mission 1 Pro loaded with a microSD card to the test at the annual GoPro Mountain Games in Vail, Colorado, where athletes test their physical limits in outdoor sports competitions including biking, climbing, running, and kayaking. The Games are not limited to humans, and some of the most popular events are for dogs.

The Mission 1 Pro is designed for a broader photographic audience, especially filmmakers and content creators, with its user exposure controls including shutter speeds up to 1/7,680 second for video and 1/16,000 second for photography, and ISOs for both from 100–6400. For low-light still photography, the shutter can be adjusted down to 1/8 second, and for exposures in pitch black environments or star trails, the Night Photo mode can be engaged for 2- to 30-second exposures. The fixed f/2.8 of the Mission



COURTESY GOPRO



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The GoPro Mission 1 Pro records a slow-motion pan (right) of a biker at the GoPro Mountain Games.

1 Pro lens (14mm in 35mm equivalence) means GoPro's optional set of neutral density filters is a must for slow-motion video captures or long-exposure stills in bright sunlight. The native field of view for the lens gives a 159-degree ultra-wide perspective. The camera settings can be toggled from Wide to Linear for a tighter field of view that reduces the fisheye effect in-camera.

The updated GP3 processing firmware of the Mission 1 Pro allows users to choose between Auto, Fixed, or Shutter Ranges directly in the settings (a feature previously requiring a custom GoPro Labs code). By contrast, GoPro Hero Black cameras are designed for a more traditional action-camera experience. They are typically mounted using one of GoPro's range of mounting systems, then turned on to capture intense POV moments with minimal to no intervention, meaning users can focus on their activity rather than camera settings or operation.

The Mission line of compact professional-grade cinematic cameras is a leap forward in image quality and overall performance because of its GP3 processor and new



50-megapixel 1-inch Quad Bayer sensor. It goes beyond traditional action sports and POV capture cameras with its 8K30 and 4K120 Open Gate video capture, in-camera stabilization, and category-leading resolutions and frame rates, battery life, and thermal performance. Still photos can be captured at 12MB or 50MB. The camera takes time to process 50MB raw bursts. So, to keep capturing the action at high speed without interruption, you might prefer photographing in

jpeg. At the GoPro Mountain Games, the results of my in-camera jpeg processing were impressive in both color rendition and low noise.

The Mission 1 Pro camera comes with an Enduro 2 battery and a USB-C charging cord. It also includes a removable rubber lens hood that protects the lens, improves contrast and color, and reduces unwanted flair. Other accessories included in the box are a curved adhesive mount for attaching the camera to

a helmet, and a buckle with a thumb screw to capture the action from a bicycle handle perspective. Attach the GoPro Boom mount to rig the camera on a bike for an even more unique perspective. The Boom can be used in tandem with ND filters to get slower shutter speeds to capture motion blur from the surrounding terrain. For handheld shots without accessories, I slipped the Mission 1 Pro into GoPro's ergonomic point-and-shoot grip.



The GoPro Mission 1 Pro captured the action in the mud pit section of an obstacle course.



I documented several GoPro filmmakers/photographers to understand how they used their Mission 1 Pro's to capture the excitement of the Games, including Henry Hougen, who rigged his GoPro to a boom to safely move into the action while Giada Regoli performed her slackline acrobatic magic (page 43). For my photos of dogs showing off their long jumps and vertical jumping skills (right), I used the 40-inch GoPro carbon fiber extension pole to reach out over the pool they were landing in to create slow-motion videos. The same extension pole came in handy to document the human action on USA Climbing-sanctioned walls.

To photograph runners going through a mud pit on an obstacle course (left), I clamped the Mission 1 Pro to a horizontal pole in front of where the athletes were exiting (above) and operated the camera with the GoPro Quik App on my iPhone 17 Pro to fire the camera in Burst Mode for 30 exposures in 3 seconds. I set the camera to a fixed shutter speed but kept the ISO on Auto and made slight exposure adjustments with EV (up to 2 stops plus or minus).



The POV where my GoPro was mounted for video, documenting an Extreme Vertical high jump for dogs.

The Mountain Games Athlete Team's sponsored athletes embody the core values of the annual event: a passion for human-powered mountain sports, an active outdoor lifestyle, eco-consciousness, and a spirit of adventure. There is no upper or lower age limit to be part of this dream team, with 11-year-old Coloradan Dax Macomber showing off his mountain biking skills with a GoPro attached to his helmet.

Other attachments for POV shooting expand the range of opportunities, from a silicon GoPro Bite Mount that is especially useful for close-to-the-eye angle videos, to a built-in kayak action camera mount, which documented my unintentional departures into Rocky

Mountain white water. The Mission 1 and Mission 1 Pro are waterproof down to 66 feet (20 meters) without additional housing, while the Mission 1 Pro ILS is weatherproof but not waterproof, due to its interchangeable lens system.

