

Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

I set up this tutorial to help out the guys who customize McFarlane SportsPicks (SPs). You guys do a great job customizing the figures, but then you fail to showcase them with good quality photos. Your work is so good it deserves better!

This tutorial provides some basic information about photography in general and studio photography specifically. It is intended to give you enough ammunition to create good quality photos of your custom SPs. I'm not going to turn you into a studio photographer, but I will improve your pictures with this information.

Specifically, I'm going to discuss:

Equipment - what items you'll need to shoot pictures of your SPs

Shutter speed, aperture, depth of field and how it all fits together - There is a difference between stumbling into a good photo and controlling the shoot so you know what you're going to get. A big part of this difference is understanding shutter speed, aperture (and depth of field) and recognizing how to use these functions to deliver exactly what you want in the picture. This will help all of your photography, not just your SP portraits.

Shooting your SPs - I'll talk about a basic light setup, some creative ideas for lighting and positioning and some things to watch out for.

As time permits, I'm going to add to this tutorial to tell you how to modify your photos on the computer once you've taken the pictures, to make your final shots look even better!

For now, however, you can start on your journey to improved pictures by learning about what equipment is required.

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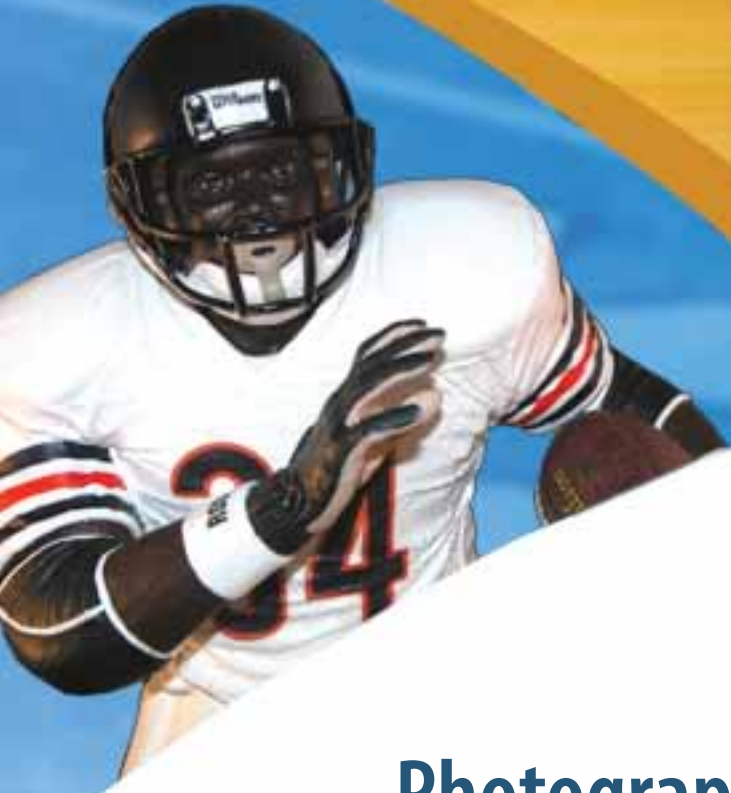


Custom Photography Tutorial

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Index

Equipment	pg. 3
Shutter speed, aperture, depth of field.....	pg. 8
Shooting your SP Portraits.....	pg. 27



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Equipment:

You can spend a fortune on a studio setup with strobes and light meters and all. Unless you plan to start selling photos for a living, however, that would be totally unnecessary. You can put together everything you need to shoot very nice studio-styled photos without spending a lot.

Here is the equipment you'll need.

Camera - This is the single most expensive part of your studio setup. You can't get by with a point-and-shoot camera for this type of photography. You need a camera that allows you to shoot in aperture-priority (AV) mode. Don't worry if you don't know what that means - I'll explain it later. You can find film cameras that give you this capability for \$300. You will save a lot of time and money, ultimately, if you get a digital camera instead. You can get a Canon Rebel 300D for \$500 - \$600 on ebay. You may also be able to find a Canon D60 or Canon D30 for a few hundred dollars on ebay. It costs more up front but you'll recoup your investment in no time with what you save in film processing and printing costs. You're going to do a lot experimenting with lights and camera angles when you start doing studio shots; put the money into a camera now and save money and frustration in the long run. If you absolutely can't afford a camera like this, get yourself a good quality (Canon or Nikon, preferably) digital camera that has a tripod mount and comes with (or lets you purchase separately) a remote shutter release. Those are absolutely critical features.

Tripod - You don't need anything fancy here. You just need a basic tripod to stand the camera on while you shoot. You can find these cheap at garage sales, flea markets, pawn shops, or thrift stores. You must have a tripod for this type of photography. You will be shooting very long exposures - maybe as long as a second or more. If you don't have a tripod, you will get nothing but blurry shots.

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Equipment:

Remote shutter release - this is a wired trigger for the camera. You use this to take pictures without having to touch the camera. Just the act of pushing that button causes a tremor on the camera, which can show up in a long exposure photo. The remote shutter release will allow you take pictures without shaking the camera. You'll find this at a camera store or online at ebay or at a camera e-tailer. Make sure you get the right shutter release for your specific camera.

Two light stands - these are mini tripods to hold the floodlights. You'll find these at camera supply stores.
Two reflectors (shells) - These are big shell-shaped bowls. The lightbulb fits inside the reflector. The reflector directs all the light from the bulb forward. It also increases the size of your lightsource so the shadows it creates are softer and less distinct. Camera supply store.

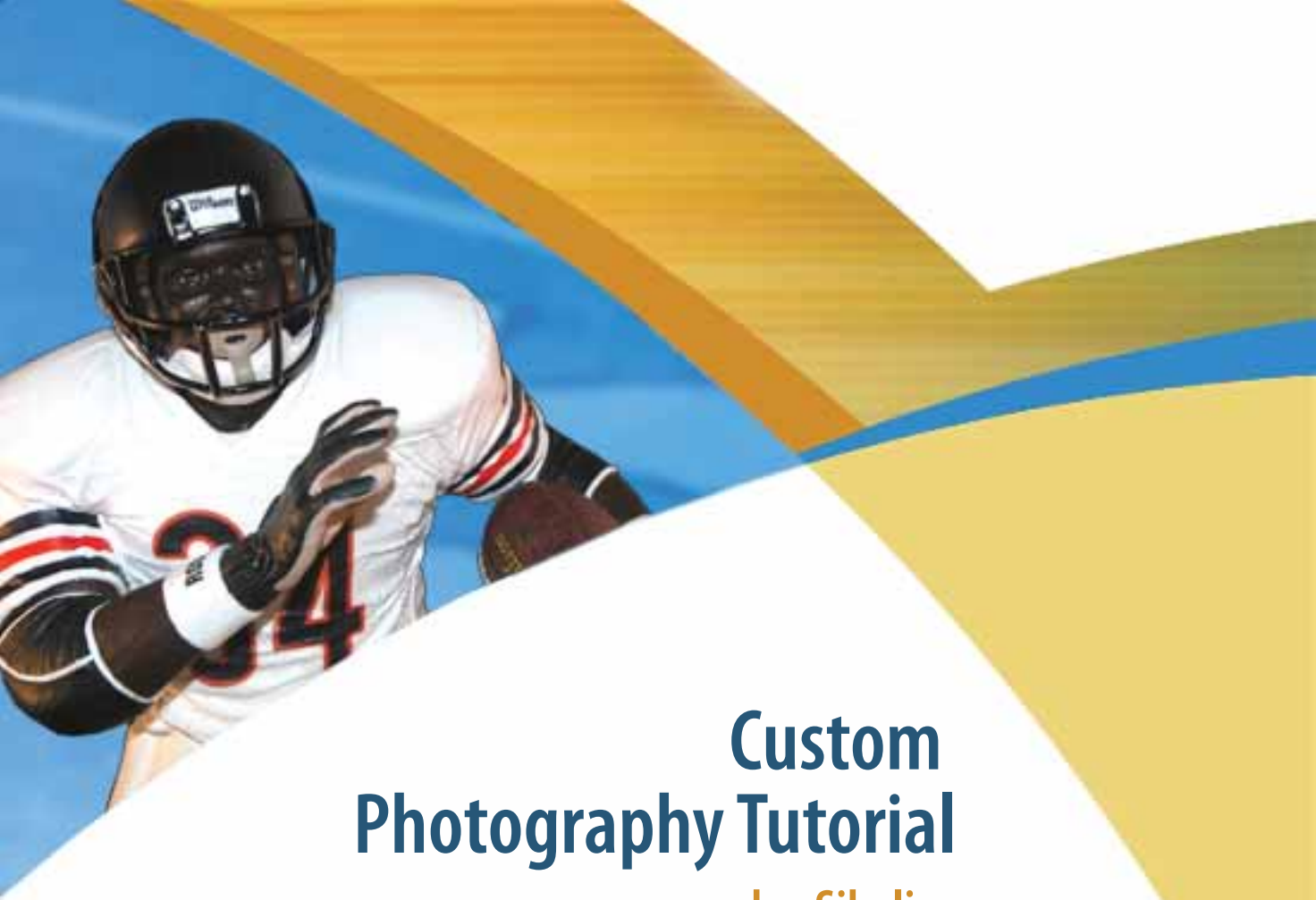
Two light stands - these are mini tripods to hold the floodlights. You'll find these at camera supply stores.
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Four lightbulbs - (125 - 250 watt, daylight or tungsten balance) You have seen photographers shoot with studio lights that flash (called strobes). These are expensive and challenging to use, but people are more comfortable posing under the strobes than under hot, constant floodlights. Fortunately, your SPs won't care about the heat. You can use the simple, inexpensive floodlights for your studio setup. Different types of lightbulbs have different "colors" to them. Your eyes don't see this but your camera will. You can choose daylight balanced bulbs or tungsten balanced bulbs. The key is to not mix them - stick with one or the other. Get these at a camera supply store. Buy four of them so you have backups when bulbs burn out.

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Equipment:

Two diffusers - a diffuser is just a plastic shield that fits over the open end of your reflector. You've seen photographers setting up these big nylon "boxes" that have the lights inside, or umbrellas. These are also diffusers, and any will work. (I like the plastic shield type more than the umbrellas, but that's just me being cheap and personal preference.) The light shines through (or in the case of umbrellas, bounces off) the diffuser, which effectively increases the size of the light source and softens the shadows on your subject.

