Strobe Photography: SPORTS LIGHTING OF THE '80S

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Photographing in the path of most resistance is made easier in a flash! How to stop action ice cold

There's a big difference between ASA 800 and ASA 64. It's pushed Ektachrome versus Kodachrome 64, and in this day and age when there's a choice, few editors will settle for grain city.

Well that's all well and good if all you're worried about is reproduction value in a magazine, but what about if you're concerned with stopping action during sports photography with an aperture that is smaller than the opening to the Lincoln Tunnel?

The solution is strobe photography. Throughout the basketball and hockey arenas in which I shoot nationwide, I help execute my assignments by arranging several 2,400 watt-sec. strobe units across the rafters. Fitted with telephoto or "sports-reflector" heads, these units feature fast flash duration and a quick recycling time. The packs upon which my studio relies are

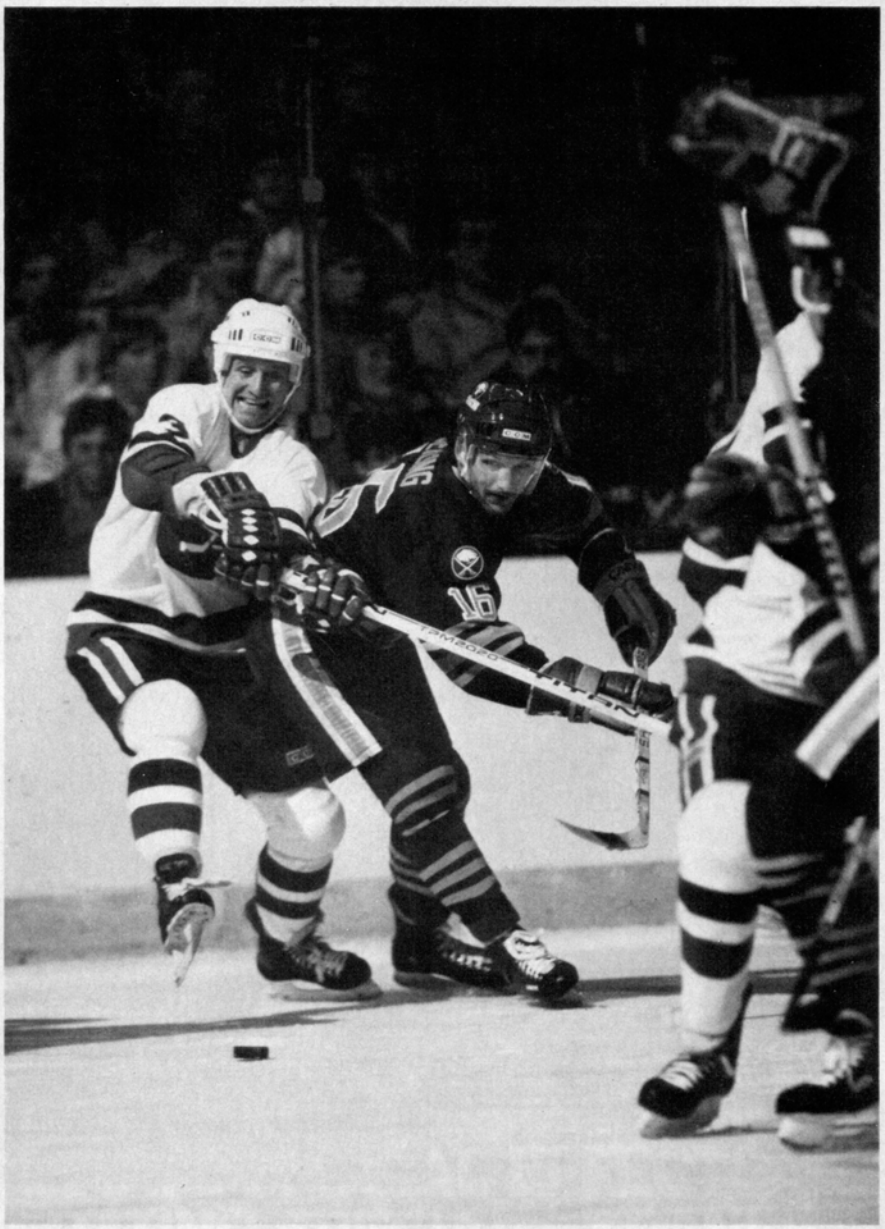
Balcar 2,400 watt-sec. units with high reflectance heads.

We place two units at each end of the ice. A photographer stationed by each net triggers his set of strobes with the aid of Hawk Remote Controllers. When the shutter is tripped, a radio signal is sent to the strobes, which are triggered simultaneously.

With the Balcar units set for full power and Kodachrome 64 we shoot at f/4. We need cameras that sync at fast speeds, so we shoot with the Nikon FA and FE2 at 1/250-sec. This sure beats Ektachrome 400 pushed a stop and shot at 1/500-sec. at f/2.8. The fast flash duration and sync speed cut out all ambient light, so there is no ghosting or blurring.

The important thing about strobe photography is also knowing when not to use it. While on assignment to capture New York Islander Mike Bossy's 400th goal in the National Hockey League, it was important to remember that these strobe units have a recycling time of from three to four seconds to get up to full power — a time span in which a specific moment that needs to be captured can go by the boards too easily. If you shoot too early, then the puck may be in the net, the celebration could be over, and the player could be back on the bench before you can snap off your next shot. So when looking to capture specific moments such as the Bossy assignment, using available light and a fast motor drive are highly recommended.

When shooting for the 1984 International Games for the Disabled, strobes were set up in the Hofstra



With our strobes at full power, we shoot Kodachrome 64 at 1/250-sec., set at f/4.

Strobe eliminates the color shift often inherent in available-light pictures.

University pool and the Nassau Community College fieldhouse. The pool was lit with Mercury Vapor lights as well as natural light from one end of the pool. Light levels were low and varied on the time of day. With strobes set up, we shot the same exposure throughout the assignment, regardless of the time of day, and didn't have to worry about changing color casts. Available light shots at the pool and fieldhouse were taken on Kodak EES film at 1600 ASA. When the fieldhouse shots were taken with strictly available light, we had to shoot at f/2 at 1/250-sec., which resulted in an overall green cast to the print. The same situation shot with strobe allowed us to close down to f/5.6, with no color shift.

So add the professional's edge to your sports photography: strobe units and the freedom of choice.