

Photographing Little League Baseball

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If you're reading this handbook, then you are most likely planning on shooting LLB for the purpose of selling prints to parents and players. This handbook will guide you through the ins and outs of shooting Little League Baseball, how to get contracts, location and techniques, and how to deliver the best possible product to your customers. Although specifically designed to address Little League Baseball, many of the ideas and techniques can be applied to any youth baseball games. As they often say, "a picture is worth a thousand words," so I have given applicable JPG links in each section where appropriate.

Forward:

Before discovering the world of digital photography, I had been involved in Little League Baseball for over 25 years. I was the Camp Director at their main camp in Williamsport, PA after having served as coach and batting instructor for 20 years. I had worked as a regional instructor for LLB, giving coaches and player clinics throughout the east coast. I have served as guest instructor at several camps throughout the east coast including Bucky Dent's Baseball School and Doyle Academy.

In addition, my ties with LLB include Regional Little League World Series Official Scorer and Statistician and Regional Columnist covering teams from the state of Connecticut. On the local front, I have been on several Little League boards, and have served as umpire, coach, clinician, and private baseball instructor focusing on all aspects of the game.

Currently, I am the President of Play Ball Photos Inc., photographing youth baseball and other youth sports action throughout Long Island and the east coast. I'm the official photographer of the East Region Little League Tournament in Bristol, Connecticut and a staff photographer for the Little League World Series. When not behind the lens, I'm the head JV Baseball Coach at Smithtown East HS and teach sixth grade English and Science at Nesaquake Middle School.

The Structure of Little League:

If you have ever coached or been involved in Little League at the local level, you could probably skip this section. But, it's important to understand how Little League is organized from the local level all the way up through the national level.

A) The League: The league is the most basic level of Little League Play. In order for a league to participate as an affiliated Little League, it must apply for an official charter through Williamsport. Once granted a charter, that league will be able to participate in all levels of Little League play and will be fully insured. An official Little League is usually run by a local board of directors responsible for maintaining the integrity of the league under the auspices of Little League Baseball Inc. More likely than not, this is where you would start in presenting your photographic services to the league.

B) The District: The district is comprised of many leagues within an area. Smaller states have fewer districts, while larger states have many districts. New York and California have over 35 districts. Each district is governed by a District Administrator or “DA”.

C) The State: Depending on the size of the state, some states divide their states into sections. Here in NY, the state is divided into 4 sections.

D) The Region: States are grouped together into Regions. Here in the east, there are two major Regions, the New England Region which contains six states and the Mid-Atlantic Region which contains five states. There are currently 16 Little League Regions across the globe, 8 USA regions and 8 International regions.

E) The World Series: The Little League World Series is held every year at the end of August. The 16 regional winners are brought to Williamsport for a 10 day tournament. The regional winners are divided into two brackets (US and International) and two pools within each bracket. Each team plays three games of round robin play during the week. Best records out of each pool, will “cross pools” and face each other. At that point, it becomes a single elimination tournament. Best two teams out of each bracket (US) and (International) face each other in the US Championship and International Championship respectively. Those two winners then square off in the final game for the World Championship. You can see how the pools were arranged in the 2005 Little League World Series here:

<http://www.littleleague.org/series/2005divisions/llbb/series.htm>

Once again, it is at the local level where you want to make your presentation of your photographic services. Calling the District Administrator will only get you referred to the league president. It is up to the league and its BOD to decide which vendors they employ. It is important to note that in most leagues, you are treated as a “vendor”, just like the person who might be selling hot dogs and/or ice cream at the field. In other leagues, the league may decide to employ you as an “Official Photographer”. In those cases, the league may ask that you follow the same procedures as their volunteers. This usually includes a full background check before being allowed to shoot and sell.

The last thing that you’ll ever want to do is to show up on a field, start shooting and give out cards. It may be well within in your right and there have been numerous discussions on FM about doing this, but in the long run, you help yourself professionally by going through the proper channels.

Gear and Settings:

I started shooting LLB with a Digital Rebel and kit lens and I was still able to get some decent shots. It can be done and was done in the early days of film with less than stellar gear. But, if you are looking at getting started in the business, you owe it to yourself and your customers to get the best possible equipment you can afford. Currently, here is the gear I use for baseball:

- Canon 1D Mark II, Canon 1D, Canon 20D
- Canon 200 f/1.8
- Canon 70-200 f/2.8 IS
- Sigma 120-300 f/2.8
- Canon 400 f/2.8 IS
- Canon 28-70 f/2.8
- Canon 1.4x and 2x TC

Obviously, this is going to be the best equipment available, but if you are looking at the bare minimum, I would suggest a DSLR of any kind and a focal range around 300mm. Depending on accessibility, even 300mm might be a little short. However, if allowed to shoot inside the fence, 300mm will be enough to get the batter and all infielders. Zooms are nice and offer greater flexibility, but if given the choice, I'd rather use primes since it teaches you how to shoot tight and frame your subjects correctly.