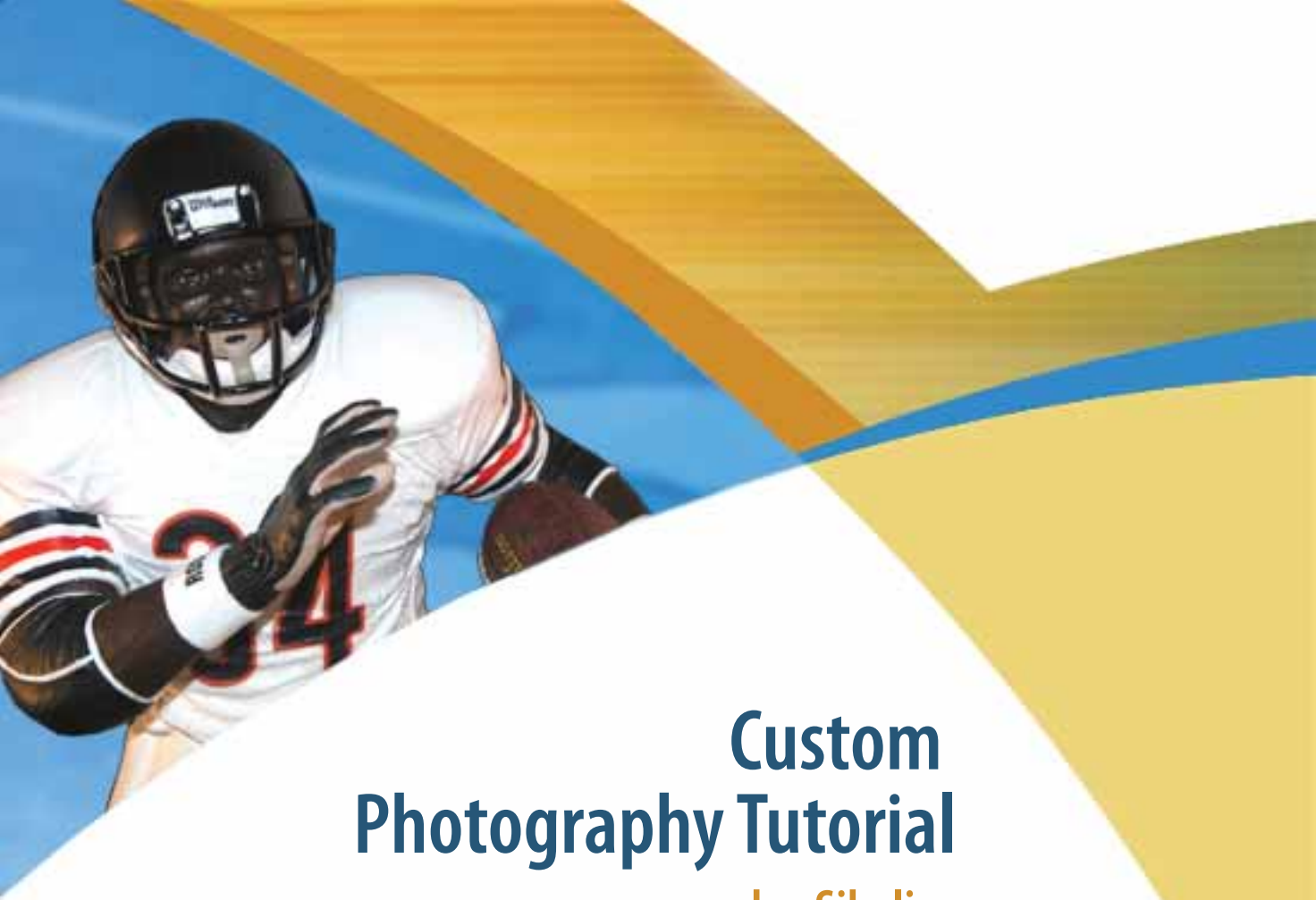
Backdrop or Solid color bedsheet - You're shooting pictures of a fairly small subject, so you can get by with bedsheets rather than buying formal backdrops. Some people create their own backgrounds to look like stadium settings. (Understand that you may have to illuminate a background of this type with one or two additional lights to make it look realistic.) The backdrop needs to be large enough so that it covers the entire background, even when you separate the subject and background by several feet. The tendency is to put the subject right up against the background, but you don't want to do this for two reasons. First, you will get shadows on your background. Second, you want the background to be out of focus.

Backdrop stand - or wires and eyehooks to hang backdrop from ceiling - Again, you can get creative and figure out a way to suspend the backdrop behind your subjects. You don't have to buy an actual backdrop stand.

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Equipment - eBay Example:

I've seen several kits on ebay that would give you everything you need for the lighting equipment. If you look on Ebay under Cameras & Photo> Lighting & Studio Equipment> Continuous Lighting, you might find something like the following, with a buy it now price of \$265:

THIS IS A 3 LIGHT 1250 WATT SMITH VICTOR MINI BOOM KIT WITH AN EXTRA SET OF TWO 500 WATT AND ONE 250 WATT BULBS. THIS IS AN EXTRA BULB FOR ALL THREE LIGHTS. THESE POWERFUL TUNGSTEN PHOTO-FLOOD BULBS WILL GIVE YOU THE LIGHT YOU NEED. EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO START YOUR STUDIO IS HERE AND COMPLETE.

THIS KIT INCLUDES:

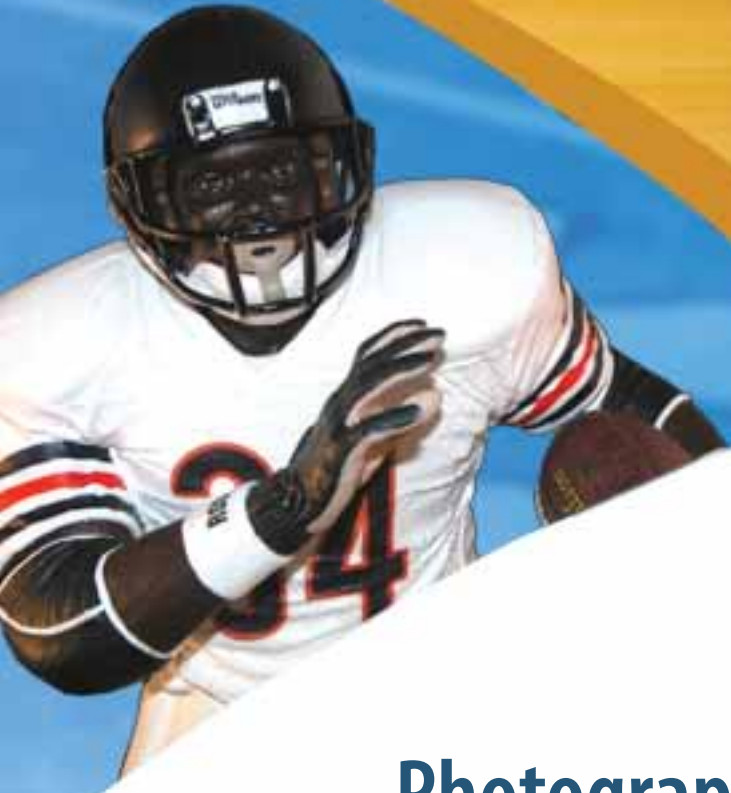
- 2 12 inch REFLECTORS
- 1 5 inch REFLECTOR
- 3 SOCKET & CORDSETS WITH STAND MOUNTS
- 2 33 inch WHITE UMBRELLAS
- 2 UM4 UMBRELLA MOUNTS
- 3 RAVEN RS8 8 FOOT ALUMINUM STANDS
- 1 MB110 MINI BOOM
- 4 ECT 500 WATT PHOTOFLOOD LAMPS
- 2 ECA 250 WATT PHOTOFLOOD LAMP
- 1 LIGHT CART ON WHEELS
- 1 IMAGING WITH LIGHT GUIDE

No, I'm not selling these kits LOL. This is just a good example of a basic, inexpensive lighting system that will work for your purposes.

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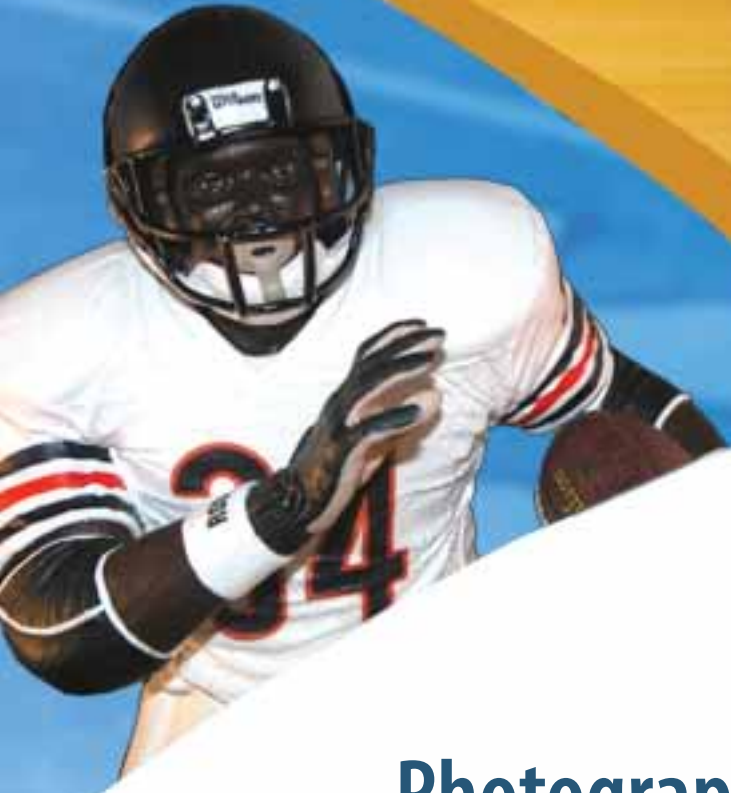
You can assemble a cobbled system for less than this - that's what I did - but a kit like this is pretty convenient. Remember, you can use this lighting setup for more than just your SPs. If you sell stuff on Ebay, it will be very handy to have this equipment on hand. You can even try your hand at some family portraits with this type of setup. Using this setup, for example, I shot the below portrait of my son:



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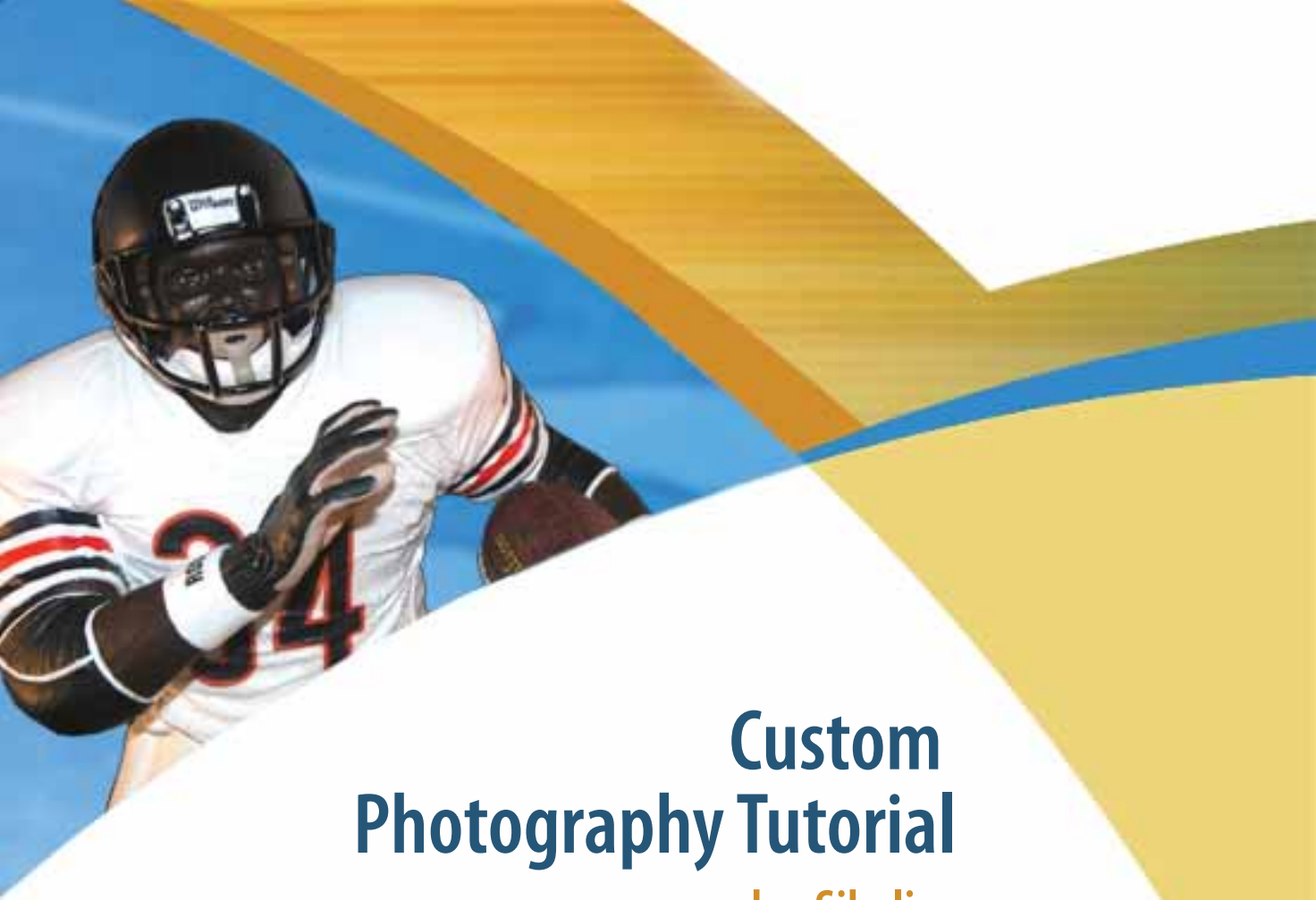
As you go through this tutorial, think about the improvements you'll see in your photos and how they'll sell your SPs more effectively. Good photos make you money. And if you follow the steps in this tutorial, you'll be able to take them yourself very inexpensively. Just remember, it doesn't have to look like a fancy studio - here's the setup I use all the time:



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Shutter speed, aperture, depth of field:

OK, before I get into talking about how to use studio lights and how to use them to get nice photos, I want to make sure you understand a couple fundamental concepts about photography. If you don't understand these concepts, you may end up with decent shots (or you may not) but you won't control what you're doing.

Let's say you wanted to fill a glass of water from a faucet. You can do it one of two ways. You put the glass under the faucet and

1) turn the knob very slightly to barely open the faucet, and a trickle of water comes out. You wait and wait, and finally, your glass is full. Or -

2) you turn the knob all the way and the water gushes out. The glass fills up much more quickly.

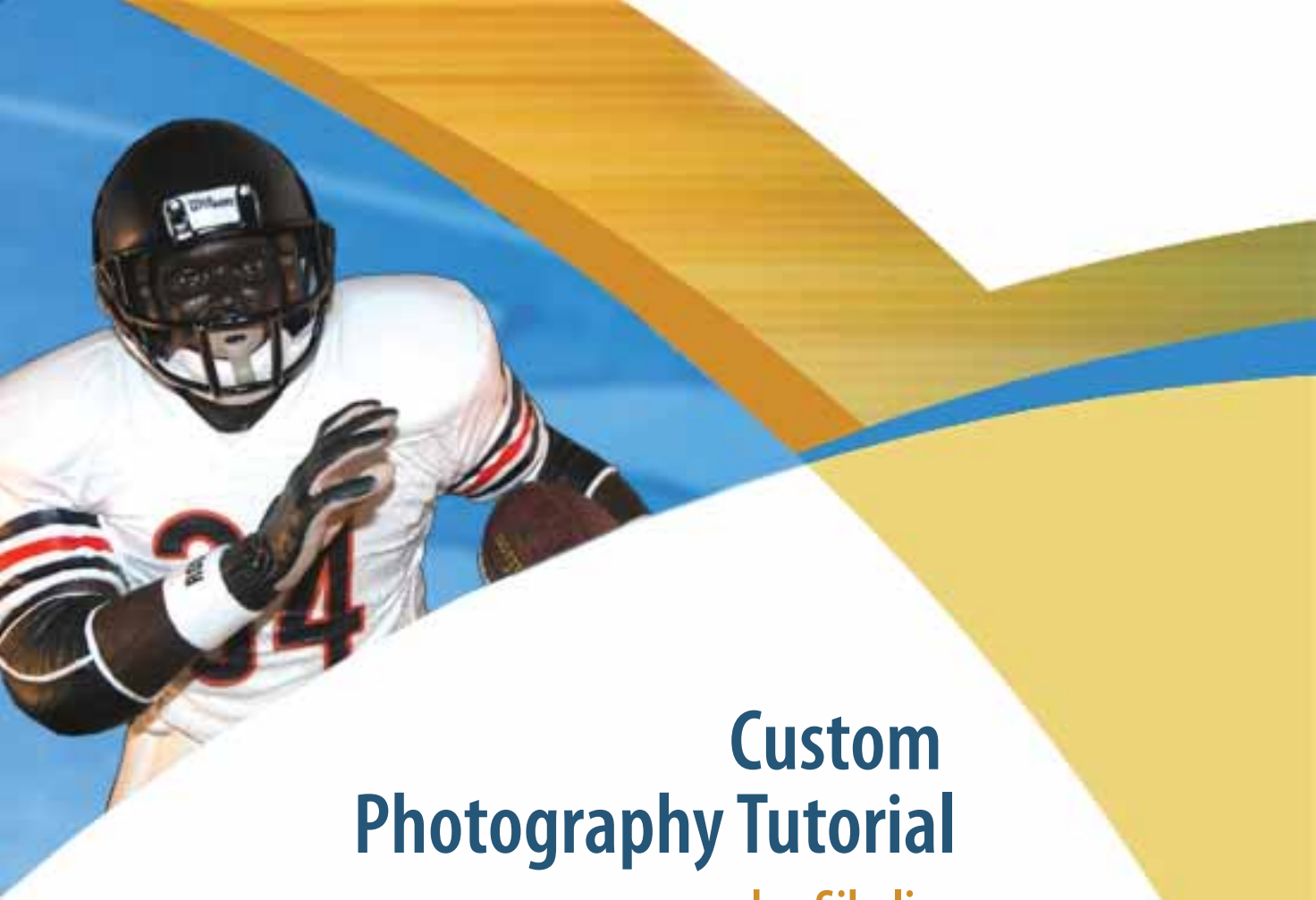
Either way, you put the same amount of water into the glass, right? The difference between the two choices comes from two variables. How much you opened up the faucet and how long you let the water run. A small opening required more running time than the large opening did. Or you could turn that around and say if you wanted to let the water run a long time, you HAD to use a small opening.

Cameras work the same way, except that instead of filling a glass with water, you're "pouring" light onto the film (or the digital sensor, for digicams). Instead of filling a glass, you're allowing enough light to come into the camera to create a properly exposed image. Not too much light, not too little - just enough to give you a good shot. To do that you open your shutter (the faucet in the above analogy) and the time you let the light (the water in the analogy) come flooding in is how long you leave that shutter open.

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Shutter speed, aperture, depth of field:

When you take a picture, you push the shutter release. The shutter opens, allowing the light to pour into the camera. If the shutter opens very slightly, only a small amount of light is allowed in, and you'll have to leave that shutter open longer to allow in the proper amount of light. On the other hand, if you open the shutter wide open, much more light comes in and you don't have to leave it open nearly as long to get the proper amount of light.

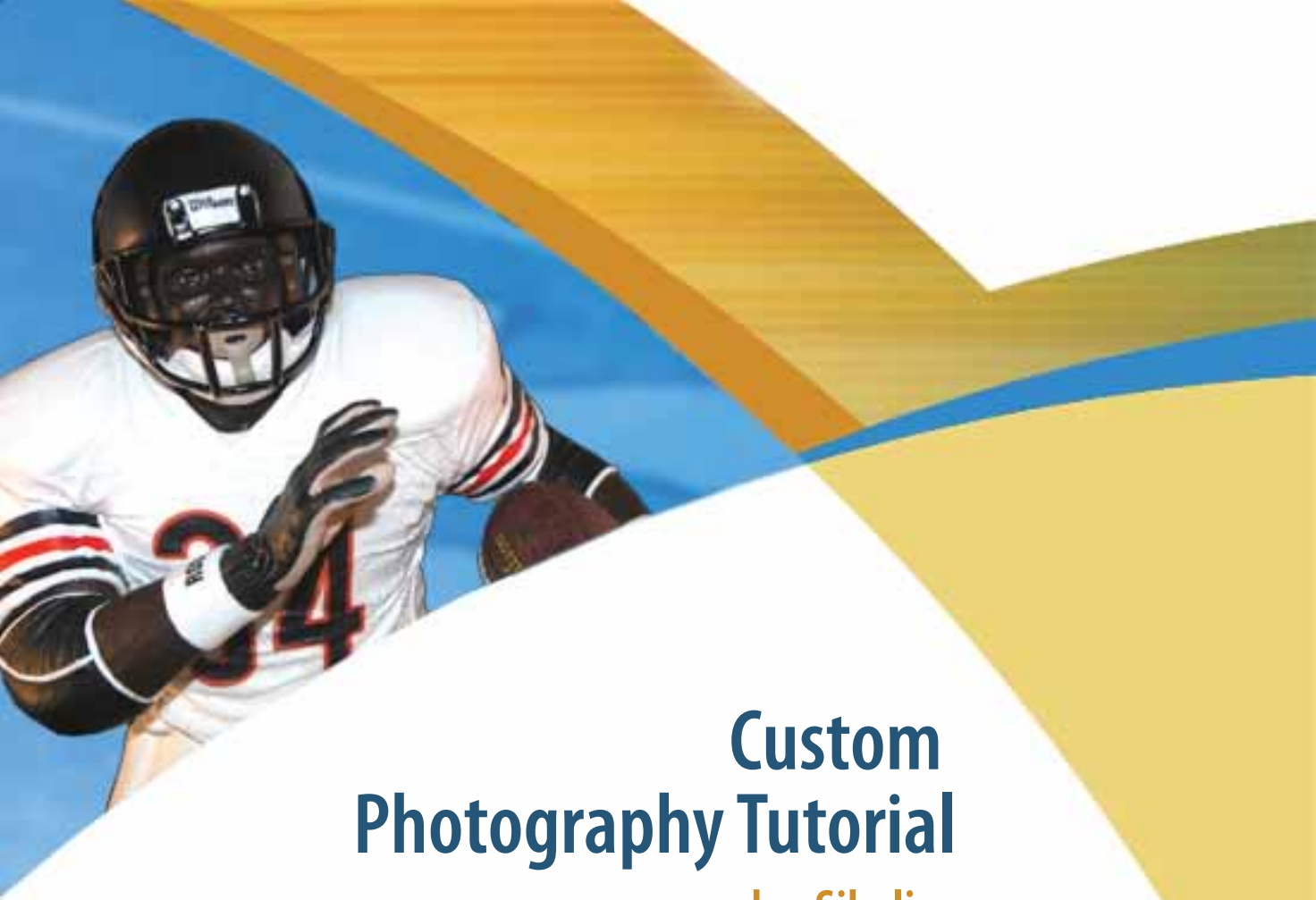
This shutter opening is called the aperture. How long you leave the shutter open is called the shutter speed. With a good camera, you can control the aperture and the shutter speed. As you take photographs, you are continuously striking a balance between aperture and shutter speed to use the advantages and limitations of each while creating properly exposed images.