Videographers and photographers can use Mission 1 Pros for virtually any genre. GoPro's Chris Prado suggests that wedding photographers discreetly place the camera within the altar flowers to capture the ceremony from the couple's perspective. As the bride walks down the aisle, the device records her approach, the groom's reaction, the wedding party, and loved ones, all from an angle traditional cameras rarely capture. In addition to being set up and

triggered directly on the camera, e.g. for intervalometer or video recording, the Mission 1 Pro can be controlled via the GoPro Quik smartphone app or GoPro's remote that works up to 196 feet away and can control up to five cameras.

The Mission 1 Pro and its two siblings live up to their positioning as tools for imagemakers who want greater creative control and are willing to engage more deeply with the imaging process to capture a particular look, mood, or narrative. In the right hands, they are powerful storytelling tools. •

Mark Edward Harris is an award-winning photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.

Living the Story

JON SOOHOO IS RECORDING DODGERS
AND LOS ANGELES HISTORY

By Mark Edward Harris

In the sports photography world, few if any full-time positions could be more dream-job-worthy than Los Angeles Dodgers team photographer. Jon SooHoo has been fortunate enough to hold that coveted title since 1995.

SooHoo's path didn't begin with photography. At the University of Southern California (USC), he majored in gerontology, the study of the human aging process. At age 11, SooHoo became aware of the fleeting passage of time when

his grandmother passed away. Stories about his late paternal grandfather, who played a vital role in preserving L.A.'s historic Chinatown, deepened SooHoo's understanding of family legacy. Today, SooHoo, a fifth-generation Asian-American Angeleno, is acutely aware of the impact of the stories he captures with his lens of his extended family—the Dodgers—and the city they all call home. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.



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JON SOOHOO



IMAGES ©JON SOOHOO / ©LOS ANGELES DODGERS LLC







Mark Edward Harris (MEH):
How did you start photographing professional sports?

Jon SooHoo (JS): It goes back to my college days at USC, working at the *Daily Trojan*, starting as an intern my sophomore year in 1981 doing dark-room work. I applied because I didn't have any direction. Even though I was studying gerontology and ended up earning a degree in it, the core classes were beating me up. I had to find an enjoyable outlet. I eventually worked my way up to chief photographer at the paper. One Saturday afternoon I was covering a USC women's basketball game at the L.A. Sports Arena, which also housed the Clippers. That's where I met Andy Bernstein, the NBA photographer. He had come in during the USC game to set up for the evening NBA game. He mentioned he was looking for a darkroom guy to do his NBA photo prints. I started working in his rental darkroom in a Hollywood studio processing black-and-white negatives that he and his photographers (including me) took, and made 8x10 prints to be sent to the NBA for distribution.

For color at that time, it was slides done with strobes that I lugged up to

a catwalk. I would load four 2,400-watt Speedotron packs so Andy could shoot Fujichrome 100. We'd line all the packs up with zip wire to form a 'u,' and drop two sync lines down to the floor. That was considered one set. At the Forum, there would be up to seven sets. I would install our set and other entities—*Sports Illustrated*, *USA Today*, etc.—would install their own sets. The Forum was a little scarier than the Sports Arena, because the walkway is very narrow—two planks side-by-side—and the arm rails are inconsistent. I got over the fear quickly, though, because I knew Magic Johnson would be playing Michael Jordan, or whomever, down below.

I started photographing both the Clippers and the Lakers. As Andy let me shoot more games in both color and black and white, he got the Dodger contract in 1985, and I started shooting and doing all the darkroom stuff at the stadium as well.

MEH: How did you end up the Dodgers team photographer?

JS: In 1995, I bought the contract from Andy to be the contractor for the Dodgers, as he was too busy with the NBA to do both. In 2012, the last day of



“Fog had rolled all the way over Dodger Stadium, and then there was a window where the fog rolled back out, and I had the sunset all lined up and exposed for that. It was magical.”



Frank McCourt's ownership, we were in the law office ready to hand the Dodger organization off to the Guggenheims. Frank came up to me and said, "I heard your wife lost her job and your healthcare. Do you want to become a full-time employee before I hand the team over?" I of course said yes. I'm very grateful that he made that offer.

MEH: Can you share some memorable photo moments you've had?

JS: One of my favorite Dodger photos is of Sandy Koufax walking with Clayton Kershaw down the hallway at Dodger Stadium in 2015 before an Old-Timers' Day game (page 50). I'd prepped to do a photo of them in the bullpen. As we headed there, someone tapped me and said, "There's something real cool going on behind you." I turned around and started photographing them with my 50mm walking backwards as they talked baseball. It turned out to be the money shot.

My favorite aerial (left) was taken on Manny Mota Bobblehead Night from a helicopter I'd rented. Before heading to the heliport around 5 p.m. I saw fog had rolled in over downtown, so I texted the pilot, "Do you think I should come another day?" He said, "Oh, no, get down here and we'll take off. It's going to be really good." We get in the air and he was absolutely right. Fog had rolled all the way over Dodger Stadium, and then there was a window where the fog rolled back out, and I had the sunset all lined up and exposed for that. It was magical. I flew with the door off with my 28-300mm on my Nikon. I'm one of the least scared photographers when it comes to using a zoom. All these guys want to use fast primes, and I just want a



zoom where I can find my image and pop it, whether it's at 1600 or 100 ISO. I want to get the image I want to get, and you've got to go with results. You can't go by the specs. That's how I view this photography game.

