



Spring Training 2009

By Coach Gary W. Stanley

Baseball season is just around the corner and the boys of summer are somewhere warmer than where we are, and are working hard to get in shape before the start of this new season. They call it "*Spring Training.*"

Now whether you are a baseball fan or not, you may be surprised to learn just how much photography and baseball have in common. Okay Gary, you've come up with some crazy notions before, but baseball? Talk about comparing apples and oranges here, how about apples and submarines. You're right. On the surface they have nothing in common, but just bear with me for a minute.

While the actual game of baseball and the capturing of an image in photography are very different, the steps taken to get there are very much the same. Consider this: like baseball, we do most of our photography when the weather is warm. That's from about April until sometime in late October. After that we all disappear presumably to hibernate with the bears.

Yes, I know there are quite a few of us who photograph through the winter. Many of us, however, do a lot less photography when the winter winds begin to howl and the temperatures start to drop. Consider this: baseball players are

professionals, right? What do they do after their long winters nap? They hop on a plane and head south for - you guessed it - "*Spring Training*." Why do you suppose they need spring training? Because they're a little rusty, and they need to get back in to shape *Before* the regular season starts.

This is beginning to make sense now, isn't it? Your camera has been in the closet for a while. You're not sure if the batteries are any good. Did I wipe down my tripod after that rainstorm last fall? Remember that one leg was loose, did I tighten it? Oh, you know, I meant to get that lens serviced before spring. Boy, I've got a new digital camera that I got with my tax refund and haven't really put it through its paces yet. Oh yeah; I probably should read the manual too...well at least glance at it!

Well, that's what "*Spring Training*" is for! It's almost March, and it won't be long before spring is here, the flowers start blooming, the trees get their leaves back, and the wildlife start having their young. How many more reasons do we need to get back into shape?

Here are some *Training Tips* for doing just that, starting with your photographic equipment and ending up with your own mental and physical photographic conditioning.

The Tripod: Check and make sure all the nuts and bolts are snug, that the legs and leg locks all work properly. Wipe them clean with a clean slightly damp cloth to remove any dirt. Now check the head to make sure it is working properly. Wipe it off in the same manner. Avoid using any lubricants, as most manufacturers don't recommend it. I have done so on a few of my less expensive heads and then wiped them down very thoroughly, but that was in desperation. You don't want the head slipping when you have an expensive camera mounted on it.

Your Camera Bag: Get rid of any junk that doesn't belong in there, like candy wrappers, used lens cleaning tissue, old batteries that you no longer remember if they are good or not. Also, go through the bag and do a quick inventory of your lenses, filters, batteries and so forth to make sure you haven't misplaced anything. If your batteries need replacing or recharging, do that before you head out to shoot (in other words, while you're thinking of it).

Your Lenses: Wipe all the outside surfaces (other than the optics) with a clean dry lint-free cloth. Be sure to extend the lens barrel and the focusing ring so as to get to all of the exposed parts. Use 'canned air' or a 'Hurricane' blower to blow off all dust on the surface of both front and rear lens elements. Make sure if you are using the canned air that the can is held upright at all times when using it. Don't shake it either. You're trying to avoid any of the propellants from getting on the surface of your lenses, and keeping an easy cleaning job from becoming a nightmare. Don't use any cleaning liquids unless you have something more on the lens such as fingerprints or smudges. Then only apply a small drop to a lens

tissue, and carefully clean the surface. There are also special cleaning cloths made just for lens cleaning and do it without any liquids.

Your Camera: Hopefully, you use your camera often enough that the need to remove your batteries to prevent damage, is not an issue. On older film cameras batteries have been known to leak, allowing acid (corrosion) to ruin your electrical system. So if you're not going to use the camera for a while, take the batteries out. I haven't heard of any issues with today's digital cameras other than an occasional battery recall. May it's because we up-grade to a new camera every five months or so! ☺

Use your hand blower to clean any dust from around the body of your camera. Then use a soft cloth to wipe down the body. Leave a lens on when you do this so you don't accidentally damage a mirror or sensor on the inside of the camera.

Often you'll look through the viewfinder and see a speck of dirt or dust and panic thinking that this will show up on your pictures. Usually this dust is on the mirror so it will not show up when you take a picture as the mirror will rise out of the way during exposure. If your mirror is dirty remember; the mirror is prone to scratching and is very delicate, so if you're not familiar with doing this yourself, you may want to let a service tech clean it for you.

The same thing is also a good idea if you are shooting digital and have dirt on your sensor. Yes I used to clean my own, and if you feel comfortable doing so, fine, but please, be very careful, one slip can be quite expensive. Many of the new digital cameras have the ability to self clean the sensor, and quite frankly, I don't hear as many folks complaining about it like we did when digital SLRs first came on the scene. I'd rather clean a speck or two off the image with the clone stamp than risk damaging a sensor by cleaning it myself!

Also be aware that the contacts or pins around the outside of the lens mount of an automatic or auto-focus camera can also be affected by corrosion. Remember, they transfer information from the lens to the camera. I carefully clean these contacts using ammonia on a Q-tip. Keep in mind, that if you have electronic problems with your camera, and it is under warranty, think it through before performing any service that might void your warranty.

How About You?: Most of the time, my equipment is the least of my problems, it's the creative rustiness, lack of physical exercise and my need to get out of the office that makes this part of my "Spring Training" program most important. Sometimes a trip south to Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge in Florida to do a little bird photography will take care of that. It allows me to get out and do some healthy walking, get used to carrying my camera equipment again, and I find this kind of "Spring Training" to be just the ticket to get us back in shape.

Even if you don't have the time or money to take a trip, why not start a daily routine of walking, or go to a local park, zoo, or your nearest stretch of wilderness (city or country), to get some good exercise and practice time photographing before the season gets in to full swing.

Spring Training Exercises: As you begin your warm-up, exercise your brain with these thoughts: Have I reviewed my camera settings so that everything is ready to go? Do I need to review my camera manual? Were there any issues last year that I want to improve on this year? For example: How am I doing with exposures? Am I selecting the right focal length lens for the shot I want? Do I need to improve my creativity by trying different compositions? Do I always focus accurately or get the best depth of field for my shots? Have I tried any new creative techniques that might make my shots more interesting? Remember last year I wanted to pay more attention to lighting! Last year I also had a lot of distracting elements in my compositions so I need to pay attention to that.

This is the kind of mental exercise that I do in a situation like this. I find that it keeps me creatively and mentally sharp no matter the subject. Also don't be afraid to spend some time reviewing some of your favorite books or magazine articles. Have you missed going to your camera club because of the weather? This can also help you to stimulate you photographically.

At some point you'll thank me (the coach) for making you show up on time, getting you in shape, and helping you to be mentally prepared. In the end when you hit that first photographic homerun you'll say: "I owe it all to my *coach* and '*Spring Training*.'"