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PRESS PASS Exploring the Depths of Sports Photography

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Formatting Will Delete All Your Images

I did not start off doing a project on sports photography. I originally wanted to create a project that mixed my dual major in photography with my psychology major. I chose Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and her theory on the science of death and dying; not exactly the cheeriest of subjects. But the topic was serious, documentary photography. The kind of photography Newhouse had been trying to coax me into since I was a freshman. Black and white, depressing photo stories were the kind that got you recognized, at least in the way the higher-ups wanted you to be. It was respectable. It was adult. It was...not exactly my style.

Shockingly enough, my first project did not work out. There were issues with timing, wavers, and permissions. These were not insurmountable obstacles but I was not involved enough in the topic to dedicate the time and energy to making it happen.

At this point I thought about giving up Honors. It was finals time and I was stressed about exams and critiques. I had come into the program never expecting to do a Capstone and was legitimately angry at the board for changing the program in the middle of my sophomore year. But I had real issues with giving up. I am not a failure. Challenges do not defeat me.

Enter second proposal: Insider's Guide to SU abroad in London. I did everything right with this one. Got an advisor, wrote out a proposal. I worked every week over the summer for several hours researching, conducting interviews, creative layouts, and editing photos. My advisor and I agreed, if this project were to be cutting edge it needed an interactive component and audio. This meant returning to London to conduct interviews with locals and capture ambient sound, not to mention flush out my photo

library. After working with the Honors faculty I submitted a request for additional funding. My advisors were sure I would be approved.

I was not. According to the committee, my project was not “cultural” enough...

I broke down in tears. What was I to do? Relegate 17 pages of hard work to the electronic circular filing cabinet on my iBook’s desktop? I could not bring myself to that fate! In that project was my soul not to mention every free moment of my summer.

London is my hometown and the time I had spent there priceless. I decided to table the project as far as a thesis but still gave it to my friends and former residents who were heading across the pond for their semesters abroad. Hopefully they could find some use of it.

... and back to square one.

“I still really like your original idea of the death industry, Rachel.”

“No! I don’t want to do that! You can’t make me!”

(That second part was in my head, but if you were in any way telepathic it would have resonated like a Kiss concert)

This whole experience is like a microcosm of my public schooling career. I had wanted to be an architect since I was eight. When I had a free moment, I was scrounging for graph paper, drawing little blueprints of houses and schools. Tenth grade changed everything.

One of the photography teachers, not even the one I had for half a year freshman year, gave me a camera and a roll of film one day in September saying someone from the community had donated it and he wanted to see if it worked. I was a JV cheerleader, so it seemed only natural as I had to be at the football game that Friday anyway, to take pictures instead of sitting in the bleachers. We developed the photos the next day and put them up in my mom’s office windows the Monday following. That was when the Photo

Editor of *Silver Chips*, the high school paper asked to use them in the next issue. I never looked back.

I did go to my mother's office one day bawling my eyes out though. I had changed my mind! What if I changed my mind again? What if I chose a college and ended up leaving because I failed out or was dreadfully unhappy? What if I chose wrong? I did not choose wrong.

Sports photography saved me. It was my high school sweetheart. While my friends scurried around chasing boys...well, I was still chasing boys, but they were in uniforms, on a field, with a ball, and I didn't have to worry about getting pregnant. Sports photography saved my career in the Renee Crown Honors Program too.

Going the way of the Dodo

I started off shooting with film. Pretty ancient stuff. You had no idea what you were going to get until you sent the film through the processor the next day and looked at the negatives with a loop on a light board.

My film camera's name is Dino, after the crooner Dean Martin. I had a huge aspherical telephoto zoom on the front of this little Yashica camera body. He looked like a dinosaur, one of those big, vegetarian-types. I had no idea what I was doing, shooting at high school night football games with terrible light. I was using 1600 ISO and still could barely get stop action. Somehow it worked and I loved him for it.