MEH: Perhaps the most historic photo from Clayton Kershaw's illustrious career was your image of his 2014 no-hitter (above). How did you capture that?

JS: I took that photo from the Dugout Club seat section between third base and home. The key was to capture Kershaw on the mound with the scoreboard showing all the zeros on it in the background.

MEH: What's in your bag for a typical game?

JS: When we play at home, I'll carry a 28-400mm for the Z 9 as my go-to lens. In the clubhouse, I have a 17-35mm and a Nikon SB-5000 Speedlight with a magnetic MagMod diffuser. At the batter's eye above the center field fence or the bridges above the bullpens





at Dodger Stadium, I carry the 800mm f/6.3. If I go to the tower at the top of the stadium, I bring the 180-600mm along with the 14-30mm to get the full house. I also have a 24-120mm and recently added the new Z 70-200mm f/2.8. With a 1.4x converter, I can shoot from any of the photographer wells and cover everything. The Z 9 has an Ethernet port that I plug into to send my tagged images to my editor who's in the stadium, and they send it to social media ASAP.

MEH: What are some of your other “greatest hits?” Capturing Kirk Gibson’s walk-off home run in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series against the Oakland A’s and Freddie Freeman in 2024 hitting

the first walk-off grand slam in World Series history against the Yankees are other great examples of how you have frozen historic moments.

JS: The late sports commentator Vin Scully at the White House is one of my favorites. He was a true gentleman, just the nicest man, very gracious, very well-spoken, very thoughtful. He loved what he did. The best part about Vin (page 51, top) is that every story he told was a story that he lived, not stories that somebody else went through. He lived those stories, and so I’m trying to do that with my camera.

For Gibby’s home run I was in a photographer’s well outside first base next to the A’s dugout on the steps, so I had

a little extra room to get good angles. I had a roll of T-Max 3200 in my camera and was already at frame 16 before he came up to bat. I remember thinking, *I better change rolls*. I quickly loaded a new roll and next thing you know, he pulls it over the right field wall. Back in that day it was manual focus, so I’m trying to keep up with him as he’s rounding the bases. I refocused to third base to ensure I’d be able to catch third-base coach Joey Amalfitano high-fiving him and then follow Gibby home for the group hug. When the darkroom guy at Dodger Stadium spooled the reel, some of my negatives got sandwiched, so I lost about six frames from second base to Amalfitano slapping his hand. Fortu-



“I want to get the image I want to get, and you’ve got to go with results. You can’t go by the specs. That’s how I view this photography game.”

nately, I got the last frame that happened around home plate, with Gibby’s face looking in my direction and all the players behind him (page 56).

MEH: Where were you for Freddie’s grand slam?

JS: I went up to the top of the stadium and climbed a ladder to the top of the elevator tower behind the plate. I knew there was going to be the game-ender sooner or later, whether it was us winning or losing. Because of my high vantage point, I had the entire batter’s box in the frame and the ball coming off Freddie’s bat. I then followed him going around the bases and doing high-fives at home plate. The topper was Freddie going to see his father in the stands behind home plate (above). It was a fantastic moment that no one else could get but me because of my angle from the top. I’m always looking for unique angles. I’ve used a fisheye on my camera mounted to a monopod to get a high angle on the team surrounding players coming to home plate. That kind of access is one of the advantages I have as team photographer.

MEH: Do you feel like a real member of the team?

JS: That’s the way I see it. I’ll be here longer than the players will be. I took pictures of Dave Roberts playing baseball and now he’s the manager and his kid just graduated college. Time’s flying by, and I appreciate the whole kit and caboodle. •

Mark Edward Harris is an award-winning photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.



Sugarland, Texas-based photographer Alison Carlino's best advice for volume sports photography? "Grow slowly or you're going to fail fast." Each year, Carlino's business, Carlino's Photography, has a booking to photograph 600 Little Leaguers, which requires two stations and nine photography staff. It took a lot of trial and error over the last



ALISON CARLINO

decade to build a workflow that could handle such an enormous number of diminutive baseball players.

Carlino had been a wedding and portrait photographer for 13 years when she started taking photographs for her son's soccer team. "It's not that I grew up playing sports," says Carlino. She and her husband were both in the marching band in high school. "We didn't really know a lot about *any* sport, to be honest." But when she began making team photos, she leaned on the lighting and posing skills she already had.

"It was traditional knee-in-the-grass work for the first couple of years," she says. When digital composites became popular, she says, "we just took a hold of that and ran hard with it." Those composites sustained her business through the COVID-19 pandemic and are still central to her volume packages.

Today Carlino's Photography employs 14 people and photographs 125 sports teams, 30 seniors, 30 families, and five to seven weddings a year. At press time, Carlino was preparing to photograph 80 teams during the late summer of 2026. "It's funny, if you would have asked me 10 years ago if I would have wanted that, I would have probably said no," Carlino says. "But I couldn't have done it alone. We were alone at that time. Now that I have 14, that's a big difference in how you can scale up."