In regards to settings, I shoot in Av, use center point AF AI Servo, back focus star, and use AWB. We can debate whether a custom WB should be set, but the Mark II has a very reliable AWB. Also, I don't recommend using manual mode because the exposure can change drastically when shooting from the first base side onto batters compared to shooting the left side of the infield. I'd much rather keep my aperture constant and let my shutter float as long as the shutter speed is fast enough. For night time baseball, I'll use manual exposure a lot more and custom set my white balance.

During the day under a moderate to harsh sun, I use an EC of +1/3 to +2/3. I'd much rather let the highlights blow out a little to save the faces and in most cases, it's the whites of the pants and jerseys that blow out, which are supposed to be white anyway.

In regards to shutter speeds, for me the happy zone for baseball is 1/1600-1/2000 at f/4 and ISO 200. I don't like ISO 100 on sunny days because I find the images to be too contrasty even if setting the parameters at (-1) for contrast. I have no documented proof that ISO 100 results in more contrasty images, but it has been my experience that ISO 200 works best. If you are planning on publishing directly to the web, I would suggest using Color Matrix 3H on the Mark II (sRGB). Bear in mind though, that sRGB is going to limit your gamut a bit when printing and this can be most noticeable in color shifts of reds and purples. AdobeRGB gives a wider gamut with less color shifts, however, if publishing directly to the web without conversion, your images will look somewhat flat when it comes to color under an AdobeRGB profile.

Location:

It is been my experience in shooting several sports that a great shot can be captured from anywhere on the field. However, as you gain experience in knowing the sport and anticipating action, you'll be able to set your location based on the situation. What I like to do is start out on the first base side and take care of all my batter shots early. I find shooting batters to be the most restricting part of the shoot. If I had my choice, I would rarely focus on batters and look at capturing shots on defense, but in the youth sports market, capturing batters is a necessary part of the job. I like to get them done early though. I'll want to get at least one decent "ball in frame" shot for every batter and then spend the rest of the game concentrating on defensive action. A great majority of my shots when selling to parents will be in vertical mode. You can however, switch to horizontal mode if and when the situation permits.

When shooting right handed batters, it is important to shoot reasonably tight and start with your batter to the far left of your frame. Depending on how tight I am and the stride of the batter, there will be times where the backside of the batter is actually out of the frame before he/she initiates the swing. You must allow your batter to stride into the frame! If you center your batter while in the stance, chances are you'll wind up with the batter striding out of the right side of the frame, or capturing a shot where the batter is in frame, but the ball is not. If done right, the batter should stride into the frame and still leave plenty of room on the right side of the frame for the ball, bat and breathing room ahead of the hitter.

If a lefty should happen to bat while on the first base side (it happens a lot), look to capture the follow through and the first couple of steps en route to first. Actually, I find this to be a more compelling shot anyway. The other option is to switch to horizontal orientation, loosen up a bit and try to capture ball in frame while at the same time capturing some face. Again, I stress that a good shot can be captured from anywhere on the field. Don't whine about your location!

Some examples of batters from the "wrong side":

- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F0105.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F6562.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F6737.jpg>
- http://www.playballphotos.com/images/BBH_Pre-Season_Bash_2006/_G5F0925.jpg
- http://www.playballphotos.com/images/BBH_Pre-Season_Bash_2006/_G5F1427.jpg
- http://www.playballphotos.com/images/BBH_Pre-Season_Bash_2006/_G5F3043.jpg

No matter what the situation though, time of day and location of sun will more than likely dictate your shooting location. For new shooters, you'd like the sun to be toward your back, but as you gain more experience, you'll quickly learn not to be afraid to shoot into a situation that is backlit. Knowing how to set your camera can make for some interesting images when shooting backlit. Plus, it can alleviate some problems of having to deal with hard shadows.

Technique:

This is the part of the handbook where I'm going to choose to spend the most time and where I think it could be of most benefit to new shooters. When it comes to capturing youth baseball, the same principles apply as it does in any sport...