So why would you care if you're using a small aperture or large, or a fast shutter speed or slow?

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Shutter speed:

Let's start with shutter speed, because that's easier to explain.

While your camera is taking a picture, while that shutter is open, anything being photographed that moves will be blurry. Your eyes don't see it as a blur, but the camera will - like smearing paint across a canvas. You've seen pictures like that before, where someone moved while the picture was being taken and they're all blurry.

Let's say you're taking a picture of a race car going past you at 200 miles per hour. In that situation, do you want a slow shutter speed or fast? Well, that depends. You've seen pictures where everything is in focus but the car is a blur. It's a nice effect - You can just feel the motion of that car in pictures like that. In those pictures, the photographer used a slow shutter speed - for example, maybe he shot the picture at 1/60th of a second. During that 1/60th of a second, the car racing past at 200 mph actually moved about 4.9 feet, while everything else around it was sat still - so the car is a blur and everything else is very sharp.

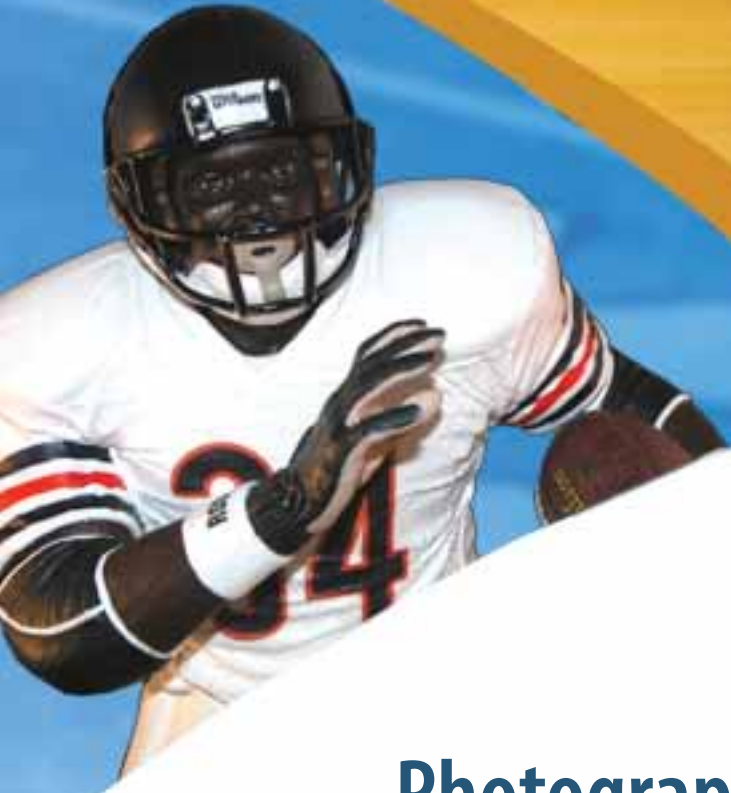
On the other hand, if you wanted that race car to be nice and sharply focused, you'd have to shoot with as quick a shutter speed as possible to "freeze" the action and reduce blur. So if you shot the picture at 1/1000th of a second, the car doesn't have much time at all to move - it actually travels only a couple inches. It's sharp and everything else is too.

Now, looking at those two examples . . . in the first, where the photographer shot at 1/60th second so the race car would be a blur, that means the shutter was open longer - so that means he had to use a smaller aperture to ensure he didn't allow too much light in. To freeze the action he used a fast shutter speed like 1/1000th of a second. That means he'd have to open the aperture wider to allow enough light in.

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Shutter speed:

In either instance, he had to let the same amount of light in to get a properly exposed image. It was just a question of whether he wanted to freeze the action or let the car be blurred. He controlled that decision with the shutter speed, and the shutter speed dictated what aperture he would use.

Here is a picture taken with a fast shutter speed to freeze the action:



You can tell this was taken very fast; I was able to freeze the planes in mid air so you can read the words on the fuselages.

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Shutter speed:

Here is a photo of my nephew, Shane, taken with a slower shutter speed, to show the motion:

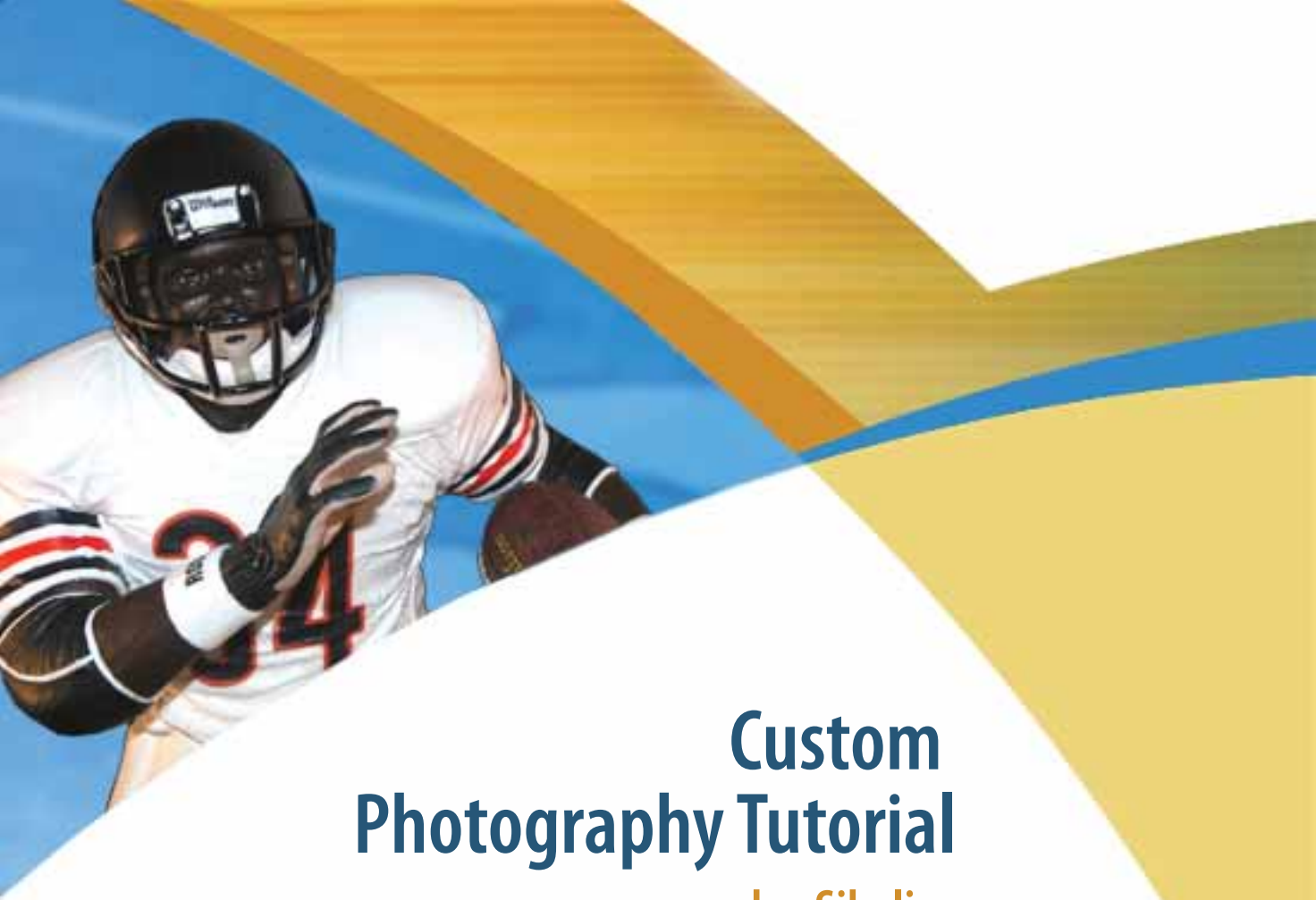


Shane is a good pitcher, but his fastball doesn't move as quickly as those jets in the previous picture. But notice how his arm and the ball are blurred when the jets were not blurred at all? This is because the shutter speed in the baseball picture was slower than the jet picture.

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Shutter speed:

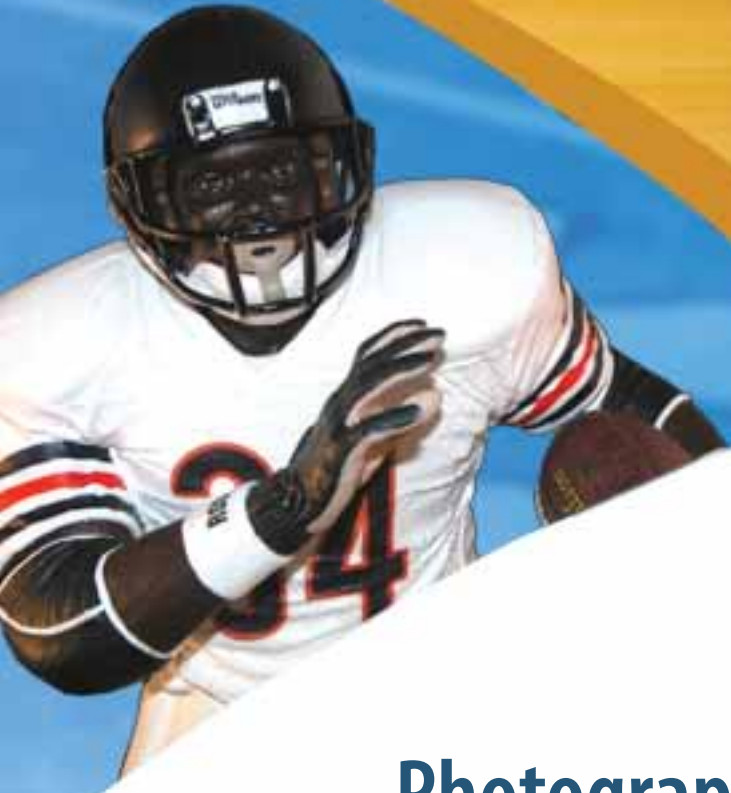
When you are shooting a moving subject, you will probably want to shoot in Shutter Preferred Mode rather than Programmed Mode or Fully Automatic. Shutter Preferred (it will be labeled TV on your camera) means that you pick the shutter speed and the camera adjusts the aperture. So if you wanted to freeze that sports car you would pick a shutter speed of 1/1000th and fire away - if the camera is set on TV it will set the aperture for you. Likewise, if you want the car to be a blur you would set your shutter speed at 1/60th - again, the camera will do the work of calculating what aperture you need. Point-and-shoot cameras normally have different modes - if your camera doesn't allow you to control aperture or shutter speed, you would shoot in Sports mode to approximate what I'm talking about here, to force the camera to shoot with as high a shutter speed as possible to freeze the action.