IMAGES ©CARLINO'S PHOTOGRAPHY / carlinosphotography.com



ALISON CARLINO BUILT A SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY EMPIRE

BY AMANDA ARNOLD



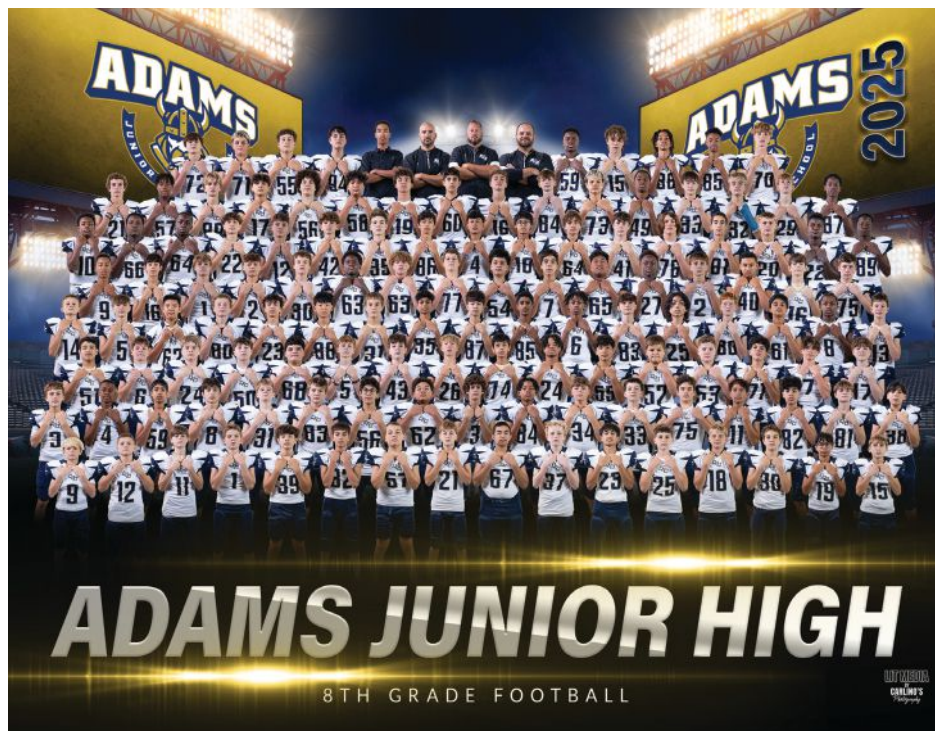
VOLUME SPORTS WISDOM

Over the last decade, Carlino has learned valuable lessons in how to run a streamlined and profitable volume sports business:

Drop the bottom third. Carlino's business provides team and individual portraits (or T&I, as she calls it) to schools on spec, hoping parents buy packages of photos. But because so much labor goes into those sessions, including post-production compositing for team photos and up to four employees to staff the session, she doesn't return to schools where parents don't make purchases. If a low- or no-producing school wants her to come back, she charges a \$250 labor fee that the client must pay up front. "As you start scaling up, it's important to know where your bottom third of producers are," she says, "so you can drop those and just concentrate on the ones that are producing for your business."

Additional products require a pre-commitment. Outside of T&I, Carlino's Photography offers banners and media day packages, which require prepayment. For example, she recently spoke with a volleyball coach who, in addition to T&I, wanted individual headshots, banners for each senior player, and a large team banner to hang in the school gymnasium. Those additional products require a pre-commitment from the school, Carlino explains.

Strive for media days. Media days, where outlets secure on-camera interviews, videos, and still photography of athletes ahead of the season, began in the pro leagues and have trickled down to collegiate sports. Carlino's media day tacks 90 minutes onto the standard T&I session for headshots and action photos, and portraits with effects like smoke, colored gels, and props. "Any sports photographer that's not offering this,





ANATOMY OF AN IMAGE

Camera and lens: Canon EOS R3, Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L II USM lens

Exposure: 2 seconds at f/9, ISO 100

Lighting: Alison Carlino made this light trail photo of her nephew in a dark studio on a dark background. The light was an LED Nanlite PavoTube, a 4-foot RGB tube light that “you can turn to any color of the rainbow,” she explains.

Photographer’s note: “Because you have a dark space, completely black, with a dark background, and then you flood the room with whatever color you want, and because it’s a slow exposure, wherever the athlete moves, the color drags. It was a whole two-second exposure. And the fun thing about light trails is none of them turn out the same way twice.” She’s been experimenting with light trail portraits since December and hopes to add the option to her individual senior portrait sessions for the 2026-2027 school year.

you are missing out on some really good stuff,” Carlino says. She markets these events only for senior or starter athletes, which usually encompasses 12 to 15 subjects. She caps the number of athletes at 20 and the school can buy additional time if they want to feature more athletes.

Work from the ground up.