CAPTURE PEAK ACTION

LOOK FOR FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

GET CLEAN BACKGROUNDS

1) Shoot Low

With youth sports, it is imperative that you shoot as low to the ground as possible. Rarely, if ever do I shoot with a monopod and quite often I'm handholding a 200 or even the 400 with my ass to the grass. It can be tiring at times, but the shot you get will separate yourself from all the rest. Even your belly to the ground, can make for a compelling shot if done right. Shooting low to the ground will make your little athletes look larger than life! I realize that the physical demands will prevent you from doing this all the time, but it is something you want to continually strive for in your shooting technique. As in any rule, there are some exceptions, but shooting low is something I cannot stress enough.

The following shots were shot with ass to grass:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/KG5F2423.jpg>
- http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/SJSM10AvSJSM10N_Finals/KG5F6111.jpg
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F0408.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F4770.jpg>

2) Don't burst shoot batters!

I never burst shoot batters. Okay, well I won't say "Never", but hardly ever. There are several reasons why I choose not to burst shoot batters and I have outlined them below:

1) ***It doesn't make mathematical sense.*** For a burst of 8 frames, there *may* be a total of two keepers: ball in frame, and depending on how much you shoot through the play, the follow through. So, a burst of 8 requires looking through 8 images, keeping two and deleting six. And this has to be done every time a pitch is thrown! No way man. I don't have the time or the patience. Compared to bursting a defensive play, where at least half the shots in the sequence are keepers, burst shooting batters doesn't make mathematical sense. You just don't get a good bang for your buck.

2) ***Eight frames per second still doesn't give me enough control.*** Aside from the first shot where you have complete control of when your shutter will fire, the shots in the burst occur automatically, and sometimes it's still not quick enough to capture the parts of the swing you want to capture. After the first tap, you are at the mercy of the machine. I'd much rather time my single tap at a precise time to capture ball in frame and like I mentioned earlier, it's really the only shot I want anyway.

3) ***Time and storage!*** If you burst shoot every single batter, your card is going to fill up quite quickly. Either that, or you're going to spend a lot of time chimping away shots when you should be

focused on the action on the field. Deleting hundreds of non-useable swings and misses can be taxing. By the end of the third inning, you'll be exhausted. I say, spend your time perfecting your single tap timing.

3) BOB is all Luck:

And anyone who tells you different is lying. What you are aiming to do is get ball in frame with every single tap on a batter. To me the ball in frame ratio is more impressive than capturing that one Bat on Ball (BOB) that you may get every 5,000 shots. Compression is another story.

Since we are in the market of trying to get a decent shot of every player on the diamond from shoot to shoot, your focus is to get a ball in every croppable frame as much as possible. The closer that ball is to the bat, the more options you have for cropping and enlarging. Personally, I find a ball in frame with a little motion blur to be more dynamic than a completely frozen clay baseball wrapped around a bat. The key is to capture a shot with ball in frame and some degree of face in your batter shots.

4) Creative Angles:

One of the things I learned while shooting at the regionals is to get creative with angles and lenses once you have covered a team at least twice. You constantly have to give the parents and customers something different to look at. By mid tournament and after having shot a team twice or three times, I spent a day in the OF shooting toward home with a 400/2.8 with a 2x TC. I call these in-game ambiance shots because the reach was just perfect to be tight on the batter, catcher, and umpire yet loose enough to include the LLB Regional Tournament logo. Then there was a day I spent under the bleachers shooting through a fence with an 80/1.8. Here you can get some nice looks of players as they approach the plate. You can get a full frontal view of the right side of the infield. Now, shooting through a fence can be somewhat of a challenge, especially if you have to move the glass quickly from player to player. Removing the lens hood makes it a little easier but be prepared to get a few more OOF shots. However, when you get the shot... it's certainly something different and you'll be glad you did it.

The third angle was discovered by accident. I was doing some fan flavor during the first inning in the stands when I decided to spend an inning shooting the action on the field. First thing you'll notice... NO CLUTTER! No umpire butt, no coaches stepping into your shot, no foreground infielders throwing your focus out of wack just before snapping the shutter. The thing you lose, of course is what everyone tells you about shooting low. It breaks the rules of youth sports so to speak, but the angles are different and I was amazed how many of these shots sold during and after the tournament. A good action shot is a good action shot and when shot from a different angle, it can still work well.

