



MSHSAA General Photography Guidelines



The Missouri State High School Activities Association understands that quality action photographs are a vital part of the print media industry. Access to such shots is often determined by vantage point, lighting, facility, physical limitations, etc. Similarly, the individual photographer's camera, film speed and experience also factor in to the quality of sports action photos.

In the pursuit of that perfect shot, eager photographers often lose perspective of how their actions, location or lighting might affect the event they are covering. Indeed, a common ground between the two perspectives is often difficult. This page has been designed to further assist photographers, videographers, assignment editors and sports personnel in their coverage of high school sports. It should also serve to help school administrators, officials and game personnel in their planning of media accommodations at interscholastic events.

General - The most prominent factor in determining photography guidelines is safety. This includes the safety of the photographer, as well as the players, coaches and officials. Similarly, another highly-significant factor is the continuity of the contest itself without interruption or distraction. All policies that have been developed -- both by the National Federation and the MSHSAA -- center on these two factors. There are also issues of privacy, event management and others which often are considered when guidelines are established.

Locker rooms are no place for cameras or media at the high school level. A vast majority of all high school participants are minor children who have the right to privacy in dressing facilities before and after competition. Team benches, dugouts and sideline areas are also off limits.

A common misconception is that camera flashes are not noticeable to an athlete in competition. Some sports have specific regulations (see below) with regard to flash photography, but in general, anytime the outcome of an event or the concentration of an athlete can be altered by a flash -- it should not be used (the start of a race, the "start" whistle in wrestling, a golf swing, a tennis serve, etc.). Flashes should never be aimed directly in the face of any competitor, regardless of the sport. Ceiling-mounted strobes are much less distracting than camera-mounted strobes and are preferred, when possible. Television flood or fill lights should never be aimed at the competition field/floor when the game is in progress. Game officials have the discretion to ask a photographer to change his vantage point if the official feels the players' ability to play without distraction is being jeopardized by the photographer's location or her camera flash. Game administrators and photographers should work together to make sure the players' comfort is never compromised.

For safety reasons, tripods should not be kept near the competition field/court at any time. Photographers should always respect the view of those who may be behind them (such as spectators at basketball, volleyball and wrestling events) by sitting on the floor during play.

Finally, when there is any doubt with regard to what access a photographer may have at a high school event, ask the host management for any site-specific policies or the best area from which to shoot action shots. Again, working in advance with the administration (and officials) can often prevent embarrassing situations once the contest has started.

Baseball, Softball - National Federation playing rules prohibit any photographer from entering the playing field (including foul ground) during play. This generally includes any area inside the fenced playing or "live ball" area. For softball only, photographers may enter the playing field and shoot from a deadball area that has been lined off in foul ground in advance. If the field has no such photography box, the playing field may not be entered (see NFHS rule 1-2-3). Specific focus techniques allow for shooting outside a fenced area, and generally fence work beyond the dugouts is low enough to allow photographers a great vantage point without obstructions. Climbing atop dugouts, fences and scoreboards is highly discouraged and is prohibited during all postseason events. Team bench and dugout areas are restricted to team personnel only, unless a separate photographer's well is attached to either end of a team dugout.

Basketball - Camera and ceiling-mounted strobes are now permitted for all postseason games. However, flashes may not be used during any free throw situations or in the face of any competitor. Photographers should shoot from the baseline (right side of the goal as one faces the floor), and outside the lane areas and remain at least 3-feet from the baseline at all times.

Football - Photographers are to remain at least 6 feet from the sideline at all times, and are restricted from the team bench areas and coaching box (extends to each 25-yard line). Generally, flash photography poses no problems in football, but should be avoided before the snap of the ball to avoid a potential offside or encroachment penalty for either team.

Soccer - Photographers are to remain at least 7 feet from the sideline at all times, and are restricted from the team bench areas. Generally, flash photography poses no problems in soccer, but should be avoided during penalty kicks and any time a goal keeper's vision might be impaired by a flash. The endlines of the field can be used for photography, but only outside the box areas and at least 7 feet from the endline.

Volleyball - Flash photography is generally permitted in volleyball. Photographers should be aware of where the "playable" (live ball) area ends on each specific court, and remain outside that area at all times. Generally, the best vantage point for volleyball is the sideline opposite the team bench area and outside of the playable area. Distance is critical due to the potential for play to extend beyond the court boundaries.

Track, Cross Country, Swimming - Flashes should never be used at the start of a race, and any noisy camera mechanism (such as loud auto advance/rewind systems) should also be avoided to ensure a fair and clean start. Camera operators are to stay off the course, running track and bulkhead at all times. Photographers should never cross a running track or cross country course during the race itself, and deckside photographers in swimming should remain at least 3 feet from the edge of the pool at all times.

Wrestling - Flash photography generally poses no problem, but should not be used before the official blows his whistle to start competition (from neutral or referee's positions). Photo personnel should remain at least 10 feet from the edge of the mat, and never sit on the mat itself.

Tennis, Golf - Competitors are usually very sensitive in these two sports with regard to being photographed during competition. If possible, shoot during warm-up or practice. Generally, the greater the distance between the photographer and the competitor, the less the chances of a potential confrontation. Tennis should be shot outside the fence or from an adjacent court, but never in a "live ball" area inside the fence of a competitor's court. Always shoot from behind or slightly-behind a golfer, and stay off the greens at all times.