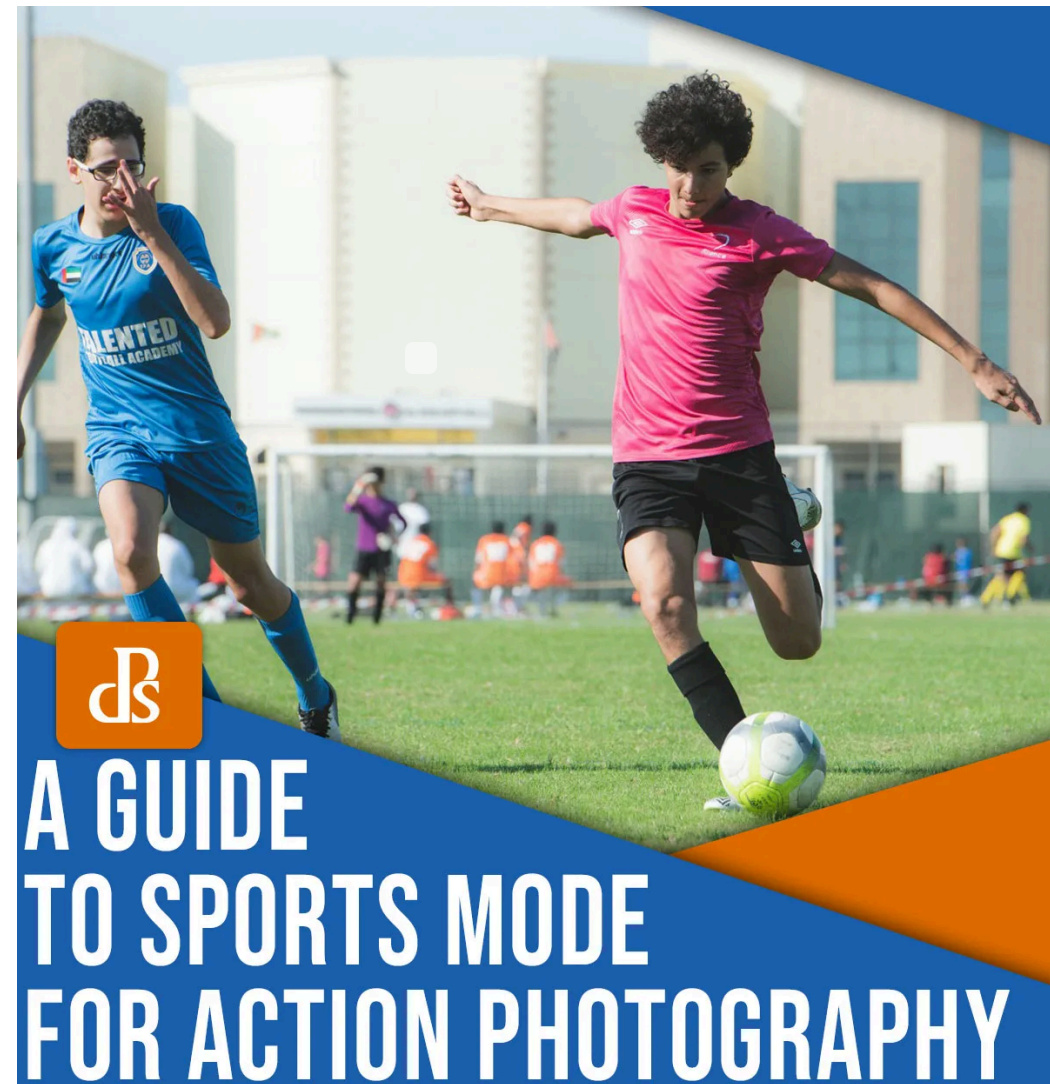


How to Use Sports Mode: A Quick Guide

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Most beginner-friendly cameras – whether DSLRs, interchangeable-lens mirrorless models, or point-and-shoot cameras – include a variety of **Scene modes**, such as Sports mode, as well as Portrait mode, Landscape mode, Close-up mode, etc.

These Scene modes are designed to help you take better photos *without* delving into more complex settings. And while Sports mode isn't ideal for dedicated photographers looking to **produce high-level sports photos**, if you're a newbie and you're fed up by the inconsistency of your camera's **Auto mode**, Sports mode can definitely help.

In this article, I'll walk you through the ins and outs of Sports mode. I'll explain what it is, and I'll also share my best advice for how to use it effectively. By the time you're done reading, you'll be able to work with your camera's Sports mode to boost your success rate when photographing sports (as well as action scenes more generally!).