Some examples of creative angles:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/KG5F2288.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/KG5F2570.jpg>
- http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/fm-images/Independence_Day_Tournament_BH/IGA/IMG_2798_K.jpg

5) Turn Accidental Chops into Creative Crops:

There will plenty of times when your framing and/or timing will be off and you'll lose a limb. Don't trash that shot just yet! Look for the key elements mentioned earlier. Is the action solid? Do we have good facial expression? Does the shot tell a story? If so, losing a limb need not ruin the shot. Here is an example of a situation that occurred last year. A customer ordered a photo with chopped limbs. The face was great, the action was good, and it was shot tight. The problem is that the feet were chopped. After using some professional judgment, I cropped the image above the waist and mailed it to the customer. A few days later, I received this email:

Dear Mr. Alesse:

The picture I ordered from your website was not exactly the shot that I received. The one I received is cropped just below the belt line whereas the online thumbnail was a full body shot.

After explaining to him about the chopped feet and the fact that it was an 8 x 10 requiring even more cropping, I offered to redo the shot as pictured. Shortly after sending that email, I received this from him:

You know what? This photo is growing on me. I'll keep it. Thanks.

6) Pan Everything:

Any moving object can be panned and you really have to try it once in awhile. I won't even call it panning as much as slow shutter sports photography, because sometimes you're not even moving the camera at all. You can shoot pitchers, baserunners, batters, infielders, outfielders, just about anything with slow shutter speeds and get some interesting effects. The key is that in most (I won't say all, because there are some exceptions), the face has to be in focus. What's great about slow shutter sports shots is when you nail the shot, it's the greatest feeling in the world. It's something in your viewer unlike anything you have done before and it's really cool. Don't expect to get it every time. It takes a little skill and a whole lot of luck since the shot is totally dependent on the head motion of your subject. But keep trying and you'll get it.

This was shot at 1/15 of a second at the Regional Tournament and was one that I included in my SS application:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/SS/KG5F0436.jpg>

7) Don't be afraid of motion blur and noise:

If using top quality gear, shooting at ISO 1600 or higher need not be a problem. A good action shot will be a good action shot despite any apparent noise or motion blur. But... the faces MUST be in focus, show little to no blur, and be properly exposed. For the longest time, I was afraid to shoot at night

for fear that it would degrade the quality of my shots. I was wrong and I learned this lesson the hard way.

Last year, at the LLB Regional Tournament, I chose not to shoot any games under the lights for fear of noise and slow shutter. Plus, I needed to edit the four previous games, prepare for the next day, and have time for dinner.

The problem was that the team from Connecticut only played at night. Well, after missing the first couple of games under the lights, those parents from Connecticut were pretty darn angry at me. They wanted photos! Luckily, CT had 3 more games in the tournament, and since I was already working from dawn to dusk, what was one more game each day, right? I relied on my Mark II to do its job of handling noise at ISO 1600, dropped my shutter to 1/400 and still got some real nice shots. Did it have noise? Yes. Was there motion blur in the limbs? Yes. But I quickly learned that it didn't matter. Parents will be less concerned with the technical aspects of the shot and more concerned whether you caught their child during peak action in a tournament that is one trip away from the Little League World Series. Trust your camera to do what no point and shoot can do and shoot at night!

Examples of shots under the lights:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/mafinal/KG5F8078.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F5709.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F5768.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F5461.jpg>

8) Get as much air behind the subject as possible:

Photographer, Robert Hanashiro tells why he likes to shoot from the end zone as much as possible when shooting football. Simply put, you get cleaner backgrounds. There is a big difference in subject isolation between clutter that is 15 yards behind the player compared to 150 yards behind the player. Shooting batter profiles is a necessary evil. You have to do them. Parents want them. Coaches want them. But, at best you'll be dealing with a backstop 10-15 feet away from the batter which inevitably isn't going to isolate him much. This is another reason why I choose to focus on defensive action, because there is a lot more opportunity to get air behind the player. Here is where I have to admit the 200 f/1.8 earns its reputation. No other lens that I own, including the 400 f/2.8 can replicate the bokeh achieved with the 200 f/1.8. Even stopped down, that lens will produce bokeh unlike any other piece of glass that Canon makes. But, to take full advantage, you must shoot your subjects with plenty of air behind them. Here some of my favorite shots most noted for the bokeh of the 200.

- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F0378.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F1854.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F1633.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F8544.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F7120.jpg>

9) Shoot THROUGH the play:

This is another Hanashiro technique. When burst shooting a play on defense, it's important to keep the "tape rolling" after the play is over. You'll get looks toward the umpire, pain grimaces, jubes, looks of frustration. You name it. During an intense part of the game, flex your buffer to its potential and shoot through a play. You'll get a lot more keepers than you can ever imagine. These particular images were used for my initial SS application and are a result of shooting through the play:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/SS/KG5F9190.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/SS/KG5F7352.jpg>

10) Hide your safety shots:

Sometimes called stock shots, safety shots are the shots that you get of infielders and pitchers during warm up. It's a great way to insure that you get a decent shot of every player and I encourage you to do it. When you do this be sure to get as low as possible, shoot as tight as possible and make sure there is nothing in the background. Some of the common errors I see with inexperienced shooters include capturing these images with other players playing catch, other baseballs on the field, or players not facing the action. These are dead giveaways that the shots were taken during warm-up. When I do my safeties, I'm constantly aware of what's going on in the BG at all times and if little Johnny is having a conversation with the other two infielders behind the pitcher's mound, I find another angle or wait for the game to continue before shooting the pitcher.

There are a lot of good angles to get safety shots and depending on your accessibility here is what I would recommend.

1) For the third baseman, SS, and second baseman, sit close to the first baseman on the foul line. You want that infielder and baseball coming right at you when you shoot.

2) For the pitcher, sit on the ground right behind the catcher, slightly to the catcher's left if it's a right handed pitcher. Tell the catcher to catch the ball! It takes some risk, but really, this is one of the better angles to capture a pitcher and unless you are behind a fence, it's the only time during a game where you'll be able to get a shot at this angle. Otherwise, stick with full profile shots during the game and make sure the pitcher's chest is facing you. The other option is to shoot low to the ground behind the backstop. This is a lot easier than you would think. Press your lens tight against the backstop. The AF might hunt a little more, but it will soon lock in. Don't worry about the slight haze you see in your view finder. That will easily snap out by pinching the levels sliders in post processing. If you need to, you can also take off the lens hood, but be careful not to damage the front element and make sure you at least have a filter on your lens to avoid any kick of rocks and dust.

Here are some of my favorite shots of the pitcher from behind the catcher:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F4510.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/day03/KG5F8103.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/day03/KG5F8551.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/KG5F2392.jpg>
- http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/SJSM_N11vISP11/KG5F4793.jpg
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F8419.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F4835.jpg>

Shooting pitchers from the side are also “safety shots”. If shooting the pitcher in profile, there is an opportunity to do some interesting tight crops and it was Carl Auer who originally tuned me into the possibilities. Look for an opportunity where the pitcher gets to the draw just before delivery where the ball is even with the top of the cap. Once you have ball and cap even, to me, that photo screams for a tight horizontal crop. The key is that the pitching arm or the ball has to be even or just below the head. If the ball is above, then the crop doesn't work. Here are some examples.

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/day01/KG5F1077.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/day02/KG5F6418.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/KG5F6685.jpg>

Shots of the pitcher from the backside rarely work and I’m not a big fan of the angle between home plate and the direct side profile, although there are some exceptions. On occasion, you’ll get a pitcher that has a nice high leg kick. Here is where you WILL be able to get a decent shot from the backside. Here is an example:

- http://www.playballphotos.com/images/BBH_Pre-Season_Bash_2006/_G5F1971.jpg

3) For the catcher, if you are allowed to shoot from behind the pitcher’s mound during warm-up, you can get a nice shot of the catcher throwing down to second. However, the problem with this angle is that the lack of an umpire in the frame makes it a sure giveaway that it’s a warm-up. Otherwise, stick with a side profile shot and it becomes less noticeable. If possible, shoot it or crop it real tight to make the fact that it’s warm-up less noticeable. Examples from the Little League World Series:

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F1054.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F1493.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/KG5F2599.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F0945.jpg>

4) Don’t forget the first baseman and outfielders! If time permits, you’ll want to get these players too. Since the first baseman will inevitably get some ball action within a game, you can shoot the first

baseman whenever you are on the third base side during the game. During the game, there are quite a few places where you can get nice action on the first baseman. This first example is across the diamond, while the second one is shot on the first base side close to home plate.

- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/KG5F6548.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/semifinals/KG5F4822.jpg>

Remember that outfielders are people too ☺ For outfielders, you may or may not have the reach or the time to get every outfielder during peak action in a game. Many times, you will have to rely on their at bat to get a decent shot of them. But, if electing to shoot some safeties, move towards the outfield and get them during the warm-up. More often than not, they'll ham it up for you when they know they are being photographed which can make for some nice action and facial expressions that the parents will really love. When in game action does come though, you have to be ready to shoot it, even if it means having to crop the shot.

5) Finally, portraits also serve as great safety shots and some of the portraits you can get in the game far exceed what you'll ever get in a T & I shoot.

