

From Athlete to Hero: Creating Cinematic Sports Portraits

With Kirk Nelson

Camera Settings for Each Shot



50 mm
f/6.3
1/200
ISO 40



46mm
f/6.3
1/200
ISO 40



48mm
5/10
1/200
ISO 40

Equipment Used in This Class

One of the questions I get most often is what equipment I use to create my sports portraits. While this class is focused on technique rather than gear, here's a breakdown of the equipment used during the demonstration. Remember, the concepts taught in this class are far more important than the specific brands or models. Similar equipment from other manufacturers can produce excellent results.

Background Lighting

The background was lit using two Flashpoint XPLOR 300 Pro strobes, each paired with a Westcott 2'x3' Rapid Box Switch softbox and Westcott Pro Light Mods.

This is what provides that “Stadium Lights” look behind the athlete. The light mods can be a little challenging to mount properly and often require bits of gaffers tape to close in seams and gaps where the light tends to leak through. .

- Westcott Pro Light Mods (2'x3')
<https://www.fjwestcott.com/products/westcott-pro-light-mods-2x3-rapid-box-switch>
- Westcott Rapid Box Switch 2'x3' Softbox
<https://www.fjwestcott.com/products/rapid-box-switch-2x3>
- Flashpoint XPLOR 300 Pro TTL Monolight
<https://www.flashpointlighting.com/product/flashpoint-xplor-300-pro-ttl-r2-battery-powered-monolight/>

Rim Lighting

To create separation between the athlete and the background, I used two strip softboxes paired with Godox V860II speedlights.

Strip boxes produce a narrow, controlled highlight along the edges of the subject, helping define muscle tone, uniforms, and helmet reflections without overpowering the main light. I do use the included grids on the softboxes to help minimize light spill. I will give a disclaimer here that the V860 speedlight is a low cost solution I sometimes find it to be underpowered in larger setups.

- Glow EZ Lock 12"x56" Strip Softbox
<https://www.adorama.com/glow-ez-lock-12-x-56-inch-quick-strip-softbox-bowens/p/glsbez1256>
- Godox V860II Speedlight
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01FB1Y3KA>

Key Light

The primary light source was a Flashpoint XPLOR 400 Pro fitted with the Westcott Manny Ortiz 36" Beauty Dish Switch.

This is the light that establishes the overall look of the portrait. The beauty dish creates crisp, directional light with enough softness to flatter the athlete while still emphasizing texture, muscle definition, and dramatic contrast. It's my go-to modifier for cinematic sports portraits because it delivers punch without looking overly harsh. It's also large enough that with the right placement and feathering, I find that I usually don't need a fill light

- Flashpoint XPLOR 400 Pro TTL Monolight
<https://www.adorama.com/flashpoint-xplor-400-pro-ii-ttl-outdoor-flash-godox-ad400pro-ii/p/fplfx400piit>
- Westcott Manny Ortiz 36" Beauty Dish Switch
<https://www.fjwestcott.com/products/beauty-dish-switch-by-manny-ortiz-36>

Atmosphere

To add depth and make the light more visible, I used a professional aerosol haze.

Unlike smoke machines, aerosol haze is quick to deploy, doesn't require electricity, and works well for small studio environments. A little goes a long way, so use it sparingly to enhance the mood without obscuring your subject.

- AGPTEK Haze Spray
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01B1V9ELM>

Lightroom Classic Presets

These presets are created from the settings I used in Lightroom during the class. They are available as part of the class files, or you can download them off my site here:

<https://checkout.mailerlite.com/checkout/31988>

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www.thepixelpro.com

www.sportraitpro.com