Fred Miranda Youth Softball Shooting Resource

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This discussion is assuming you have access to be on the field during the games.

The gear I use: Nikon D2H, 70-200 AF-S VR and well, that's about it. I have all kinds of other gear but I don't use it for softball. I need to pick up a 1.4 teleconverter but haven't done so yet. I stay away from the 2x converters. In my experience, they've done more damage then good for me. So I sold mine. Also, I never use my mono pod when shooting with this gear. I actually own a really nice one, too. Mono Pod's are evil! (Unless it's supporting some really fat lens, then they're like Heaven!) I feel they limit your creativity. Last but not least, flash cards. I prefer to use Sandisk over Lexar…I like the added detail and color quality of the Sandisk. (This is only a joke)

What makes my images stand out? It's simple. Nice clean backgrounds!!! If your background is full of busy distractions, the awesome shot of the short stop diving to catch a line drive is just another crap photo. Always look at what is behind your subject before you shoot the subject. Using a small f-stop will help aid in improving your backgrounds by leaving the background blurred. You also can just move to the left or right a tad bit. I can't stress this point enough and it is the main thing I teach my photographers. Always ask yourself, what's behind this subject, before you decide to photograph it. Things like parked cars, porta-podies, washed out gray skies, power lines or heavy set mothers sitting behind a chain-link fence wearing the latest must have fashion colors. These are all major distractions and have no rhyme or reason being in your photo. Yet so many youth sport photographers include the distractions. Stop it! Just stop it! OK!!!

Use the "rule of thirds". If you don't know it, learn it. It is one of the most basic, yet important parts of good photography. Use it especially when shooting the athlete eyes. It gives the eyes room to look in too.

Try never to shoot from a standing position. You will very rarely ever see me shooting while standing in a full upright position. Most of the time I'm sitting up against the fence and sometimes I lie down and shoot up at the catcher, pitcher and first or third baseman depending on what side I am on. It gives a sense of greatness to them. If I am on my two feet, I'm bending down to be sure that I am at the same level of the athlete. I'm also paying attention to my backgrounds and moving ever so slightly up or down to remove potential distractions.

Get in tight!!! This means don't be afraid to crop out parts of legs, arms, helmets, bats, etc. One rule of thumb to go by when cropping is to never crop at a joint. (i.e. rist, elbow, knee, ankle, etc) The story is in the eyes and facial expressions. So that you what you want to be focusing on. And by doing so will naturally create a blurred background which in turn will isolate your subject. Capture the focus in the child's eyes, the intensity of their pitch or swing or the reach for the ball. When shooting the batter, don't just shoot the batter swinging. Shoot the batter just before the pitch when their eye is on the pitcher and they are in their stance. Also capture the eye contact the batter makes with the coach when he/she is giving her signs between pitches. The only way to get the story told is to get in real tight. Make sure your focus is on the eyes of the athlete. Shoot the batter on deck. This is real easy and probably my best selling shots. Many times I capture them looking at me while doing their warm-up swings. I also capture them standing there with the bat resting on their shoulder with a peaceful look in their eye. Parents love these types of shots. Shooting the catcher and pitcher is real easy. I like to shoot these athletes between innings. The pitcher always makes a few warm-up pitches. I walk out on the field and shoot the pitcher face on. Again, I get in tight to capture the intensity in her eye. I then turn around and shoot a few of the catcher face on. Her eye on the pitcher and glove placed in the strike zone. These are easy to get and look great! During the next inning I will get on the field again and shoot the infielders and outfielders doing their warm ups. Shooting the first baseman making a reach for the ball from an angle that doesn't include the dug out is always a nice look. Get shots of the first baseman and the third baseman when they're prepared for the play. I like to shoot these horizontally using the "rule of thirds" to include the face and mitt and give room for their eyes to look into. Make sure not to include the feet of pitcher or the shortstop, etc. use the infield or the outfield as a nice blurred background.

Let's get technical: I like to shoot a lot of "action-portrait" type shots. As I've stressed earlier I like to get in tight and focus on the eyes. In order to do this with success you need to use an ISO of about 400 to give you an f-stop of about f5.6 while maintaining a proper shutter speed. An f-stop of f5.6 gives just enough depth of field to keep a nice focus from the face-mask to the eyes while maintaining a shallow depth of field throughout the rest

of the frame. I use the “aperture priority” mode most often. It gives me quick control of my depth of field. You also need to pay attention to your shutter speed in order to avoid camera shake. (One cause of soft images) A minimum of 1/500 is a good rule to stick by. If I can’t shoot at f5.6 and 1/500, I up my ISO to 800. Unless the sky is covered in heavy clouds, this should never have to do this. If you’re trying to stop the ball in mid air or the swing of a bat, you’ll need to be shooting at about 1/2000 or higher. Obviously, good light is needed for that.