What is Sports mode?



Look carefully, and you'll see the icon in the shape of a runner on the mode dial – that's Sports mode!

Sports mode is one of several camera Scene modes that preconfigures various exposure and focus settings for a specific situation. While the details vary across camera manufacturers and models, you can expect Sports mode to optimize your camera's settings for fast-action scenes, such as a football player sprinting toward the end zone, a basketball star slam-dunking the ball, or a biker zipping down a street.

You can generally find your camera's Sports mode option on the main mode dial (i.e., the dial on the top of your camera, which should include other Scene modes as well as a conventional Auto mode). It's usually indicated with a running person icon, like this:



In recent years, however, camera manufacturers have become less consistent in how they display Scene modes. If you can't see the Sports mode icon on your camera's main dial, or if your camera lacks a main dial completely, either consult your camera's manual or spend some time searching through your camera's internal menu options. (One quick tip: You can sometimes find Sports mode hidden behind a more

general Scene mode option, indicated as “SCN” on a mode dial.)

How does Sports mode work?



If you're simply interested in **photographing action** and you *don't* want to understand the settings behind Sports mode, that's completely okay; just skip to the next section.

For those who do wish to get a closer look at what Sports mode is doing behind the scenes, here are the typical adjustments you can expect:

- Increase the **ISO** to a higher setting

- Reduce the f-stop (i.e., widen the **aperture**) for a shallower **depth of field**

- Increase the **shutter speed** to help stop fast action

- Set the **drive mode** to “continuous” and the continuous shooting speed to its highest setting

- Adjust the **autofocus modes** to continuous and tracking options

Typically, Sports mode sets the ISO to 400 or above as this boosts the exposure so that a fast shutter speed can be used, but depending on lighting conditions and lens selection, the ISO can be lower. Reducing the f-stop will help isolate the action in the scene because a shallow depth of field will blur the background. (Most of the time the subject is a single person, a car, a horse against a backdrop, etc., and it's best if that background is blurred so the viewer can focus on the action.)

Boosting the shutter speed is all about increasing the chances of stopping the main action. The shutter speed set by Sports mode depends on the amount of available light and lens in use, but most of the time, it's 1/200s or greater.

The continuous shooting mode ensures that, as you hold down the shutter button, your camera will capture multiple photos in quick succession; as you can likely imagine, this gives you a higher chance of nailing the perfect shot at just the right moment. And your camera's fastest continuous shooting speed (often 10 FPS or more) will boost your chances even further.

Finally, Sports mode will adjust your camera's autofocus modes to action-focused, predictive settings. Autofocus is a complex topic, but with Sports mode active, you can expect your camera's AF to adapt to new scenarios, move at high speeds, and even track your subject around the frame.

In other words, Sports mode adjusts all of these variables together in order to take the guesswork out of shooting sports and other action scenes. Thanks to Sports mode, beginner photographers can focus on capturing the

movement and excitement rather than fiddling endlessly with camera settings.

How to use Sports mode



Now that you know how the settings function, let me explain how I recommend you use Sports mode for the best action photos.

First, Sports mode works best with a long lens – that is, a lens with a focal length of 50mm and above. This is because the tighter framing combined with the decreased depth of field will render a clearer contrast between your main subject and background and do a better job of emphasizing the action.

Second, use the fastest lens you own. (Here, I'm referring to the lens with the widest maximum aperture.) Why is this important? Well, the faster the lens, the more Sports mode can widen the aperture, and the faster the shutter speed it'll be able to use (as Sports mode typically forces your camera to use the lowest possible f-stop). Plus, a wider aperture will give your photos better separation between the subject and the background.



Third, you don't need to use a tripod with Sports mode. While a monopod can definitely help if you're using a large, heavy lens, the increased shutter speed and ISO will make hand-holding the camera much easier.

Next, do your best to keep the action near the middle of the frame. Many cameras have the majority of their focus points in the center, so by placing your main subject in that area, you increase your chances of capturing an in-focus shot. That said, newer mirrorless cameras offer absurdly impressive AF capabilities, so this advice won't always apply. Consider testing your camera by photographing fast-moving subjects

and see how well its autofocus performs, then adjust your approach accordingly.

Last, if you *do* decide to place the action toward the middle of the frame, consider shooting slightly wider than necessary and then cropping during post-processing. While it's easier to focus on the action in the middle of the frame, it's generally a bad idea to center your compositions; you'll end up with photos that feel static and stifled. Instead, crop so that there's some **extra space in front of the action**, like this:



The extra space in front of the subject will add dynamism and give the eyes somewhere to go!