Examples:

a) Leadoff hitter and team spark plug for Hawaii, Layson Aliviado during the national anthem (you couldn't ask for a better hair light!): http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/IMG_0345.jpg

b) The ever fierce, Vonn Fe'ao for Hawaii:
http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/IMG_0327.jpg

c) Harrison Kam let's everyone know who's number one:
<http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLSWORLDCHAMP/KG5F4981.jpg>

d) From the regionals, dejected starting pitcher, Luke Perry wonders where he went wrong in his first game in Bristol: <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/day02/KG5F8017.jpg>

e) From the regionals, RI's Nick Mattiello approaches the plate:
<http://www.playballphotos.com/images/day03/KG5F8346.jpg>

f) The champions from Maitland Florida let everyone know that they're Number 1 as coach and former major leaguer, Mike Stanley looks on:

<http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F1790.jpg>

11) Sometimes, the number sells:

This is going to go against everything you have heard about shooting baseball and face. Every now and then, shoot the back of a kid and get the jersey number. Sometimes it sells.

12) Shoot tight and crop tighter!

This was the subject of a recent discussion on FM. I fully believe that our ability to crop is what sets us apart from other casual shooters. The key is to shoot and crop tight! Why? Simply because you can. It's what's going to separate your DSLR camera from the P & S. You have to let the quality of your

pixels flex its muscles and get the shot that the others can't. For those that are in the business of the ever increasing competitive market of youth action sales, we need to set ourselves apart by allowing our gear to flex its potential. 8 MP is not an eye opener anymore. Plenty of P&S cameras can do that. What we need to do is increase our skills as shooters and post processors, and allow our long glass to be long glass.

In other words, we have to get the shot that they can't get. This means capitalizing on our field access, shooting as tight as possible, and allowing the quality of each and every pixel shine when cropping and post-processing. Here are some examples of shots that were shot tight and cropped tighter from the Regionals and Little League World Series:

- Dante' Bichette's son Dante Jr going yard:
<http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F0959.jpg>
- Mike Stanley's son, Tanner: <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F1140.jpg>

12) Shoot INTO Your Body Index:

Don't let the "swing it and wing it" method kill your shot. Shoot into your "body index"!

The idea of "body index" was a term Ben Chen introduced to me awhile back. I had been doing this for quite sometime, but never knew there was a name for it until speaking with Ben. My idea of "setting body index" may differ from Ben's but in a nutshell it simply means shooting INTO your most relaxed comfortable body position.

Shooting into your body index is an advanced shooting technique and mastering it will take some time. Having a baseball background is going to give me a distinct advantage in this area because I often find myself shooting the same way I coach. Chances are though, if you are intent on shooting baseball, you probably have been involved in the game in another capacity and/or love the game of baseball to begin with.

As mentioned, I coach JV baseball and the best advice I can give to those that shoot and coach baseball is to shoot the same way you coach. As a shooter, you have a clear advantage over other shooters if you thoroughly understand the game from a coach's standpoint. That means you have to anticipate where the ball might be hit, where the play is going to be, who the stronger players are on the field, know what the coach might do in first and third situations, know whether the infielders are being drawn in for a play at the plate, know the habitual tendencies of your players and so forth. Once you can anticipate all the possible scenarios, you have to plan and set your shot for all those possibilities. This means that you have to shoot INTO your body index.

Body index is a term used to mean the most relaxed position your body can be in while holding a lens. Let's take a first and third one out situation as an example. First and third situations can mean that if a ball is hit, there may be a play at the plate, or the infielders might try to spin two depending on where it's hit. I'm going to set my body index towards second base. That means, if I'm handholding, I'm facing towards second, raising my lens and making sure that I'm as absolutely as comfortable as I can be for the

shot at second. I may even set my focus ring here. Once I'm squared up and comfortable towards second, I'll now twist my body towards home while holding the lens. This is NOT my most comfortable position, but it's okay because I have more time to frame my shot and wait for the ball to be hit. Okay, now... ball is hit. I'm watching the play, watching the body position of the infielders. My lens is still pointing toward home. If the play is at home, I'm there already, just frame and go. If the infielders go for two, I twist back into my body index, frame, focus and fire. If I didn't anticipate that play at second and didn't set my body index for it, I'd be rushing the shot which may result in a shot that's poorly framed with a tilted horizon, and OOF.

Think of the idea like a rubber band spread apart between thumb and index finger. That's the position the rubber band wants to be in. If you take the other hand and pull the rubber band, it can go there, but when you release, it's going to snap back into its original position. Same goes for body index and shooting. The rubber band between index finger and thumb is your shot at second. Twisting towards home is stretching the rubber band, but you allow yourself to snap back into the play at second base quickly and comfortably.