When Carlino first began doing media day sessions five years ago, she says, her workflow was not efficient. “Oh, we wasted so much time,” she adds, when, for example, she would capture a basketball player dunking the ball but then quickly need to move lights to photograph the player lying on the floor surrounded by basketballs. Today, she moves the athlete through poses from the ground up. “We start with tummy shots or on the back,” she explains. “Then we go to kneeling, and then we go to seated, and then we go to standing still, and then we go to action last. It’s from the floor up, so our lights stay low and then they go high.”

Set your lights and your workflow for action shots.

Carlino finds it’s best to set the lights and then have each athlete move through the same motion one by one. For example, with volleyball players, she might have each of them do a bump and each of them do a spike. First, she sets up two lights for the bump shot, one pointed where each of them will be diving at the ball and one behind, “so it’s kind of a cross of light.” Once each of the athletes has gone through their bumps, she shifts the lights higher, and they each perform their spikes.

Coach your players for the best action shot. Don’t be afraid





Watch Alison
Carlino explain
Media Day on
PhotoVision
at ppa.com.



to advise your subjects on form if they're not hitting it quite right, she says. "You have to tell them, 'I want you to arch your back and really stretch your hands out, and I want you to make sure your mouth is closed and your tongue isn't hanging out. I want you to make sure you're really over-exaggerating, so you look like a *Sports Illustrated* athlete going up and doing that.'" Carlino advises photographers not to do media day action shots until they understand the sport well enough to know the proper form and technique, as well as which actions make for the best photographs.

Market your senior portrait work at your volume sports sessions. Cross-marketing at volume sports

sessions is paramount for Carlino; it's how she fills up her senior portrait calendar, which, besides media days, is what she loves most. At T&I sessions, she displays graduation cards, senior portrait albums, and metal prints. "We set them out on the table, and we advertise to those kids *right there*," she says. "That is your priceless target market. You're missing out if you're not advertising to those kids, because they are starting their senior years."

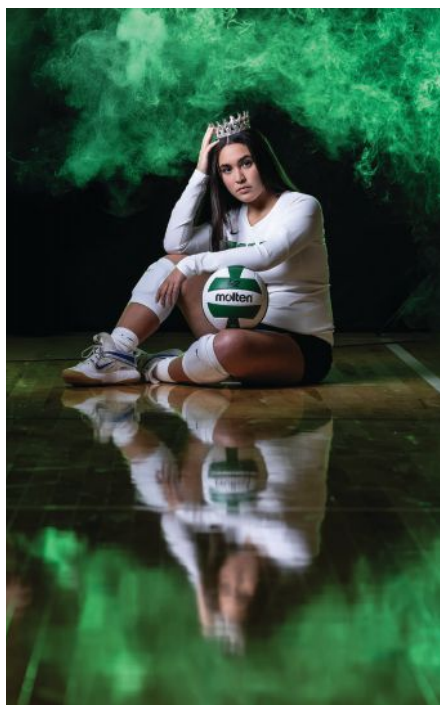
KNOW YOUR GEN Z CLIENTS

This generation of high school athletes cares about two things, she says: authenticity and content creation. With that in mind, Carlino

GO-TO EQUIPMENT

For media days and individual senior portrait sessions with student athletes, sports volume photographer Alison Carlino dials up the drama with:

- **Grids on lights** to prevent the light from splashing all over the gym floor
- **Colored gels** to lend color to smoke and snow
- **Atmosphere Aerosol** for a hazy look
- **SmokeNINJA**, for a smoky effect that doesn't set off the smoke alarms in school facilities
- **A snow machine**, which, combined with red colored gels, can make it look like sparks are flying.



is making some tweaks to her business for the new school year.

For one, she is launching a new athlete branding experience, an individual portrait session with a high school athlete on the field or in the gym. “They’re going to do the still images, the hero shots. They’re going to do the action stuff. That’s all going to stay the same,” she says. “What we’re adding is a recruitment-style branding experience where we’re going to have content creators come and make reels for these kids.” The experience is for high school athletes looking to build their brands as they move toward college sports, where they could potentially earn money through sponsorships.

Who is the content creator at those sessions? A close friend of the portrait subject who comes along on the photo session and creates content. After all, she explains, the senior portrait industry has had to evolve because Gen Z clients have

different expectations than past students. “We have lost a good amount of senior portrait sessions this year to friends with cameras,” she says. These clients prefer the familiarity and trust of a friend creating content for them. So why not invite that person into the fold to create and post reels? It makes her subjects more comfortable, it gives Carlino access to another potential senior portrait client, and her portrait sessions are publicized through the shared reels, she says, calling it a win-win.

Carlino has found that current high schoolers are more likely to wait for a friend to post a photo of them and then share that post versus posting photos of themselves outright. So, where Carlino in the past has had a team of senior ambassadors help her with marketing, she is planning a new approach: a beach day photography experience in Galveston with 10 rising senior athletes on teams she’s photographed in the past. The students

sign an agreement that Carlino can use the images on social media, and they get the digital images and all the content for free. She also plans to use the gathering as a kind of focus group. “I’ve got a list of questions I want to talk to them about,” she says, which she plans to do over ice cream. For example: Are you planning to do senior photos this year? What do you want out of that experience? What clothing styles are trending? “You can ask ChatGPT all day long what clothing styles are trending right now,” she notes, “but until a girl steps up and tells me that the big bow thing is something they really want to wear, it may not be trending in my area.”