Now, let's turn this around to something more in keeping with our goal of shooting pictures of SPs. Realistically speaking, do you expect your subjects to move while you're taking their pictures? Probably not. You don't really care what the shutter speed is. You could take the picture at 1/1000th of a second or 10 minutes, and your SP isn't going to move either way. So shutter speed is a nonissue. Aperture, on the other hand, IS an important factor for this type of photography. Continue on with the lesson to see how you use aperture to control your portrait photographs.

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Depth of Field and Aperture:

On the last page we talked about managing your shutter speed to control your photos' look. Now we'll talk about situations - like shooting portraits of your SPs, for example - when you would manage your Aperture.

To understand this, you need to understand a term is called depth of field (DOF). DOF refers to how much or how little the area "into" your photo is in focus.

Huh?

Remember, a picture is only 2-dimensional, but you're still trying to capture 3-dimensional subjects. So even though it's hard to tell in the photo, the varying distances of the subjects to the camera influence how the picture turns out. How much of those varying distances are in focus is the depth of field.

Look at the following picture. I focused on the cat's closest eye when taking this picture. The DOF is so shallow that one eye is in focus but the other isn't. This photo has a very small DOF - anything closer than or farther than the focus point is out of focus.



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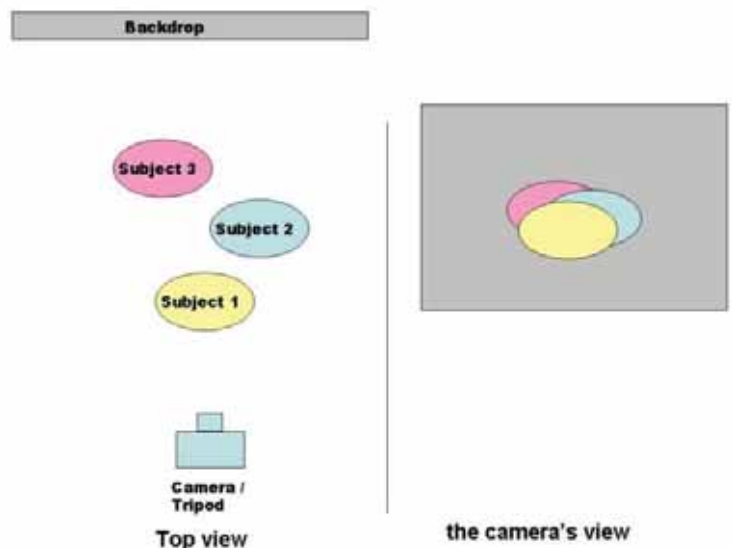
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Depth of Field and Aperture:

OK, let's see how this works. Let's say you had three figures you wanted to group together in one shot. You may set them up like what you see in this graphic:

Looking at the top view (left side), you can see how they're actually set up. What you want is a really cool shot with all three of them in one shot, all close together what is shown in the camera's view on the right.

As you look at this top view, it is clear that subject 1 is actually closer to the camera than subjects 2 or 3, right? The difference might not be much (remember the picture of the cat?) but 1 is closer than 2, 2 is closer than 3, and all three subjects are closer to the camera than the backdrop. That is NOT as apparent when viewing the subjects through the camera. You can't really tell how close the subjects are from the camera's view.



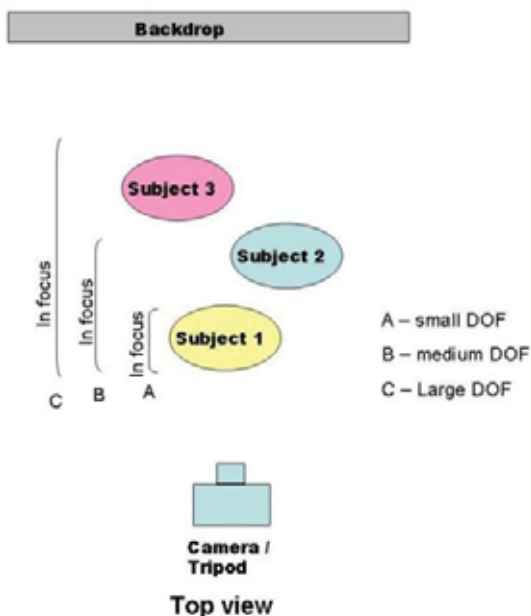


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Depth of Field and Aperture:

DOF refers to how far into the picture is in focus. Meaning - if you use a small DOF, only a very thin slice of the image may be in focus while everything in front of and behind that slice is blurred. For example, with a small DOF, you may only see subject 1 in focus. Subjects 2 and 3 are blurry. Or maybe you focus on subject 2 and 1 and 3 are out of focus. If you increase the DOF, maybe you can get Subjects 1 and 2 in focus - even though 2 is farther away than 1 - and keep 3 blurry. As shown here:



You've got a bigger space into the shot to work with if you increase the DOF. With a large DOF you can have all three subjects in focus and the background blurry, or you can keep going and have everything in focus.

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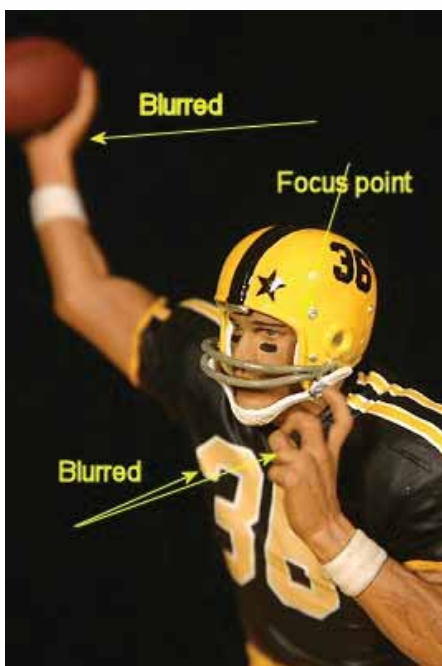


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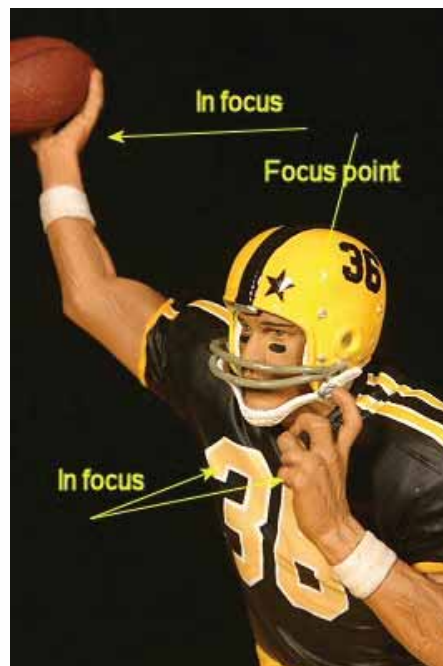
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Depth of Field and Aperture:

Here is an example of the same picture with a shallow and a larger DOF.



Shallow DOF

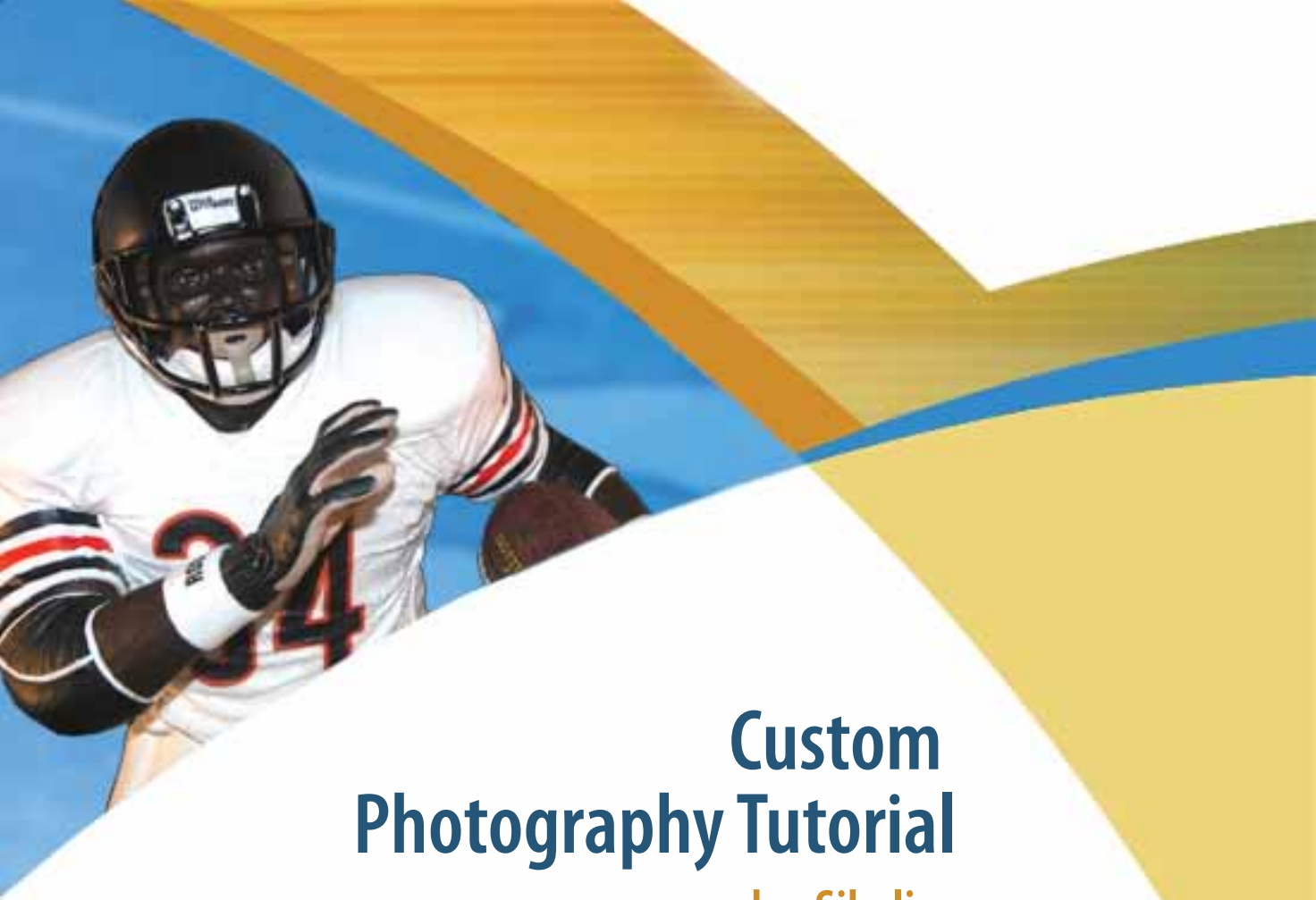


Larger DOF

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Depth of Field and Aperture:

Now that you understand what DOF means, you can see that the photographer can control how far into the picture one can look and see a sharp subject - whether that range of focused space is 1 inch or 10 miles deep. In a minute, I'm going to give you several more examples of DOF so you really can see the difference.