Setting your body index is an essential technique in getting your keeper rate up. Anticipation in advance is the key. You can actually set your body index for two bases. If there is a play at second or third, you can set your body index for in-between and still be good to go. Another thing that I often do is "dry running". Once you have your set your body index, do a dry run between pitches, seeing how fast you can get your lens to that base with no problems. Tweak as necessary. After you leave the field at the end of the game, ask yourself this... How many on base action plays were there today? How many did I get? Make a note of it. Your aiming at getting 100%. Improve for next time. It's a good drill to do with yourself. The point is that you want to "swing it and wing it" less and less as you become an advanced shooter.

13) Capture the ambience of the game:

Depending on the level and importance of the game or tournament, your "ambience" shots give you the best opportunity to tell the story of the game and help give a historical anchor. Ambience shots can be anything outside of the realm of in-game action. Here are some examples:

1) Dugout is the official mascot of LLB and really brings out the best in everyone. It makes us realize that baseball is really kids playing a kids game.

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/KG5F2525.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/KG5F1829.jpg>

2) Like father, like son, Tanner Stanley signs a hat for a fan after the game:

- http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWS05/IMG_0110.jpg

14) Celebrate "The Jube":

Jubilation or “Jube” shots are paramount in sports photography at any level. What’s great about them is that they can be captured from just about any angle and supply facial expressions that will help etch that special moment into history unlike any other sports image you’ll ever capture. They by far evoke the most emotional aspects of sports photography and move us unlike any other shots that we’ll ever capture. If you’re ever having a bad day shooting or just a bad day in general, keep your jube shots in a special folder on your hard drive and review them from time to time. They will pick you up in a hurry! Someone even suggested printing out your jube shots and hanging them up in the walls of your office. They will make you and everyone around you feel good about themselves and serve to inspire. I have captured many jube shots over the last couple of years, and it’s hard to pick favorites. The ones here hold special places in my heart.

From the LLWS...

- After being miffed all game by Caribbean pitching, Michael Memea has the at bat of a lifetime, connecting on a 3-2 fastball for a walk off HR in the bottom of the 7th inning of the 2005 Little League World Series. <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/SS/KG5F4809.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSWORLDCHAMP/KG5F4815.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSWORLDCHAMP/KG5F4851.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSWORLDCHAMP/KG5F4888.jpg>
- Vonn Fe’ao relishes the idea of being LLWS champion:
<http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSWORLDCHAMP/KG5F4926.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/KG5F3090.jpg>
- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/LLWSCHAMP/KG5F3180.jpg>

From the Regionals...

- <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/mafinal/KG5F8280.jpg>
- After defeating NJ, the team from PA invites their opponents to parade around the field with them in a last show of sportsmanship: <http://www.playballphotos.com/images/mafinal/headline.jpg>
- Maine captures the NE Regional Championship:
http://www.playballphotos.com/images/nefinal/IMG_6087_headline.jpg

Local...

- Whether on the local level or at the LLWS, kids are kids:
http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/SJSM10AvSJSM10N_Finals/IMG_4647.jpg
- http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/IMG_3734.jpg
- Tears of joy: <http://www.playballphotos.com/portfolio/KG5F4401.jpg>
- <http://www.smithtownbullsbaseball.net/photos/SJSM10vISP10/KG5F3981.jpg>

Presentations and Marketing:

As mentioned in the beginning of this guide, you'll want to set up a meeting with the local board of directors of your local league. Quite often, BOD meetings are an open forum, and to request that a meeting and/or presentation be added to their agenda isn't that difficult. What I do urge, is that you request your meeting during an "off peak" time of year. Once January 1st rolls around, things can get pretty hectic for leagues. They have to start their registration process, get sponsors, schedule fields, order equipment, etc. So, the best window generally speaking is from November to January. This is easy to remember, because it pretty much coincides with the "off time" of MLB ☺

Before making a presentation, it is a good idea to do your homework in advance. Research and preparation to the following questions will only make your presentation stronger:

- 1) What is the size and spread of this league?
- 2) Have they ever had someone do action photographs before?
- 3) Who is the hired photog for T & I?
- 4) Who is the competition?
- 5) Why are your services the best in the area?
- 6) How do you handle customer service?
- 7) On-site, online or both?
- 8) What are other action photographers charging in your area?
- 9) How do you plan on marketing your services?