As a graduation present, I got Franky. Frank Sinatra – I was on a Rat Pack bent. He was suave and sleek, my first digital SLR. A Nikon D100. With the smaller digital

sensor on the digital cameras my lenses got longer: each focal length is multiplied by 1.5. For wide angle shooting this could be a major problem. The 200 I had been using became a 350. When I upgraded this year to Marilyn (Monroe) people asked why I did not wait for a full frame sensor like the Canons. "I shoot sports" I tell them. For someone who stakes their living on flattening the image, blurring the background, and getting in close; a full frame sensor is just plain silly.

I wish someone had told me that sports photography is centered on those principles when I was a freshman. Instead I shot in the Carrier Dome with a 300mm f/6.3. Oops. I learned quickly. A smaller f-stop meant more light. More light meant higher shutter speeds. Higher shutter speeds meant stop action. My sordid love affair with f/2.8 lenses began.

Going digital meant a lot more than just a different aspect ration. Cameras got faster. Stills can be shot at 12 frames per second as opposed to the three I started out on. The cameras focus faster and have more points to focus on. Smart cameras can find faces and track even erratically moving objects.

Memory cards brought the end of film. No longer did you have to change out film every 36 frames and risk missing the action. Now an almost unlimited number of images can be taken on a single compact flash card. (I never go over 2Gb, too much risk if corrupted.) Although at first there were delays when data was being written, new faster buffers have eliminated this issue and made multiple consecutive shutter bursts a possibility.

Digital imaging had a huge impact on the journalism industry because of time, especially in sports. Images could be uploaded across the country after as well as during

games and tournaments to keep websites current. I was first introduced to FTP and Cyberduck at the Big East basketball tournament at Madison Square Garden in 2007. It took an eon. Over the summer, however, while doing wedding photography I was introduced to a free large file sharing system. Pando is now the way of my world.

Mentor Me

Although wedding photography seemed as though it had nothing to do with my career in sports journalism, Donald Keith taught me differently. He told me to think of a wedding as just another sporting event. Keep your eye on the ball (i.e. gown), wait for moments, capture emotion. Really a bouquet is not all that different in size or trajectory from a football.

Mentors, professors, and gurus have been many and varied in my short career as a photographer. In the beginning there were Annie Leibovitz and Dorteia Lange. It was odd for me, choosing two women, not because there are proportionally less but because, as the über-feminist, I often admire males simply to be contrary. In my mind, I will not relate any more to a particular person simply because they have a vagina. I loved their portraiture, their use of color, their composition. I dared to recreate their concepts and channel their genius from afar.

At Newhouse the teaching became more personal. Tony Golden deeply ingrained the basics. (There was a lot of Henri Cartier Bresson.) Lawrence “Doc” Mason took them farther. Then, during the London workshop, Mark Dolan ripped them apart.

Mark was my class's first introduction into audio. Who cares about composition and having a wide variety of shots if there is not a good caption? We are storytellers.

Where is the story?

This past year the focus has again been on multimedia and storytelling. Although most of the assignments in class have been on the more news-hardy subjects, Bruce Strong has supported me as I have deigned to transfer those same ideas of SoundSlides and panoramas into the world of sports.

The sports photojournalists in the area have been of immeasurable help as well. I do not know where I would be if Steve Parker had not adopted me at a random volleyball game my sophomore year. Steve was always there to chat before games about the latest photographic technology, introduce me to the other photographers on the row, and teach me the general logistics. I was so excited and nervous the first time he showed me into the pressroom at a football game. We began as teacher and student and have ended as friends, watching each other's equipment as one goes on a cookie run and going out to dinner after games.

Other influences have included Dennis Nett, the *Post-Standard* men's basketball beat photographer who taught me the value of a good court chair, and Kris Wilson, a military photojournalist who has been my *Daily Orange* sports beat companion the past two semesters. Eddie Keogh too, a Reuters photographer I shadowed while abroad, took me to the sidelines of my first professional match and had a powerful impact on my photography. It is he who I credit with solidifying my career path in sports.