Now you understand DOF we can go back to talking about our shutter speed and aperture.

Remember, when shooting a moving subject, shutter speed will normally control your settings. You use shutter speed to control whether moving subjects are blurry or sharp.

You use aperture to control how large (or small) your DOF is. This is an inverse relationship. If you shoot with a large aperture - you open the faucet wide open to let lots of light come pouring through all at once - you will have a small DOF. If you use a very small aperture, a tiny opening of the shutter, your DOF will increase.

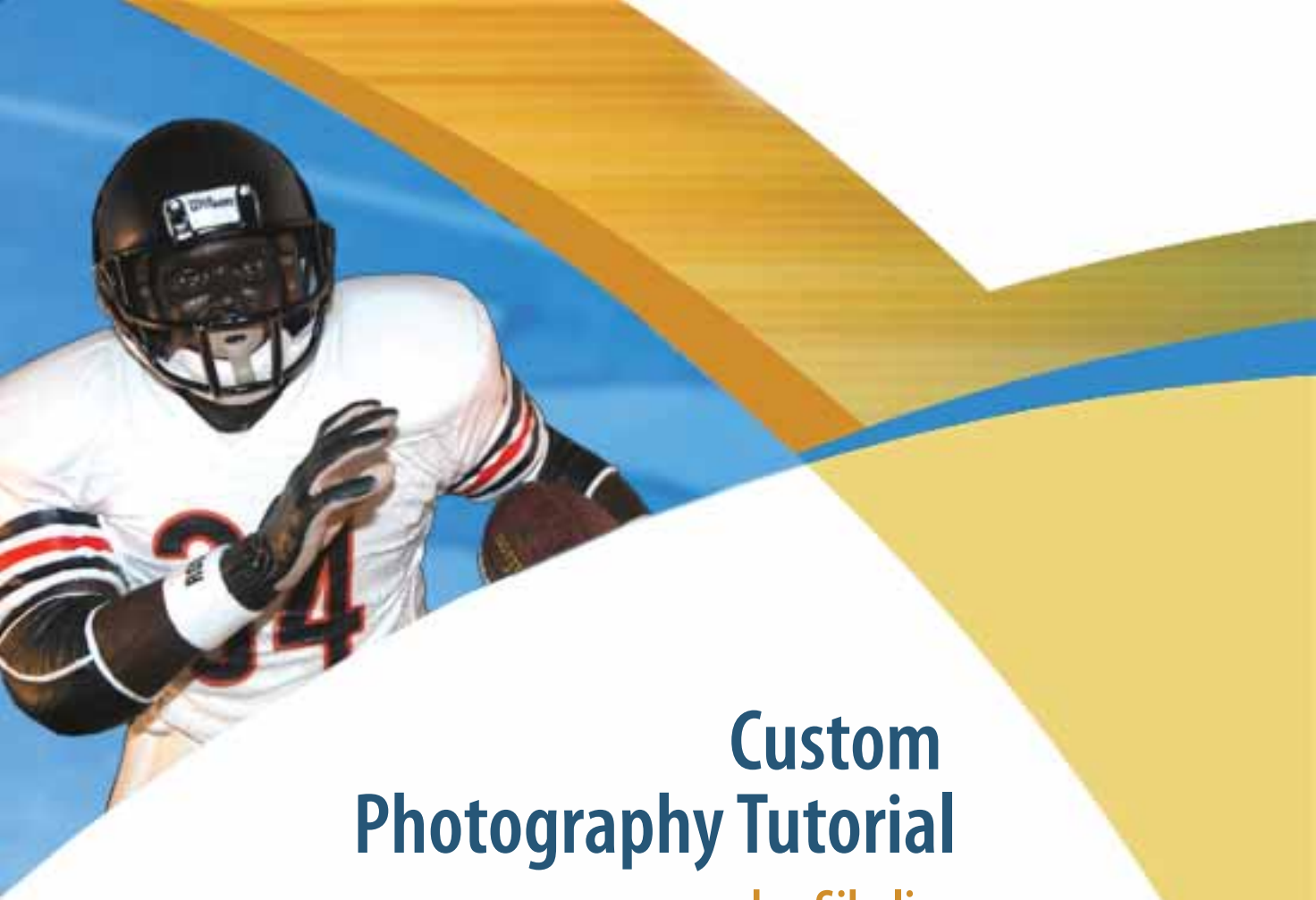
So for pictures of your figures, you want to manage your DOF and you do so by controlling your aperture. The aperture you choose will dictate what shutter speed the camera chooses for the shot.

The settings for your aperture are called F-stops. You may see F-stops referenced with the letter F and a number, like f2.8 or f11. The range of F-stops you have at your disposal is driven by your lens and your camera. A low number like f4 represents a large aperture (shallow DOF). A higher number like f16 represents a smaller aperture (deeper DOF).

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Depth of Field and Aperture:

When DOF is important you will shoot in aperture-preferred mode. (AV on your camera's dial) When you choose AV mode, you set the aperture you want and the camera will automatically calculate and set your shutter speed. Want a small DOF? Just pick f4 or whatever your lowest aperture setting you can. The camera will figure out what shutter speed you need. Want a bigger depth of field? Just run the f-stop numbers up to f8, f11, f16 . . . the higher that number, the smaller the aperture - and the larger your DOF. As you move up to f11 or f16 your shutter speed will get slower and slower, because you're using a smaller aperture so the shutter has to stay open longer. But don't worry - whatever f-stop you use, the camera will calculate what shutter speed you need and set that for you.

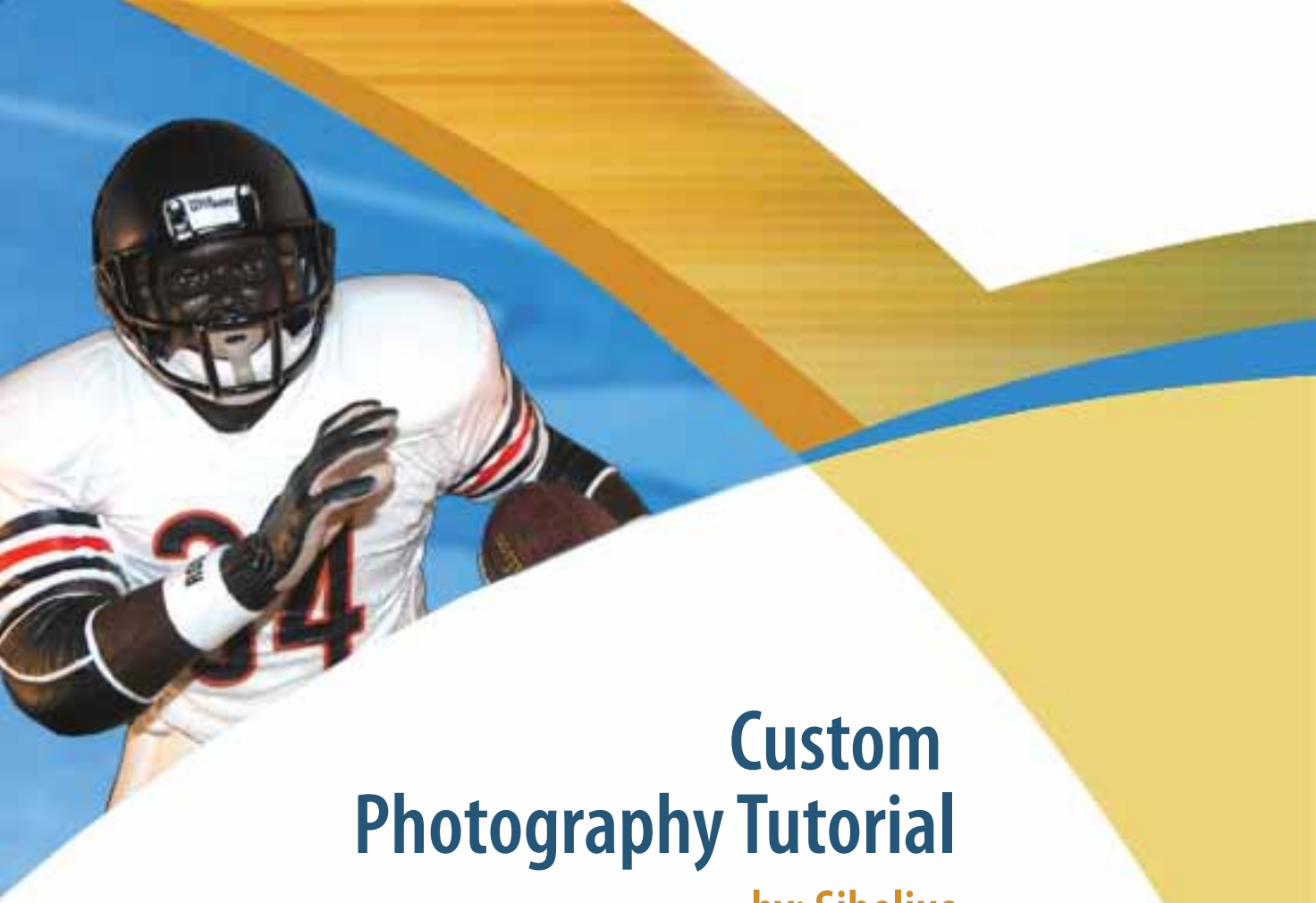
(Note: Another factor affects DOF - how much you're zooming in. If you shoot with a wide angle lens, like a 28mm lens, your DOF will be larger. If you put on a telephoto lens like a 200 mm lens, your DOF will be smaller. I'll show you a good example of this below.)

Here are some more examples to show DOF. I'm going to provide several examples because it's so important for you to understand how DOF works. Look and see what parts of the photos are in focus and what parts are blurry. Get used to paying attention to where you focus. If you have a shallow DOF, things farther away and closer than the focus point will be out of focus - it's easy to forget that. As you review these shots, you be the judge as to which works better for each shot - there isn't a correct answer. It all comes down to what you, the photographer, want to convey. The important thing to remember is, by shooting in aperture priority mode, you have the control.

