

Shooting Rodeo

Photography

Grimm C-6

As always, what you are about to read is ONLY A GUIDE; you must make decisions about the practicality of this information because the light will certainly be changing during the course of the rodeo.

When possible, shoot with the sun to your back if it's out, but only after you've chosen the best shooting locations. If it's overcast, you'll have no severe shadows, but your contrast will be very low. Add a yellow filter in front of the lens if you're shooting black and white film on a very cloudy day. If shooting a night rodeo - good luck.

If it's really cold, drink, or simply hold, coffee or hot chocolate to keep your hands warm and your body temperature higher. Keep your hands as warm as possible to prevent camera shake. Increase your shutter speed a stop or two if you think you're chill is causing you to shake a great deal.

1. Be professional at all times! This rule supersedes all others. You constantly are a reflection on us as well as on yourself.
2. You are about to shoot the most visually exciting high school sport; so enjoy the experience even if you have no idea what you are doing! The most cooperative people in high school sports will be those surrounding rodeo: the riders, the helpers, the ticket people, etc. are almost always so excited about having someone cover their effort that they respond with an attitude of "We are sure glad you're here! How can we help? Are you coming back next week?"
3. You will need boots and a cowboy hat to enter the actual arena or sit on the fence. No exceptions! Twice I was offered these items before I bought my own, so if you arrive without them shoot as best you can, but don't be surprised if they are offered.
4. Arrive early and use the time to improve your angles and to scope out the best locations for shooting. Look for the shots which involve the animals as well as the team members. Look for jackets with the school's name and/or banners that can be used as part of the image you want.
5. Consider shooting the group shot for the yearbook while you are here. It will make a much better impression with the logical background. Each school sponsors one rodeo a year and that rodeo is the best chance to get them all at the same time. They will also appreciate you that much more.
6. Vary the number of people in a photograph. Some shots should be singles and others should involve multiple people in the shot. As always, remember the rule that odd numbers of people are generally more intriguing visually than even numbers of subjects.

7. (Almost) always shoot to freeze the action first and to get depth of field second. You want to try to minimize the grain by using the lowest ISO you can. Higher ISO films will allow you a greater depth-of-field because they will allow a smaller aperture. The greater depth-of-field will allow a greater margin of error in focusing the fast moving subjects. The exception follows...

8. Consider panning on a dozen shots or so. Your success rate with these is likely to be very low; but if you get a good one it will really stand out! Your best chance is to try all of them on the same event: steer undecorating or barrels are my suggestions.

9. Look for that emotional shot that says, "I won" or a shot of the cowboy who fell coming out of the chute.

10. Shoot from a variety of different camera angles. Don't ever be afraid to rest against a post to get a slower shutter speed if it won't affect your subject. Ask about shooting from the announcer's box. 90% of the time they will be pleased to allow you to shoot from their windows - these are about 12 feet off the ground so you get a nice angle.

11. Work with the other photographers from your school. It will make for better coverage if you will shoot from different locations around the track. You should walk within the parameters of where you are allowed to move before the first event begins and then talk with the other photographers about which places provide the best backgrounds. Be sure that the back-grounds are free of distractions such as advertising, other riders, barrels, horse backsides, etc.

12. Work with any other photographer(s). If you are the only shooter from your school you would be wise to talk to photographers from other schools and try to make an agreement to shoot their riders if they will shoot yours. Give them the name of your advisor and the school's address and request the same information from them. The official rodeo photographer will be unhappy that you are here. He/she will give you dirty looks because he/she fears you will sell your images to the competitors.

13. Be predictive. Each event will have only one or two riders from your school. By watching closely the first competitors you can get an idea of what will work in those few seconds you have to get your rider!

14. Take a variety of lenses and use all that you take. This way you can isolate your team's individuals for some shots and yet incorporate the concept of "team" in others. Don't overdo any particular type unless another photographer is shooting a different lens at a different location, even then you would be wise to change lenses.

15. As a rule the Sunday afternoon events are much better to shoot than Friday or Saturday nights: you have daylight. Rodeo moves quickly and so those dark night shots are hard to get correctly exposed when using the shutter speeds necessary to freeze the action.