As I have become more focused in my area of photography I have begun again to look for the virtual teachers; finding professionals in the field whose work I admire and

attempting to emulate their style of seeing. Women are even fewer in the world of sports whether it is because females aren't conditioned to the field at a young age or they don't appreciate the long-hair-equals-cheerleader mentality of most inebriated event patrons, it makes the bathroom lines shorter and that's just fine by me. The two photographers I keep coming back to are Don Miralle, the 2007 Sports Photographer of the Year, and Bill Frakes, a former Sports POY and a staffer at *Sports Illustrated*.

SportsShooter.com has been an immense resource as well. Originating for an e-mail newsletter back in 1998 by Robert Hanashiro of USA Today, the site has grown to over 7000 plus members. Designed by sports photographers for sports photographers, the site includes equipment and arena profiles, job and internship listings as well as contests. Any sport question I could dream up during this project already had a forum and it became my usual stomping ground for innovative new still image angles.

Searching "Singles" Finds Dating Websites

A "single", in the world of photography at least, is a stand-alone image. Until I got to PHO 301, I do not think I even knew any other type of photograph existed. Tony Golden's introductory photography course for majors taught me the three types of action shots: stop action, where the motion is frozen, blur, where movement is blurred, and pan, where the camera moves with the subject, blurring the background but keeping the subject relatively sharp.

That was basically the end of my Newhouse education as far as sports shooting was concerned. Newhouse focuses far more on documentary photography, hard issues,

hopeless people and National Geographic types. “Interesting” often equals depressed. A professor once asked me if I could find an international student in a wheelchair. My current subject had not experience enough hardship to be news worthy. I was on my own.

I chose to turn down my lens aperture purely to get the highest shutter speed in the hopes of stopping the action and eliminating blur. I started shooting everything at f/2.8. Only later did I realize there were other reasons sports photogs generally shot “wide open.” The smaller the aperture the smaller the depth of field and the more the background is blurred. No more distracting fans or buildings, a viewer’s attention is directed specifically to the action, making the image easier to read.

Being able to tell what is going on in a image is half the challenge when taking sports photos. The other half is writing a caption that tells the viewer something more. I learned in high school the value of photographing scoreboards. I always had a record of what period or quarter the photo was taken, what the final score was, who was playing. Ironically my editors had chided me for this habit, “why was I wasting film?” they would ask. But I kept at it. Halfway through my junior year Sun Park, one of the adjunct photo professors, actually suggested that all photographers do it at sporting events. I felt reaffirmed!

Taking pictures of the scoreboards was particularly helpful later when writing captions. I remember one man at football game in Pittsburgh had attached the list of players to the shade on his 400mm Canon lens. He was one of those like Eddie Keogh who transferred files in the middle of the game from the field. I am not that intense, not yet, but I do pick up the list of players before each game.

On that same table in the pressroom is always a bunch of books and other information put out by the public relations departments of each of the teams. I started picking up the books on a whim; I get to games two hours early anyway to grab my place on the court. I need something to do and the fans are not allowed in for another half hour. Now it is part of my ritual: I get a cup of water and maybe a cookie (hydration and sugar-loading are key for shooting any event) and sit down to read the press sheets. I learn about the coaches, the teams' records, which players to look out for, who to make sure I get pictures of.

Background research is huge for photographers when shooting any event. For sports, knowing where to go is one way of looking like a good shooter. I like to find out in advance where the press entrance is and where the pressroom is from there. Knowing the rules of the game you are shooting is crucial. I have certain places I like to stand but it is always good to check with the regulars at a venue to see where shooting is legal so you are not kicked out halfway through the game and for each game where you sit and what the game is determines what lenses to use as well.

That being said, there is something about standing in a new place or using an unusual lens. Because during my senior year I was working for several publications and other photographers were backing me up on sports shoots, I felt able, even compelled, to experiment with my photography. Judith Fajardo, a fellow resident advisor on the BBB staff asked me after commissioning a snapshot if I approached every situation by thinking "how do I make this interesting." I think I do. I realized that the major sporting magazines do not give full spreads to ordinary pictures. The highlighted images always show something different. If I was going to separate myself from the daily action

photographers I had to find new ways of looking at the mundane. I started bringing wide-angle lenses and sitting under the basket. I would slow down my shutter to play with blur.