Carlino says she is excited about switching up parts of her business, even giving away this free beach day session. “I’m 23 years into this business, she says, “and I’m still doing free stuff.” The true payment, she adds, is getting to know her target clients better. •





Fresh Faces

Sandy Williams is prepared for anything with her newborn, child, and senior portraits

When Sandy Williams' first grandson was born in 2012, she discovered newborn photography. It changed everything. "I absolutely adore babies," she says.

Today, Williams, M.Photog., is a newborn, maternity, child, and high school senior portrait photographer who earned a bronze medal in PPA's 2026 International Photographic Competition for a newborn image (page 73). A few years after marrying her high-school sweetheart, her husband bought her a 35mm camera, which she enjoyed using as a hobby. When her daughter took up cheerleading and softball and her two sons began playing baseball, Williams upgraded to a 400mm lens to photograph games and competitions. She

also captured images of her children's teammates and handed out prints to their parents.

One photograph was a turning point for Williams. When she showed an image of her cheerleader daughter doing a toe touch to the owner of a local photo printing store, he said it looked like it belonged in a sports magazine. "That's when I really got more into it," she recalls. As her children grew older, Leesburg, Virginia-based Williams turned her hobby into a business. At first, she kept things simple by photographing families and children outdoors using natural light. Mostly self-taught, she made photos in auto mode and occasionally worked as a second photographer at the weddings of friends and family members.

By Allison Shirreffs



SANDY WILLIAMS

She decided to elevate her training with lighting workshops with FlashGear.net's Tim Payne and Westcott Top Pro Julie Gayler, M. Photog., CPP, and began following celebrity baby photographer Ana Brandt, Cr.Photog. Through Brandt's workshops, Williams learned newborn posing, lighting, editing, and how to photograph parents with their babies.

In 2015, Williams and her husband, then empty nesters, moved from Leesburg to Berryville, Virginia, where she opened a 600-square-foot photography studio. As demand grew, the couple converted the basement of their home into a 1,600-square-foot studio with dedicated spaces for newborn, maternity, and children's photography.

SLEEPY NEWBORNS AND RELAXED CHILDREN

Nearly 95% of parents want photographs of their newborns, typically at about a week old, while they're asleep, Williams says. That's why her studio space includes white noise machines, heaters, and a large sofa. Williams relies on several techniques to help her youngest subjects snooze. Her go-to method is to wrap the baby "like a cocoon" and then gently bounce them on a yoga ball. "I've never had a session where I haven't been able to soothe or calm a baby," she says.

Safety comes first. A sleeping baby is much easier to photograph safely than one that is awake and wriggling. If a baby won't sleep, there are poses Williams won't attempt. "I don't want



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TODDLER SESSION

Leesburg, Virginia-based Sandy Williams, M.Photog., shares how she works with parents to get the best out of toddler and child portrait subjects.

- Have the parents explain to their child what to expect before the session.
- Ask the parents to bring the child already dressed in their portrait outfit.
- If the child has a favorite time of day, work within that timeframe. Conversely, if they nap at a certain time, avoid scheduling a session then.
- Kids are messy! Remind parents to clean their child's hands, fingernails, face, and clothes before the photo session.
- Avoid snacks immediately before and during the shoot. No sugar highs!
- Have plenty of props and clothing changes for the kids to choose from.
- If the child has a favorite toy, ask the parents to bring it.
- Include time at the beginning of the shoot for toddlers to warm up to their surroundings. They dictate when the session begins.
- Have fun. Williams feels music can set the right mood.

any injuries,” she says. If a baby is awake at the beginning of a shoot, Williams photographs family portraits first. “I won’t lie. Photographing newborns is hard. You have to have a lot of time and patience,” Williams says, noting that newborn sessions can last anywhere from 90 minutes to four hours. “You have to be slow. You cannot rush a newborn session.” The key to a successful newborn shoot, she says, is preparation. Before every shoot, Williams creates multiple scenes using different backdrops and props, including bowls, buckets, pillows, and blankets. She also lays out wardrobe changes and accessories such as hats, headbands, and baby crowns. Williams aims to photograph each sleeping newborn in six different poses but admits that the babies ultimately determine how many they’re willing to do. “I try to do every one of my sessions differently, so parents aren’t getting the same group of photos,” she says.

Her lighting kit includes an AlienBees B400 fitted with a 64-inch soft box mounted on a wheeled light stand, which allows her to move easily from one setup to the next. She uses a Nikon Z 6II and a 24-70mm lens, “so I can have the versatility of zooming in and zooming out,” she explains.