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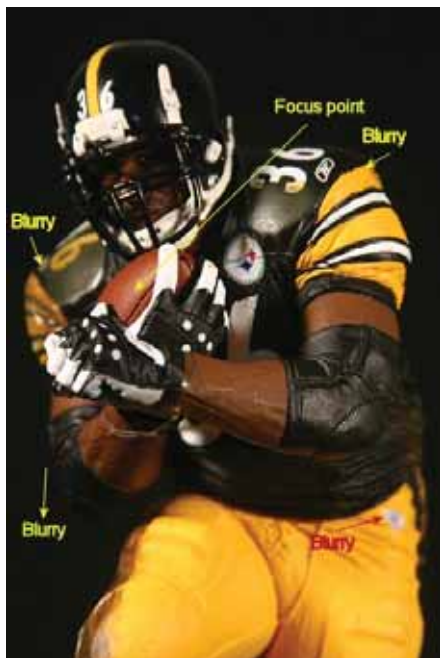


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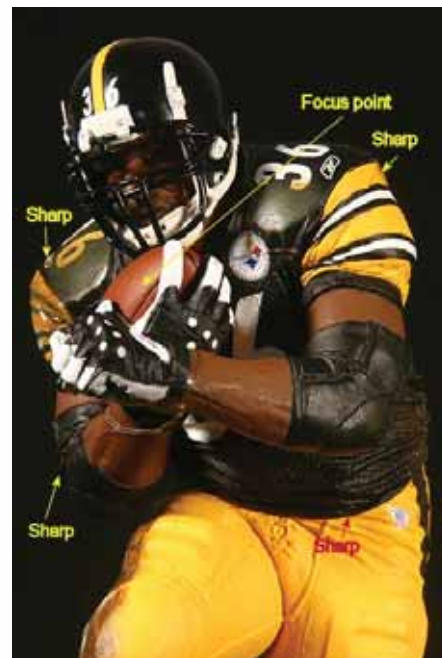
Depth of Field and Aperture:

Shallow DOF



1/40th second, f5.6

Larger DOF



.3 seconds, f18

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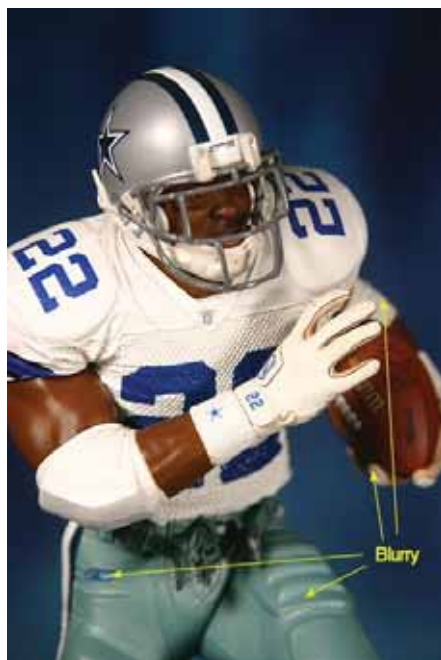


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Depth of Field and Aperture:

Shallow DOF



1/60th second, 5.6

Larger DOF



1/13th second, f14

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Depth of Field and Aperture:

Shallow DOF



1/60th second, 5.6

Larger DOF



1/13th second, f14

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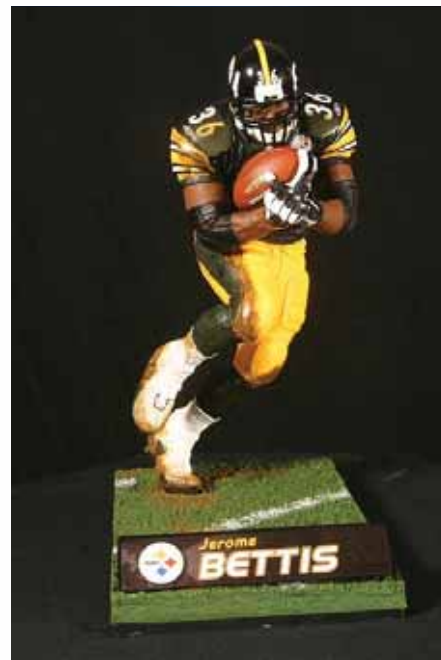
Shallow DOF



1/13th second, f5.6

Not much difference on DOF, right? About the only difference is the back of the base. Now look below to see what happens when I zoom in . . .

Larger DOF



1/8th second, f16

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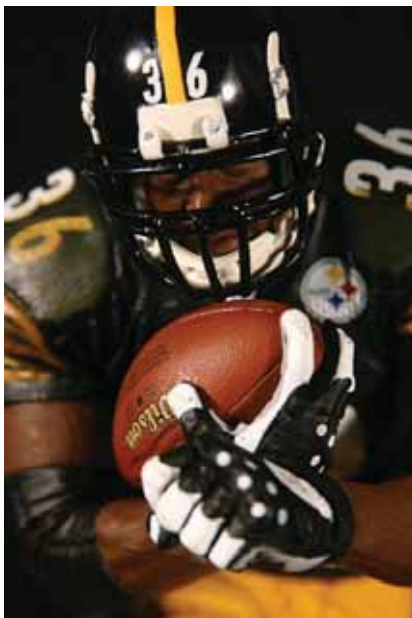


Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Depth of Field and Aperture:

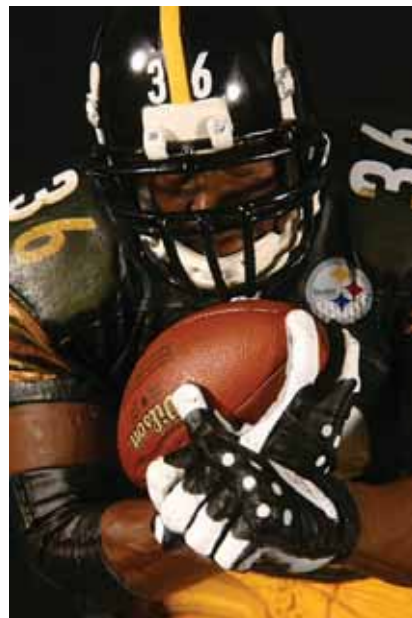
Shallow DOF



1/50th second, f5.6

Big difference on DOF here, simply because I zoomed in. Look at the knuckles, the Steeler logo on the jersey, the 36 on the shoulder. Aperture plays a role in DOF, but so does your zoom.

Larger DOF



1/6th second, f16

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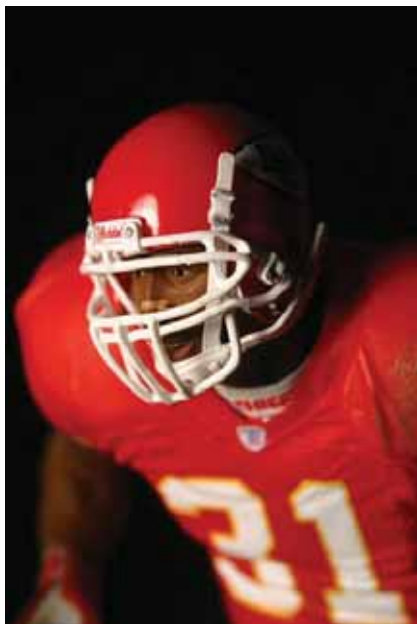


Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Depth of Field and Aperture:

Shallow DOF



Larger DOF

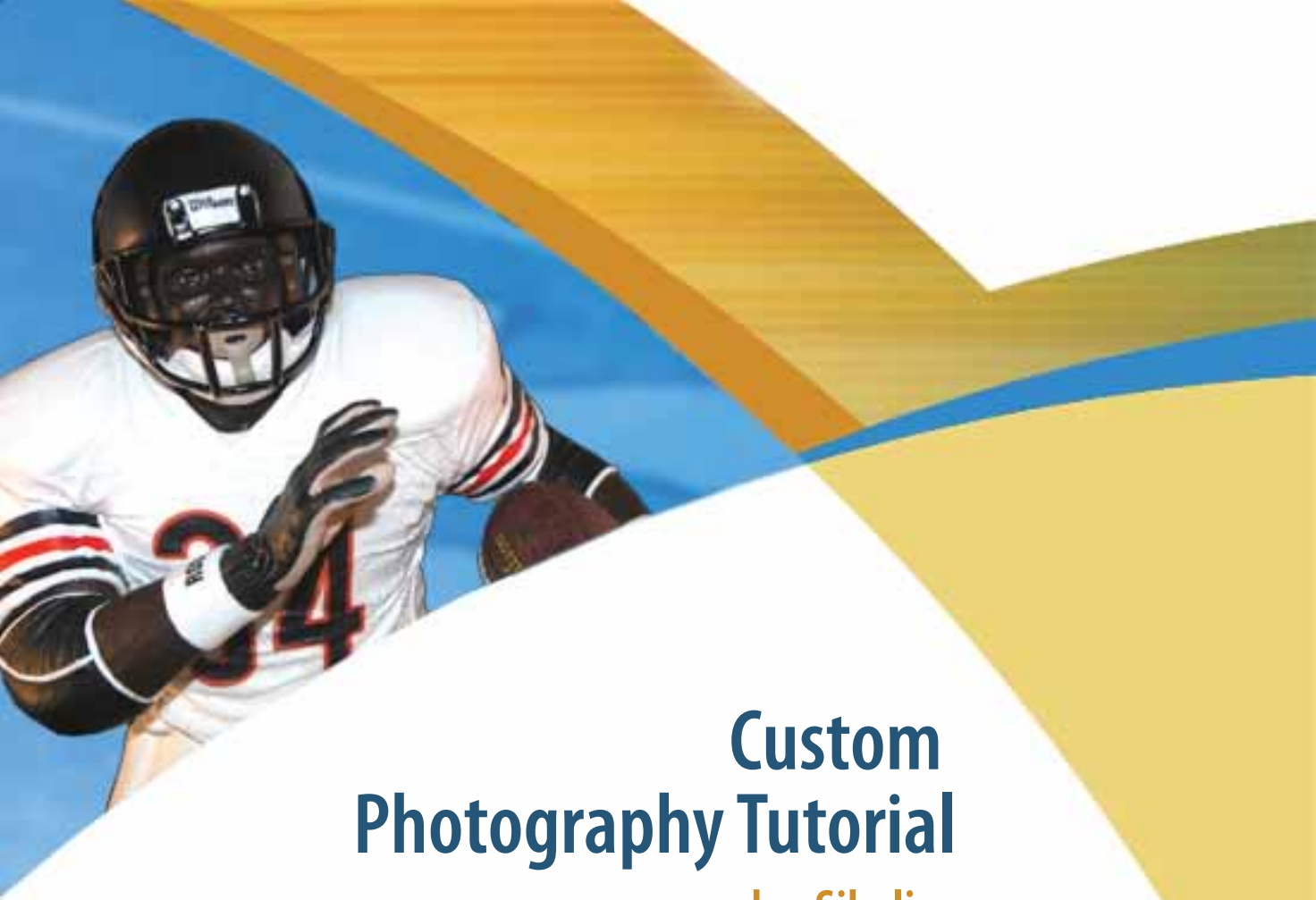


It's easy to assume that a larger DOF is always better. Not true. In this shot, the shallow DOF draws attention to the figure's face. Clearly, the eyes are the subject of that photo. The picture on the right is entirely in focus, so the viewer's attention isn't driven to the eyes as emphatically. It's all subjective, but in my opinion the photo on the left (shallow DOF) tells a better story here.

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Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Brief Review:

OK, now that you understand shutter speed, aperture, depth of field and aperture, we're ready to talk about controlling your camera and using it to get good pictures of your SportsPicks. Just a brief summary to make sure you're clear:

- A good picture strikes a balance between shutter speed and aperture. Using the settings of 1/1000th of a second with an aperture of f22 will give about the same exposure as you'd get from 1/60th at f2.8, but the pictures may look very different.
- The subject matter determines which gets priority.
- If you're shooting a moving subject, shutter speed will drive your aperture. Shoot with the camera set to TV. Pick the shutter speed you want and the camera will set your aperture.
- If you want to control depth of field, aperture will drive your shutter speed. Shoot with the camera set to AV. Pick the aperture you want and the camera will set your shutter speed.
- You can further control your DOF by controlling how much (or how little) you zoom in with your lens. The more you zoom in, the smaller your DOF.