Unfortunately, Carrier Dome rules prevented me from using remote cameras and attaching a camera to the backboard. The architecture of the Carrier Dome itself prevented me from capturing anything overhead. Flash also was a big NO, however I was able to use it somewhat during my shoots in Cazenovia with the girl's soccer team to make use of the foreboding sky, a trick picked up from fashion editorials.

After an inspiring afternoon in push-lab, an optional weekly photo think tank with Bruce Strong, I began playing with panoramic photos. My former photo editor at *The Daily Orange* described panoramics as the most creative thing you can do at a tourist location. I would take a series of photos in a circle from a stationary position, stitch them together in Photoshop, and then convert them into an interactive QuickTime movie in CubicConverter. This program allows the viewer to navigate using their mouse around the entire image.

I began my foray into the world of 360s by using a special tripod head. The head tells the user how far to rotate the camera for each photo in accordance with a previously user-defined angle. The tripod also positioned the camera's image sensor as the plane of rotation creating a more seamless image. I ditched the equipment though in my usual way. (I think tripods are bulky, heavy, and confining) and allowed the camera to be handheld. The photos became more dynamic with depth and emotion. I then added audio.

Sound and multimedia are the innovative ways the newspaper and magazine industries are changing with the invention of the Internet. It is not that people expect more getting their news online. It is that we as photographers can do more. We can

publish more images. We can show motion through still image sequences. We can make things interactive. The current industry of multimedia photojournalism is similar to the classes students are required to take at Newhouse. We should not have been upset that our London class did not count for the photojournalism requirement. We should have merely been grateful that the elective was offered at all and that we had that opportunity to learn.

The initiation of more images, video, and sound has meant greater opportunities for storytelling. For the stories I included in my presentation I tried to look beyond the game to the people on the fringes: the fans, coaches, and trainers. I also looked to the players themselves but their lives off the court or field. These people were not just athletes. They had other responsibilities, families, and emotions.

They have hectic schedules. You choose people to do stories on because they are interesting. They do a myriad of different things. It is wonderful when all you have to do is follow them through their everyday routine but when the time comes to sit down for an interview, scheduling is insanity. With games you know where an event is going to be, at what time, and that (barring a tornado) it will not be cancelled. Not so with high school soccer practices, which are dependent on the weather 30 minutes away.

Fashion shoots also require the merging of schedules but the studio can be used in any weather conditions. Normally I am in no way averse to snow. However, the City of Syracuse's penchant for clouds can make outdoor photography a challenge. Working in the studio fuels my obsessive-compulsive disorder. I am in complete control of the light, shadow, shutter speed and depth of field. I get to choose the models and the clothes, the hair and make-up.

For the show I created a long-form editorial entitled “Playing Dress-up.” The series of fashion images featured men and women in their best attire, suits or floor-lengths dresses and sports equipment. The lighting and make-up were inspired by the Hollywood glamour of the 1940s: red lips, curled hair, large soft boxes at paramount. I wanted to create juxtaposition, countering an athlete’s perceived aggressive, hard personality with the elegance of formal wear.

I found myself doing excessive research for this portion of the show. I browsed images of Frank Sinatra and Ginger Rogers looking for inspiration lighting concepts and poses. I went in the complete opposite direction as well, Googling contemporary advertising campaigns for cleats and Under Armour. Finally the genius of fashion photography masters such as Irving Penn were called in for timeless technique.

When it came to looking for models, I felt far more comfortable using people I knew. As Resident Advisor of Brockway Hall, I looked no further than my resident for most of my shoots. Living with them and having their trust allowed me to be at ease during the shoots. I felt completely natural looking through their wardrobes and asking them to try different poses. We in the B*Rock are a bit unconventional as far as floor communities are concerned.

Being as they were also friends, when I asked one of my “kids” to do a shoot, I always prefaced with the following qualifier: you do a picture for me, I will do a picture for you. I know that these are students, not models, and that they were doing this as a favor. I wanted to do something nice back for them. Somehow though I think I always won out in the bargain; doing the extra shoots, were not only extremely fun, but could technically be counted as classwork.