Get your exposure right! With today’s cameras, the matrix metering is actually incredibly good. For the most part, I can nail the exposure using the auto mode. However, I’m allowed to get away with that because I know how certain scenes will affect the meter. There really is only a couple of tricky scenarios to be concerned with and are easily dealt with. This typically happens during the early or late part of the day. If your subject is in the shade, yet the background is in full sunlight, use your “exposure compensation” mode and push it up 1/3 of a stop. (Read your manual to learn how to set this up in your custom settings menu) If your subject has plenty of light on it yet the background is dark or in shade, drop your “exposure compensation” 1/3 of a stop. This will usually take care of most situations. I don’t wish to get into a discussion of why this is the case or argue that this is a band-aid. Just know it will work really well 95% of the time at getting the correct exposure.

What about WB? It depends on the look you’re after. For me, I like a warmer look. So on overcast days, I select “cloudy” and fine tune it to -1. When shooting late afternoon on sunny days, you won’t need anymore warmth. In fact, sometimes you might want to fine tune you “sunny” setting to +1 or even set it to the “tungsten” mode since late light is basically the same color temp as tungsten light. This will still allow for a warm look, just not to warm.

Preparing your images for display on Sportsshooter.com (Moderator note: Applies to posting here at Fred Miranda too): I hear this one a lot too. How do you get your pictures to look so good and colorful? Well, by not over doing it in Photoshop. This discussion is assuming your color setting in Photoshop is set for Adobe 1998 as the color workspace. Here are my steps I take to prepare images for web display. The first thing I do is remove any unwanted noise using a noise filter software. I use Noise Ninja 2. Then I check my levels using curves and the histogram palate. I will explain how to do this on a kindergarten level. It’s easier for all of us this way. Assuming your image is open, open up the curves window. (image>adjustment>curves) Also, be sure you’ve selected the histogram palate in the upper right hand side of the screen. (Photoshop CS) In the histogram palate you will see a black shape resembling a mountain. You want your mountain to stretch from the far left of the palate to the far right of the palate. If it doesn’t, then either your black level is to low (your mountain isn’t stretching all the way to the left) and/or your white level is to low (your mountain isn’t stretching all the way to the right) If the mountain is stretching all the way to the right and then some, meaning it wants to stretch higher then the top of the palate, your image has problems I don’t want to get into because there is a chance there’s no help for your image. Anyway, assuming your mountain isn’t stretching to the left and right as it should, we can fix this fairly easily using curves. Looking at the curves window you see a box with a diagonal line going through the middle of it. The line starts at the bottom left of the box and ends at the top right. To get your mountain’s left side, the shadows part of our picture, to stretch all the way to the left of the histograms palate, place you curser at the bottom of the line on the left side of the curves box. Hold down your left click button on the mouse while dragging the line to the right. Be sure to drag the line on the bottom of the curves box. Don’t let is elevate above the bottom of the box because it can if you let it. Do this while watching the histogram palate until the mountain meets the left side of the histogram palate. Do this for the right side of your mountain using the top of the line in the curves box but moving it to the left. Once you’re done, your blacks are black and your whites are white. (Don’t argue with me, remember this is on a kindergarten level.) Now, if you feel your image is not bright enough, grab the middle of the line and pull is up ever so slightly. Careful not to over do it. You don’t want to blow out any of your highlights. (white cheeks, uniforms, helmets, etc.) If you feel you need color adjustments done, you can do this in the curves window by using the drop down menu above the curve box. In there you will see red, green and blue. Select the one you feel need adjusting and adjust it by moving the middle of the line up or down ever so slightly. Once you’re satisfied, click “ok”. Now it’s time to resize your image for web display. I do this by using the “crop tool”. Select the crop tool. Once you’ve selected the crop tool, to tool bar at the top of your screen will allow you to place the width, height and resolution. I set my width to 400 px (pixels) x 600 px and a resolution of 72. Crop your image to your liking. The image is going to shrink in size. Enlarge the image to 100% in order to view it. We still need to add some sharpening to it. Select filter>unsharp mask. I am not going to explain what all the options mean. Instead I just want to tell you how to get reasonable and decent results. Adjust your amount to about 80. The radius to about 0.3 to 0.4. Threshold, to 4 or 5. Nine times out of ten these settings are what I find work the best on an image of this size and resolution. Next we want to convert our image color profile to sRGB. I do this because websites are set up to display images in sRGB. When an image is saved in Adobe RGB and displayed on the web, the colors will look flat and lifeless. So if at any point your image was converted to Adobe RGB, in Photoshop or you shot it that way in your camera, you will need to convert them to sRGB in order for

them to have the pop you intended them to have. To do this click on image>mode>covert profile” Select the sRGB IEC61966-2.1 from the drop down menu. Click ok. Last, I like to ad a simple black border to my photos. Do this through “select>all”. “edit>stroke. Set the stroke at 5 px and the color to black. Click ok. Save and close You’re done!

Cheers to you all and happy shooting,

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