

### AT THE RINK

At the rink, there are many places from which to take pictures, and if you had a position near center ice without glass in front of you (such as in the penalty box), you can shoot most of the ice surface.

The 300mm would be good for tight, isolated, vertical action on players (trading card style), or tight shots of players in the crease. Or, if you have an elevated position near center ice so that you can shoot over the glass, the 300mm would be the perfect focal length.

But in most arenas you would be relegated to shooting through scratched up plastic or dirty glass. It's up to you to find the cleanest available space there and experiment. With some of the plastic panes, if you zoom past about 135mm, everything would be out of focus.

### STOPPING THE ACTION

There are several factors when choosing the correct shutter speed. That would include the speed and quality of play ranging from the pros down to Peewees.

For pros, we try to stay around 1/1000th of a second to freeze action and go to 1/1250th if we have an exceptionally bright arena. For young kids playing hockey I would go as low as 1/500th but would prefer not to drop lower than 1/640th.

Another factor is that you should brace yourself to hold the camera steady. This could help avoid blur. You could also use vibration reduction, vibration compensation or image stabilization (depending on your lens manufacturer) to help minimize images that are not sharp.

### EXPOSURE

Simply put, it's impossible to get an accurate meter reading around the rink, as the ice will throw your meter off. So if you are shooting manually, zoom in tight to a player to fill the frame and adjust by what you see when you review it on the camera's screen. Look closely at the skin tones.

If you are shooting in automatic mode, you should try to set your exposure compensation to +1 f/stop to make up for the ice fooling the camera's light meter. Otherwise, the ice will look muddy and all the colors will appear muted.

Also, 'automatic' or 'program' mode probably won't leave you with desirable results. Instead, try shutter priority where you set the shutter speed and the f/stop will follow along. If everything is too dark, then you will need to crank up the ISO until the images are well exposed.

Oh, and lose the flash on the camera. It's a bad look and with most flashes, it won't reach the players in action. Also, it tends to be distracting for both players and fans.

### COLOR BALANCE

For most situations, AWB, as in 'auto white balance' will work fine. Some cameras will allow you to set a custom white balance and you can try balancing off a patch of white ice.

Keep in mind that you will need the correct exposure as well, as a bit too much density will alter the color balance.

Some photographers swear by color balancing devices, such as 'Expodisc' or 'Vello disc,' to give you clean images. But again, these are only of value if all the light in the arena is color equivalent.

Some smaller arenas have bulbs that 'pulse' and change color as they cycle many times each second. In other rinks, I have run into such a varied mix of light that AWB is the only option.

In fact you can sometimes look at the lighting fixtures and see that the color from bulb to bulb is different. I would guess that the rink directors bought whatever bulbs were on sale at the time to fill in. So if you do a burst of 8-10 frames per second, you will have very varied results.

In short, I guess, this is one of the reasons Adobe created Photoshop, but fixing these color shifts can be time consuming. Programs such as ACDSee feature the ability to batch correct color and exposure.

### WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

Don't forget everything that happens off the ice as these can be the best images. Players dragging their bags into the rink, kids hanging in the locker room, fans cheering, and super tight images of players faces as they sit on the bench.

And when you're up to it, there is always the possibility of remote cameras...in the rafters, in the net, on the goal light stanchion, and many other places to get varied vantage points. The remote cameras are always fun as you never know what you have until you look through the digital card.

### TIPS

- Have patience.
- Stay in focus, brace yourself, hold the camera steady and wait.
- Shoot from all angles: High and low, 360 degrees around.
- Keep the horizon line (the boards) straight in your frame.
- Get in tight to crop IN the camera - not with software afterwards.
- Arrive early and stay late. Most of your best images will be shot then.
- Don't crop players at their joints like ankles or knees. Shoot full length or waist up.
- Experiment with slower shutter speeds to introduce blur and motion to your images.
- Look for jubilation, dejection, fans, coaches and refs.
- Having the puck in the frame is great, but having the player's eyes is more important.
- Shoot with both eyes open. One to focus, and one for safety. ★

*Bruce Bennett is the dean of hockey photographers. In April 2014 he shot his 5,000th hockey game.*