Unfortunately, multimedia has yet to break into this venue in a manner I felt compelling. I searched online and found the usual time lapses of studio time and Photoshop technique demonstrations. Nothing was groundbreaking. I decided to present my images in a traditional manner, much as if they would be laid out in a magazine. Being as they were to be viewed in succession on a video, though, I put them to music. I chose *Fever* by Peggy Lee because I felt it fit the sultry, spunky and ironic feel of the shoot more so than *Que Sera Sera* or any of the cliché sports ballads that I used for other sections of the movie.

Show and Tell

So Eric Holzwarth said, “Why not do a Senior Show?” A what? Never mind. Sure! Fine! I want to stay in the Honors program this last year. I want to complete the degree. I want to keep my job as RA of Brockway Hall. Sorry...what exactly is a senior show?

I had seen a few exhibits and photo galleries at National Geographic and the Natural History Museum but photojournalists at Newhouse do not really *do* shows. My PHO 580 class had one for London but that was just putting 11x14 prints on matte board and throwing them up in the Newhouse lobby shadow boxes. That just did not seem like thesis material to me. I wanted something more dynamic, more professional, classy, innovative.

The first dilemma was where to have it. I definitely wanted to include multimedia in the presentation. Unfortunately, the world of display spaces has yet to catch up with the industry. Most of the galleries in Syracuse were traditional, conventional ones. Print

the images, put them on some matte board and throw them up on a wall. No thanks. I would rather not spend all my money on paper and ink and all my time color correcting in windowless seclusion for the Epson 1280s. I started looking at video spaces.

The three video screens in Newhouse III seemed like the perfect venue but I was sad to hear that they were for First Amendment projects only. (Apparently, sports photography is as much about free speech as a guide to London is about culture.) The Light Exhibit too, specifically designed for new media-type displays, was still under construction and therefore unavailable for my use. I was about to start seriously considering off-campus locales when a movable plasma screen was suggested.

The screen was state-of-the-art and underused (like most of the new building). It also already had a DVD player attached and could be wheeled to any pre-determined location in Newhouse for the week I desired. The Newhouse III main lobby off Waverly was chosen because, although slightly light on foot traffic, the space was largely devoid of any competing media. It was decided. I would create a movie to be played on a loop continuously throughout the day for one week in the beginning of April. I finally felt like my thesis was real, that it was going to actually happen.

Then it struck me; shows have openings. The lobby's placement next to the Hergenhan Auditorium offered up an interesting idea. The first screening of the project would be done in the Auditorium. I would say a few words beforehand explaining the project and then have a reception to follow.

I chose a Friday evening between 7 and 9o'clock for its post-dinner but pre-"out" possibilities. I wanted something classy and sweet. Chocolate truffles, brownies, and champagne; the items that went over big at the Newhouse III opening in the Fall.

In a fashion that would have made Sherri Taylor proud, I used color gestalt to tie everything together with the red, white, and black theme. That color theme was further laced through the logo that adorned the invitations, envelopes, programs and DVD menu.

Advertising was something I had never associated with a thesis before but my experience through the Honors Student Association had taught me a lot about proper strategies for students where my graphics classes had gone more in-depth for grown-ups. I designed envelopes and invitations using Adobe InDesign, creating a database in Excel for addresses, and asking my senior graphics friends about card stock. A thicker, more durable paper was chosen for a more professional look – something about a direct relationship between weight and respectability. Proper invites went out to adults the week preceding Spring Break.

Students have a far shorter attention span. To invite my friends and peers, I felt the most effective tool would be Facebook. I basically invited everyone who had ever been involved in my photography. There were the obvious models and subjects, fellow photographers and editors from *The Daily Orange*. Then there were the less obvious: the people from my graphics classes, all of my friends who had let me cry after hard critiques, listened to me whine when I felt a due date was too harsh, or let me confiscate lunches with brainstorming sessions for photo illustrations.