Williams also photographs toddlers and children. Her studio has a room stocked full of what she calls “fun stuff” like tiaras, shoes, dresses, fancy gowns in various sizes, as well as bicycles and toy tractors. Williams asks the parents to share with their children ahead of time what will happen at the photo session and offers a sample script: “Miss Sandy is going to be taking photos of us. You can have a lollipop when we’re done if you’re good and





“I won’t lie. Photographing newborns is hard. You have to have a lot of time and patience. You have to be slow. You cannot rush a newborn session.”



you smile and listen and follow directions,” Williams says. She reminds parents that they can help prevent meltdowns by not scheduling sessions during naptime, avoiding giving their children sugary snacks beforehand, and bringing along a favorite toy or comfort item.

To elicit smiles and giggles during the session, Williams has been known to use her “fart gun,” which she says most kids find hilarious. She also has a long feather she pulls out to pretend she’s going to tickle the kids. “That always seems to work,” she adds, as does music her young subjects like.

BACKDROP MAGIC

Williams regularly browses backdrop websites for inspiration. Earlier this year, she won a silver medal in PPA’s International Photographic Competition for her whimsical image of a girl in a bathrobe and curlers in a retro-looking laundromat (above). “Most people don’t realize it, but that was a fabric backdrop,” Williams says. “When I saw it, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it.” To complete the scene, Williams also bought a laundry cart and a kid-sized bathrobe. She picked out specific towels and found an original gossip magazine from



the 1960s. "I just started pulling pieces together," she says.

Williams knew the little girl she wanted to anchor the photo. "I called her mom and said, 'How about bringing her over? I have a really neat idea,'" Williams recalls. She also asked the mom to paint her daughter's toenails and fingernails pink. The session took roughly 30 minutes, with Williams coaching her subject to act out different reactions to what she was pretend-reading. "It all came together," she says. "I felt like it was something no one had seen before. I think because of the colors and the brightness and just the look on her face. It just really stood out."

For the session, Williams used a Nikon Z 6II with a Nikkor Z 35mm f/1.8. Her exposure was 1/200 second at f/5, ISO 160. She used a Godox AD200 Pro and Godox AD400 Pro, with an octobox and softbox, respectively, on each side of and above the subject, angled down. Williams uses a similar lighting setup for many of her child portrait sessions, occasionally adding a strip box overhead.



IN HER CAMERA BAG

CAMERA BODIES: Nikon Z 6II and Z 6

LENSES: 24-70mm f/2.8, 85mm f/1.8, and a 70-200mm f/2.8

ACCESSORIES: Godox trigger, multiple batteries, XQD cards, gray card

OTHER: Chapstick, Tylenol (for long shoots), crackers (for snacking), wipes



OUTDOORS WITH SENIORS

Unlike her studio sessions with newborns and children, Williams makes nearly all her senior portraits outdoors. Sometimes she suggests locations, but she often takes cues from her subjects. Pre-session, she spends time getting to know them by asking them about their favorite school subjects or if they play an instrument, and other questions “to get that connection going,” she says. For outdoor sessions, she brings a Godox strobe, beauty dish, light stand, sandbag, and a reflector, in case she needs extra light. She typically photographs her outdoor portraits with an 85mm lens set to f/2.8. “I like the bokeh that the 85 gives me,” she says.

Williams also does headshots, engagement, and wedding photography, but is careful not to over-book herself. “I only take on what I can handle so people don’t have to wait for their photos,” Williams says. That includes her broad range of subjects, she adds. “It challenges me,” she says, “to photograph different ages. It keeps my brain moving.” Photography is “a way to stop time,” she explains. “Children grow, families change, and moments disappear. I love to capture the essence of who they are in that moment.” •

Writer and photographer Allison Shirreffs works with various organizations and publications.



Learn more
about child photography
on **PhotoVision**.



Sweet Reunion

FORMER PPA PRESIDENT CREATES OFFICIAL BOARD PORTRAIT

During COVID-19, Tallahassee, Florida-based portrait and headshot photographer Kira Derryberry, M.Photog. Cr., M.Photog.Hon.M.Photog.Cr., CPP, developed a reputation for creating radiant corporate composite photos without everyone being in the same room.

That's just the style that PPA President Makayla Harris, Cr.Photog., CPP, wanted for the board of directors formal portrait this year. Historically, the board president chooses the photographer, and Derryberry, who was on the board for about 10 years and served as president and chair, was thrilled to be asked.

Her vision was to create a movie ensemble cast feel, she explains, because "everybody brings something so different to the table."

Though everyone was together at PPA headquarters for a meeting in April, she still photographed each of them separately and in different

poses, to ensure she got the best image of all 13 board members. The entire session took about 40 minutes, since her subjects already knew a lot about posing and trusted their colleague.

Another key to the session was the right setup: a white background that is "so incredibly clean and it goes with everything," she explains. Board members were instructed to wear all black as a contrast. For lighting, Derryberry used PPA-provided Westcott lights, the main light mounted with a 48-

inch umbrella. "I use two lights on that background with strip boxes shooting across at each other to get a nice even light across the white," she says, "and then I used one big main light on the left, big being like the biggest modifier you can have."

