



# A ction Sports Photography

A brief guide with tips  
and tricks

Stefan Permien for [www.triggernaut.de](http://www.triggernaut.de)

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# Action Sports Photography - a brief guide with tips and tricks

**D**id you ever wonder why your snapshots taken last weekend at the sports event look so different than those pictures published in those glossy magazines? Yes, you are not a professional photographer but by thinking about some points you might improve your results at least.

Text and pictures: Markus Seidel, sportsphoto.ch



Picture 1: Close-up of a Kiteboarder. Taken with a wide-angle lens, standing in the water. Rider positioned "off-centre". (Rider: Stefan Permien)

## Know the sport

One very important aspect is in fact that you know the sport you are going to shoot. It is a huge advantage if you are familiar at what place, at what time you should expect the most interesting actions.



Picture 2: Standard, boring "from the beach" photo

Are things happening far away from me (e.g.

on the sea for water sports)? What kind of moves are typical and action loaded? How do the athletes prepare? And so on... This knowledge will help you to be ready to capture the action where and when it happens. Additionally you will show the highlights of the sport instead of boring images.

## Where to position yourself

Depending on the sport and the kind of photos you want to take it is important to position yourself correctly. Do you want to get close-ups of the athletes during preparation? You want to capture the start of the competition or the finish? Do you want to freeze details of action or showing the sportive and his environment? From the answers you should determine which spot is the right one to position yourself. Always think about to

avoid disturbing or distracting the athletes or getting yourself in danger. Find a place that gives you a straight view on the action without other spectators in front of you or preventing you to see the action. By the way: Nothing is more annoying than having the head of another spectator in the frame, an arm or anything else which shouldn't be there. Technically, always try to put yourself in between the sun and the object you want to photograph. This will help you to get a good lighting and will avoid too difficult lighting situations. (n.b. there are always exceptions to every rule. For creative reasons you might want to just see a silhouette of the athlete. See picture 4 as an example).

## A word on equipment

Which kind of material you are using will help you to get THE photo or make it somewhat more difficult - but it is not ulti-



Picture 3: Sequence of a trick. Post production using 8 individual pictures (Rider: Stefan Permien)

mately grant you or is not preventing you from taking a great photo. In the digital era there are mainly two types of cameras: Compact "point and shoot" cameras and SLR (Single Lens Reflex) cameras. You will see professional photographers using SLRs since they provide a couple of significant advantages required for taking photos of action sports. The main advantage might be the short delay between pushing the shutter release button and effectively taking the photo. Good SLRs have so called "shutter lags" of under 60 milliseconds while point and shoot cameras are around some 10th of a second. Both seems pretty quick - but action in your favorite sport might even be quicker and so you click in the decisive moment to take the photo but



you might just have missed the action by some 10th of a second. Another advantage of SLRs is the possibility to interchange lenses. This will allow the photographer to mount anything between super-wide-angle lenses (14-20mm, you can cover a large scene from very close) to super tele-photo lenses of 200mm or more (200 to 800mm, to get close-up shots from action that is very far). Outdoor sports might not always take place in sunny conditions - be prepared to have some protective gear available in



case it starts raining (a cheap but effective solution is a shower cap that you will find in most of the hotel rooms). Some more sophisticated protection is required if you want to take pictures in the water for instance.

## Camera mode

As action sports are by definition fast sports, ensure that the camera is set to a high shutter speed. On "point and shoot" cameras you usually have a sports mode which will automatically chose the correct settings. On a SLR switch into "shutter priority mode". This is usally marked by "T" or "Tv". In this mode you can manually select the shutter speed.



The rest of the settings will be automatically adjusted to ensure a proper exposure of the image. Depending on the available light you might chose a shutter speed of 1/1000th of a second or more. This will "freeze" the action and avoid to much blur in the image.

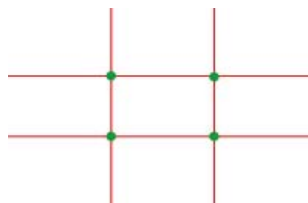


Picture 4: Another wide-angle shot taken while swimming. The wakeboarder just passed by within some half a meters - shot against the light.

## Composition

Basically it depends on the kind of picture you want to take or the message you would like to express. But there are some basic principles that will help you to get that one step closer to the professionals. "Fill the frame", means try to get as close as possible to the subject (physically or via a tele-lens) without boring surrounding stuff that is not improving the quality or message of the picture.

Choose the angle by trying to avoid the standard view on the sport. Get up to take pictures from high views, get down or even lie down to take pictures upwards, just get a view that is that little different than



Picture 5: "Rule of thirds". Try to place the object on one of the vertical or horizontal lines just next to you. the photo more attractive

Get photos less boring by placing the subject off center. The typical "snapshot" aims the subject in the perfect center of the picture. Try to position the focus slightly off center (horizontally and vertically) - this will bring much more dynamics to the photo and will make it distinguish from the average. You can see picture 1 as an example.

## Wrap-up

So, it's not the material that makes your photos special, it's you. The way you approach the theme, the subject. Try out things that seem not obvious in the first place, try

different angles, positions and moments and you might get THE shot! There is no better school than shooting, shooting, shooting. With the time you'll gather experience which will make your photos stand out from the crowd.

If you would like to find out more on shooting sports events have a look on [www.sportphoto.ch](http://www.sportphoto.ch) or contact me directly at [contact@sportphoto.ch](mailto:contact@sportphoto.ch).