I felt so good. Everything was going so well. I had met all of the deadlines I had set for myself on the timeline back in November. Then it all came to a screeching halt. I had no idea how to make a DVD. One of my former residents from my sophomore year as an RA in Flint Hall, Christopher Johnson saved me. From his location abroad in London he informed me about iDVD, a standard program on every Mac.

So I sat down at a computer in the Newhouse labs one morning between classes and started playing. It all seemed simple enough but something my father had ingrained in me from an early age broke through. I asked forgiveness from Al Gore and printed out the entire user's guide (I knew I paid that exorbitant lab fee for a reason). The time allotted in my schedule for waiting in line at the dome for front row seats to the Georgetown game provided the perfect opportunity to learn the random nuances of the program.

What I learned, however, was seemingly disastrous. iDVD would only compile JPG and MOV files. Thankfully, I knew from producing one of my pieces that Final Cut Pro saved into this format. However, I was loathe to re-create my three Soundslide projects. Apparently, others had found the limitations of exporting solely to HTML as preposterous as I did. SoundSlides Plus offered a video plug-in and Brian Tibben, the Newhouse lab guru, had a licensed copy.

The panoramic piece was entirely different. CubicConverter had no program or plug-in that would permit a the conversion from a QTVR to an MOV. Putting the piece on the DVD also eliminated the interactive quality. This drawback, although completely distressing, was a far better option than re-designing the final product. Google came to my rescue again, listing a free trial of a program called Pano2Movie that would allow me to do the conversion. Although the MOV was below my expectations, I was happy that each technological medium was finally compatible.

I owe most of my foundation in Final Cut Pro to Bruce Strong. His first few classes were very hands on. The class meet would in the Collaborative Lab (aka. the Collaboratory or the Fishbowl) and follow along on our on computers as he demonstrated

on a projection screen. For some reason I always seem to work faster than the professor teaches and am distracted by the other possibilities and buttons the professor is not teaching. That is how I stumbled across the scrolling text feature.

My thoughts immediately jumped to credits. Every feature film has credits. This obviously meant my show should have credits as well. I was grateful for the synergy between the credits and invitation lists.

Working with Final Cut Pro further stroked my creativity by inducing me to create an auto-biographical section for the DVD. I took photos from Facebook and called on images from friends and fellow photographers. I also used footage Chris Johnson had shot for an American Express take off commercial contest he had done my sophomore year. That production was my first venture into videography since 10th grade.

Insert Clever Title Here

So the show went off without a hitch. Well there was that one when Stanley Bondy, the A/V tech, and I turned on the projector initially and everything was green. Although green is my favorite color and I use it most copiously throughout my logo and resume, I do not find it the most-wise over-arching color correction. Perhaps the machine was feeling as momentarily queasy as I was at that moment but all set itself to right by show time.

All was easygoing and genuine geniality for the rest of the evening. We moved the refreshments inside the auditorium at a last minute suggestion from my mother. This enabled us to re-show the programme several more times during the reception to provide a backdrop and accommodate those who entered the presentation late.

I made but few changes from that version to the final I turned in the Honors Faculty on April 24th. A few typos were corrected. One transitioned lengthened while another was shortened. I also created a packaging: an unconventional and quirky, open-faced sandwich-esque construction from which the original concept was taken from a Express freebie from years ago. I was inspired by basketball textured paper and the CD label creation software I used for my portfolio discs. Let's just say I am neither cut out to be an industrial design major or a kindergarten teacher..

During that last week when all the projects had been created and I was merely stitching everything together I had some regrets. I wish I had stuck with what I wanted to do instead of being sidetracked with what I thought other people wanted me to do. I may have been reluctant in the beginning and I apologize to all of those to whom I was sour and generally pissed-off. But I want to thank the people who pushed me, who believed I was worth more than the standard daily shot.

There are new images I want to create. Ideas for new packages bounce about the confines of my head like tennis balls. This project made me think. It set me on a track of creativity in sports photography, which I know has brought me to the next plane in photojournalism. There is nothing more exhilarating than realizing the clarity of passion.