The most important aspect of creating successful composite photos

is to light everyone from the same direction, Derryberry advises. This way, the lighting blends together and you can drop in shadows as needed. "In a composite, you don't really want to notice the shadows and the lighting so much," she says. "If you start paying attention to that stuff, then maybe it doesn't look ... like they're together."

To capture the final blended image, Derryberry retouched each board member individually, then cut them out and created PNG files. She prefers this method, even though they all were on the same white background, because it adds to the continuity. "I like to keep those drop shadows in, onto the floor ... and also, sometimes I like the little bit of white edge lighting that I can get from the bounce of the white background," she explains.

Derryberry says she was honored to make this current slate's official portrait. "It means my work is being chosen to represent PPA," she says. The session also made for a sweet reunion. "It was a lot of fun. Everybody was so cool," Derryberry recalls. "It was fun to get to hang out with them again." •



©ANGELA KURKIAN

KIRA DERRYBERRY



©KIRA DERRYBERRY

Meet the Board

BRANDON HEISS BRINGS PHOTOGRAPHERS AND VENDORS TOGETHER



BRANDON HEISS

Starting March 1, 2026, four new members joined the PPA board of directors. Photography educator and former PPA industry advisory committee chair Brandon Heiss, president of F.J. Wescott Company in Ohio, is one of them.

How did you initially get interested in photography?

While in high school, I took an intro to photography course. The magic of seeing a photo appear out of nowhere in the darkroom made my curious brain excited.

What made you want to teach photography and what did you learn in that experience?

After my undergrad work at Bowling Green State University, I received a call from a former professor asking if I'd be interested in returning to pursue my master's degree. I was offered an assistantship and really hadn't considered teaching until I began teaching photography lab courses in lighting. I not only enjoyed seeing students fall in love with photography, but a lot of the students helped me grow and stay curious with composites, HDR, and commercial lighting techniques that were popular at the time.

What led you to the business side of the industry?

After I left Bowling Green State in 2012, I took a teaching position at Westcott. I traded the classroom for camera stores across the country. I was on a plane several times a month attending conferences, dealer events, and going anywhere people wanted to learn about improving photography lighting.

After a couple years, I got more involved in sales. Talking about our products was easy because I used them so frequently. As for still practicing photography, I have a camera with me at my kids' sporting events, and I will occasionally do family portraits of friends and my daughters, of course, as they grow older.

"TALKING ABOUT OUR PRODUCTS WAS EASY BECAUSE I USED THEM SO FREQUENTLY."

How did you get involved with PPA?

I have been involved with PPA for about 15 years, prior to starting at Westcott. While teaching, I found it valuable to visit Imaging USA to determine the new trends and look at the gear. Imaging USA is where I began to network with people who are still friends.

Can you describe your unique role on the board?

I am the liaison between PPA and vendors in the photography industry. I operate a business that supplies tools to photographers. The vendors want to know where PPA members need more

support, and if we can offer a solution, it is a win-win.

What advice do you give to photographer entrepreneur clients?

Focus on a niche. I see so many photographers trying to be a one-stop shop, but a bride is going to hire someone focused on wedding photography, not someone who photographs pets, flowers, real estate, etc. It allows you to be hyper focused on one type of client, and from a financial side, you only have to purchase gear unique to that niche.

Where would you travel to if you had unlimited funds and time?

I've always wanted to visit Greece. I would spend half the time sightseeing and relaxing, and the other half trying to capture images that nobody else captures.

How would you describe yourself in one sentence?

I'm genuinely curious about how things and people operate, and in finding the most efficient processes to achieve my full potential.

What do you do with your free time?

I spend time with my wife and kids, mostly at sporting events. I also enjoy golfing in warmer months. •

COMMUNITY NETWORKS DIRECTORY

When you get together with other photographers in your area, you'll see a world of opportunities open up to you.

One of the best ways photographers hone their craft is through peer interaction. Finding a mentor, meeting with like-minded people in your area, and relying on a network of business friends are keys to your success. Thanks to the Community Networks program, you can easily find and connect with professional photographers near you.

PPA has Community Networks across the United States. No matter where you live, odds are there's a Community Network to welcome you.

ppa.com/community-networks

INTERNATIONAL

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IMAGES ©KRISTINA CARLSON

Olathe, Kansas-based senior portrait photographer Kristina Carlson, profiled in the August issue, earned a silver medal for the image titled “Changes All Around Us” at the International Photographic Competition this year at Imaging USA in Nashville, Tennessee. Her effort alone was award-winning. “Sometimes it takes a hundred frames to get the perfect one—and this was definitely one of those cases,” she recalls, adding that she and her model Aspen worked through several slight variations in posing: subtle shifts in expression, hand placement, eye contact, and, Carlson says, “of course the bubble itself had to cooperate with all of the above.” There were a few “bubble-related mishaps,” she notes, including when the model accidentally swallowed a piece of gum. “In the end,” Carlson says, “the final image came together through a mix of experimentation, patience, and a subject who was fully willing to lean into the concept.” •

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