Sports Photography

1. LEARN THE RULES OF THE GAME

It is important to understand the rules of the sport you are planning to photograph. The better you know the game, the better your pictures will be. Check out online resources that teach the rules of the sport, the best shooting positions, types of images to look for, and equipment to use.

2. LEARN TO USE YOUR CAMERA

If you are new to photography, then you should spend some time getting to know your camera. Shooting in full Auto leaves you with little control over the quality of your images. Take some time to practice with other camera modes, especially aperture-priority and manual.

3. USE A FAST SHUTTER SPEED

If you want to freeze action, then your camera's shutter speed should be between 1/500s and 1/2000s. The faster your subject is moving, the faster your shutter speed should be. For example, you can get away with a relatively slow shutter speed for swimming, but not for baseball.

4. PLAN YOUR SHOOTING POSITIONS

In general, you want to be in a position that puts your subject facing you. For example, during a track meet you should shoot towards a curve in the course to see the runners head-on.
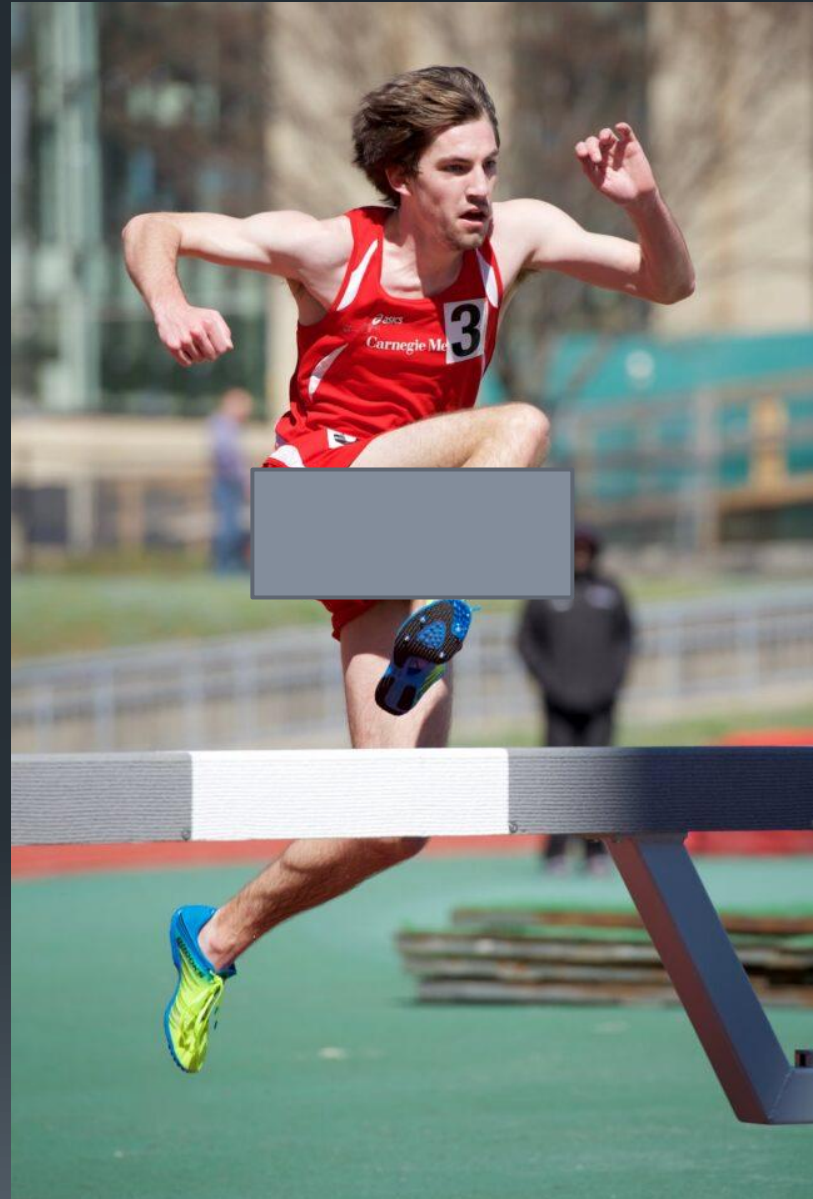
5. USE A TELEPHOTO ZOOM LENS

An entry level telephoto zoom lens costs around $200 these days. Something like a 55-200mm f/4-5.6 will give you a ton of flexibility with your shots while staying inside a reasonable budget. If you want to upgrade, check out a 70-200mm f/2.8.

6. LEARN ABOUT EXPOSURE

Understanding how shutter speed, aperture, and ISO affect your images is crucial to taking your photography beyond snapshots. For sports photography, you will usually have a fast shutter speed, a large aperture, and a variable ISO depending on the lighting.

7. RESPECT THE OFFICIALS, COACHES, ATHLETES, AND STAFF AT ALL TIMES

Your presence at the event is a privilege. If someone tells you to do something, do it. If you have a disagreement, leave it until after the event for a discussion. Do not be one of those obnoxious photographers that gives everyone else a bad name.

8. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND YOU

For your own safety, it is best to keep your head on a swivel while at the event. Checking your pictures (chimping) or looking at your phone is a good way to get hit by a ball or for a player to crash into you. Leave that stuff until the event is over.

9. DO NOT USE ON-CAMERA FLASH

Your camera's built in flash, and even a flash unit attached to the hot shoe, will be ineffective at illuminating your subjects. Additionally, flash is distracting to the athletes and spectators.

10. USE A WIDE-ANGLE LENS

Just because most sports photos are taken using telephoto lenses does not mean they all have to be this way. Use a wide-angle lens to put an interesting spin on your images, and make your viewers feel like they are right there on the court.

11. ANALYZE YOUR IMAGES AFTER THE EVENT

When I photograph an event, I take about 1000 pictures. Out of those, about 50 or fewer get sent to the event organizer, and only about 5 get added to my portfolio. The point is, save a few of your best shots and throw out the rest. Try to find a pattern of success and failure to understand what you need to work on and what is already working.