A good presentation will consist of showing off your best work to board members, showing the marketing plan you have in mind, and how the league can benefit by employing you. This often, but not always requires a donation of your profits being donated back to the league. However, even though this is customary, I would urge you not to discuss donation percentages at your initial meeting. Really, your initial meeting is not designed to negotiate numbers, but rather to display your work, answer questions, and show your professionalism. If the league is interested, dollars and cents can be discussed at a later time.

If time permits, it is also beneficial to assemble a folder for each and every board member at the meeting. In the folder, you should have at least ONE 8 x 10 photo, a couple of 5 x 7's, a page describing your background and your experience, references (if applicable), a client list (if applicable), and contact information. In addition, you can have some samples of larger prints, custom posters, and some of the equipment you use. Quite often I'll bring my 400 and Mark II to a meeting, because that alone speaks volumes about your professionalism, and the quality of photographs that you'll be producing.

Once again, this is the bare minimum. I have an upcoming meeting with all the NY State DA's where I will be bringing all my gear, a large plasma screen TV, and some viewing stations for the DA's to play around with before and after the meeting. If just starting out, plan on bringing samples of your best work and the items mentioned above.

Insurance and Contracts:

Written contracts are always a good idea when entering into a business arrangement. Many photographers I know use verbal contracts, but I would suggest a written contract whenever possible. A written contract will protect both parties. Many FM members are hesitant in offering examples of their contracts on the forum for good reason. The contracts often contain sensitive information between photographer and contracting organization that need not be shared with the general public. Best advice I could offer is consult the services of an attorney that can help draw up a contract that will serve the best interests of all parties involved. There are also some good sources on the internet that will help you with the business aspects of your photography business.

I may be in the minority in suggesting that you should have a good business insurance policy before entering in any business arrangement with any league. An insurance policy will help protect you and any others that might be injured while shooting at particular event as well as protect your valuable gear if damaged or stolen. Once again, it is best to consult with an attorney and/or financial advisor in looking at different insurance options to suit your needs.

Post Processing and Preparing Your Images for Sale:

Plenty of online discussions exist about what the best web hosting/online merchant services there are. But, in reality the best service is the one that suits your needs in all aspects. This will require a lot of trial and error. Below is a partial list of online image hosting/merchants that you will have to investigate on your own. Each has its advantages and disadvantages:

- www.photorelect.com
- www.smugmug.com
- www.photoshelter.com
- www.printroom.com
- www.whcc.com
- www.mpix.com
- www.elcocolor.com

As Carl will tell you, it is important to nail your exposure, WB, and framing out the camera. There is no time to post-process and crop images for sale for the amount of images I take, which can be as many as 30,000 in one weekend. What I do like to do is pick a few select samples, crop them as I think they should be cropped and post those samples on the gateway page to the image galleries. You do want your customers to see the quality of your work which can be sometimes diminished by the crunching of files by your online merchant. Whenever possible, it's important to delete all your OOF shots before publishing to your online gallery. Even a poorly framed shot can slip past your editing on occasion, but don't let those OOF shots slip by! There is no way to correct a profoundly OOF shot, so be vigilant in that

regard. My photographers and myself, know in advance that an OOF shot needs to be deleted in camera as much as possible, especially when time is of essence.

If planning on posting your images to an online gallery, it is essential that your galleries be ready for purchase in 24 hours or less. The more time involved in posting your galleries, the less your sales will be and those diminishing returns will multiply exponentially as hours on the clock roll by.

There are many models that exist for on-site sales and I won't go into the details right now. Perhaps a supplement to this guide will be added in the future, that will include some of these models and deciding which model works best for you. But, for now, I will tell you that when it comes down to on-site sales, marketing and customer flow are two essential factors in running a successful on-site sales model. In many aspects, on-site sales will raise your business to a new level and will only be as strong as your weakest link. It should not be something that is thrown together the last second and requires considerable planning, cost, and experience before going to that level.

Some Concluding Remarks

I know this sounds corny and clichéd, but have fun! I absolutely love shooting sports and look forward to each and every shoot. The day when the enjoyment aspects of shooting disappear is the day when I'll leave it all behind. Some days are going to be more enjoyable than others no doubt, but when the day is over, focus on the fact that you produced some amazing images and captured a moment in time for a parent and their child.

Revisit your best images often. It will serve to inspire you and make you realize what a rewarding business this can be. Always look to anchor on the positive things you have accomplished and steadily improve and try new things. If at anytime, you have any questions about the information contained in this guide or in any other aspects of sports photography, please feel free to contact me at palesse@playballphotos.com.

Good luck and Happy Shooting!