What about people whose cameras don't allow them to control their aperture or shutter speed? Most digicams have a poorman's substitute for this. If you look in your manual, you'll find different shooting modes - sports, landscape, portrait, etc. For doing portraits of your SPs, try setting the camera in portrait mode to force it to shoot with as large an aperture as possible.

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Custom Photography Tutorial

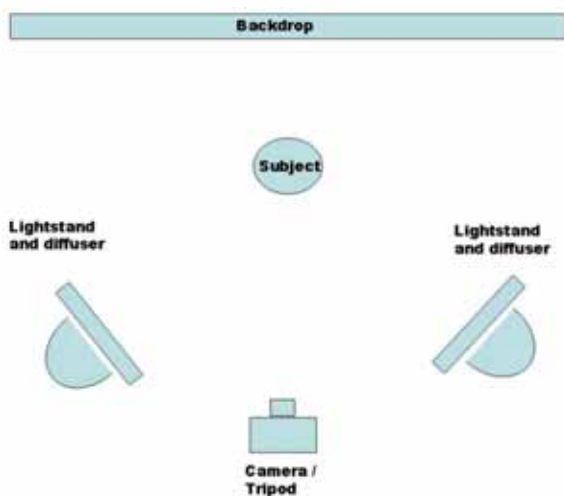
by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

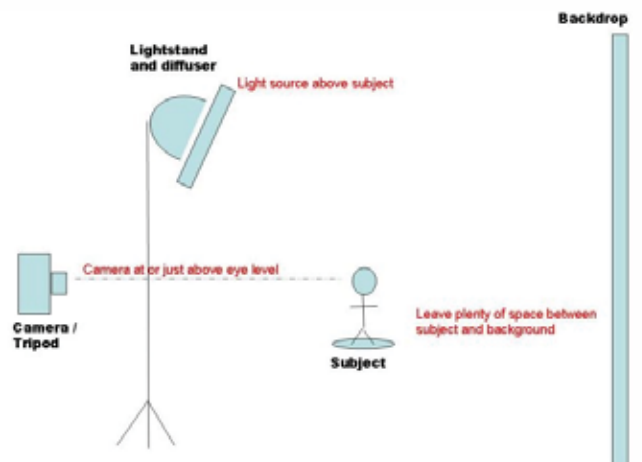
OK, now that you have the right equipment and understand shutter speed, aperture and depth of field, you're ready to start shooting pictures of your SPs.

Simple lighting set up

OK, you've got the equipment and you understand how to control your camera to use shutter speed and aperture effectively. Let's start with taking a picture of one figure in a very simple, two-light set up. I've included two drawings below to give you a top view and side view on how to set up things up.



Top View

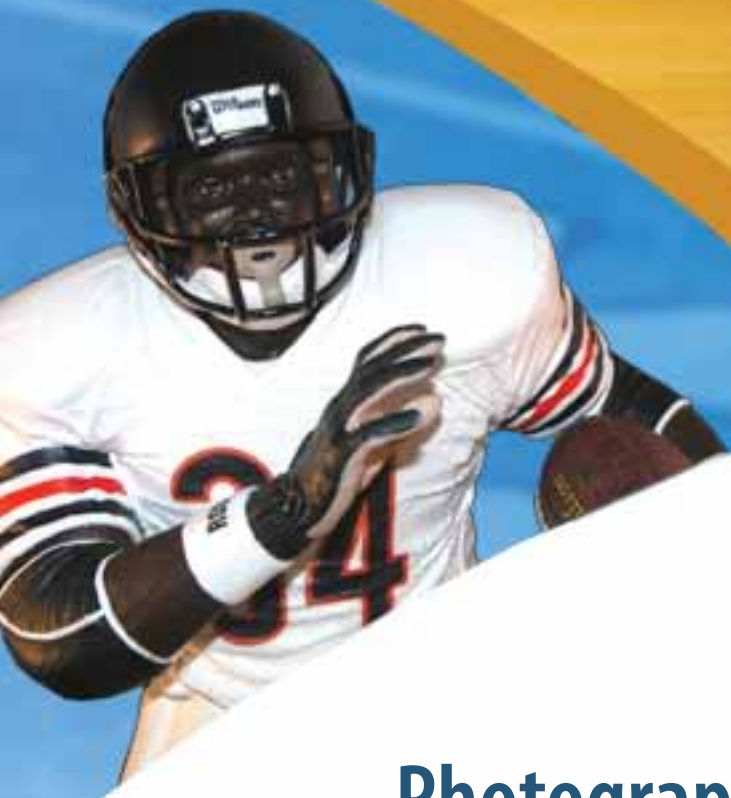


Side View

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by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

Things to notice:

- The two lights are about the same distance from the subject, assuming that the bulbs are the same power. (meaning that one bulb isn't 125 watt and the other isn't 250 watt)
- The lights are approximately 45 degrees to the right and the left of the line between the camera and the subject.
- You've got a space of several feet between the subject and the background.
- The lights are on light stands and are above the subject, pointing down at a gentle (not extreme) angle.
- For now, the lights are not closer to the subject than the camera.
- Your camera is on a tripod and you are using a remote shutter release to trip the shutter.
- The camera is slightly above the subject's eye level.

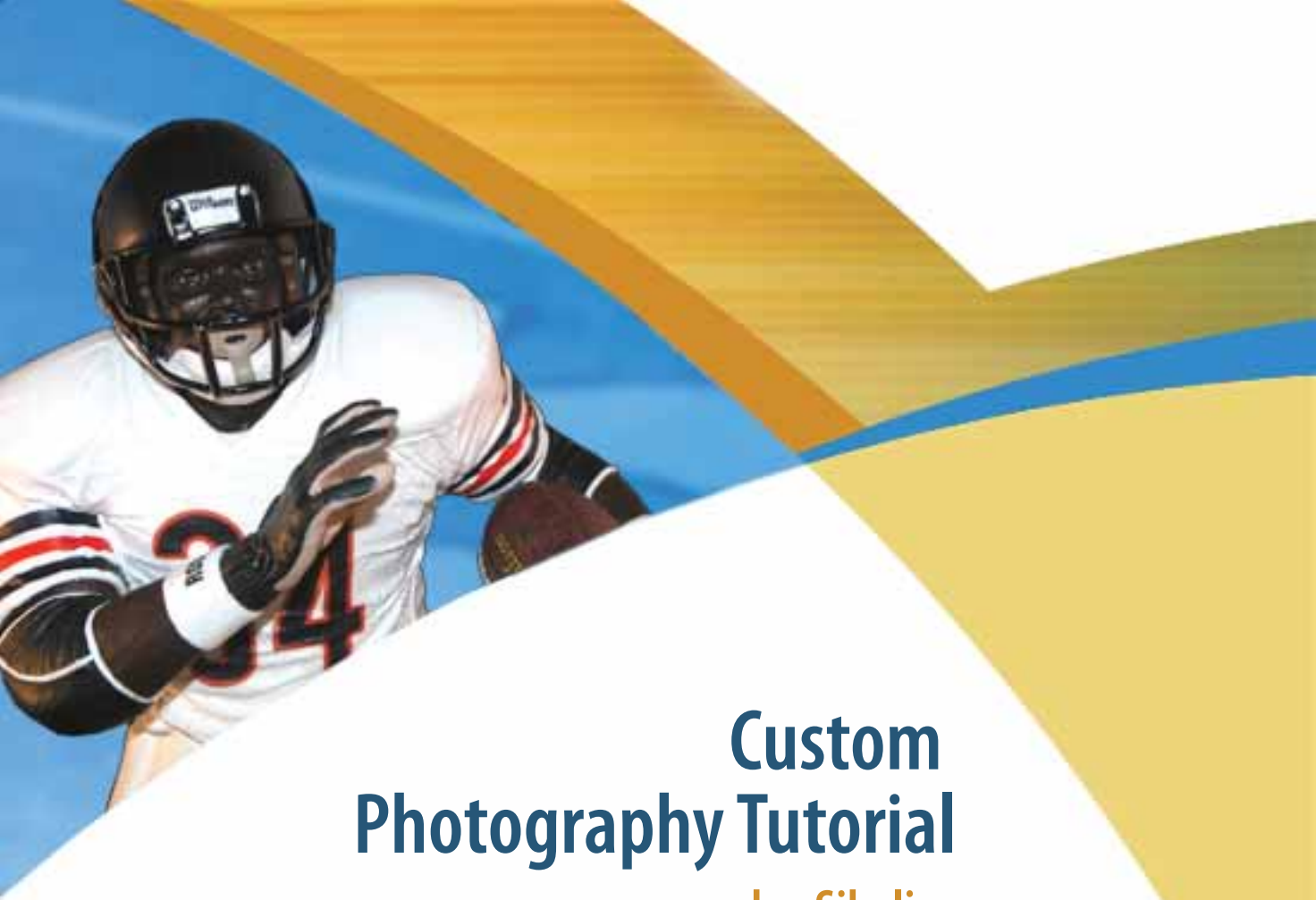
You've just about ready to shoot some good, reliable pictures of your subject. A couple more steps to take:

- Cover any windows and turn off all other lights - the only light in this room should come from your studio lights.
- When you bought the bulbs, you chose tungsten or daylight balanced bulbs. Set your camera for tungsten or daylight color balance to match the bulbs. If you're using film, make sure the film matches the bulbs (Ask the store for tungsten balanced film if you use tungsten bulbs. Regular film is daylight balanced.)
- Set your camera's filmspeed (called ISO or ASA) to 50 or 100 - no sense using a high film speed in this setting. It just adds noise to your pictures. If you're using film, use a slower speed film.
- Turn OFF your flash.
- Be SURE to use a remote shutter release.

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Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

You are ready to shoot. Set the camera into AV mode and set your aperture to a low number - 2, 2.8, 4, or 5.6. (If you're using a point and shoot camera, set it to portrait mode.) Compose the picture by zooming in and focusing. Step back from the camera and count to three, then release the shutter to take the picture. (When you make adjustments on the camera, that causes the camera to shake. You need to give it a couple seconds to finish shaking before you shoot or else you'll get blurred shots - that's why you count to three before shooting.)

Now you're going to take the picture again, but you're going to change the aperture up by a few clicks. If you shot the first shot at 2, change it to 5.6. If you did the first shot at 5.6, change it to 8. Then count to three and shoot again. After that, do it again - change the aperture up to 8, then do it again at 11, then at 16, then 22. You're going to end up with several copies of the same picture. But when you look at the photos you will see the effect of DOF. Some will have too small a DOF, some may have too large a DOF. But if you bracket like this and shoot several versions of the same shot, you'll end up with at least one that gives you a DOF you're happy with.

Now you can move your subject and try it again. Put your F-stop back to its widest option (like f2.8 or f4) and then take a series of pictures, changing the aperture to adjust the DOF.

After you've taken several angles of your subject, download the pictures and check them out. You will see how DOF can be managed by adjusting your aperture, and you'll start to develop a feel for what apertures work best to create the look you want.

You can stop here. You now have the knowledge to take nice, functional pictures of your SPs. From here on out I'm going to talk about some things you can do to improve the photos even more.

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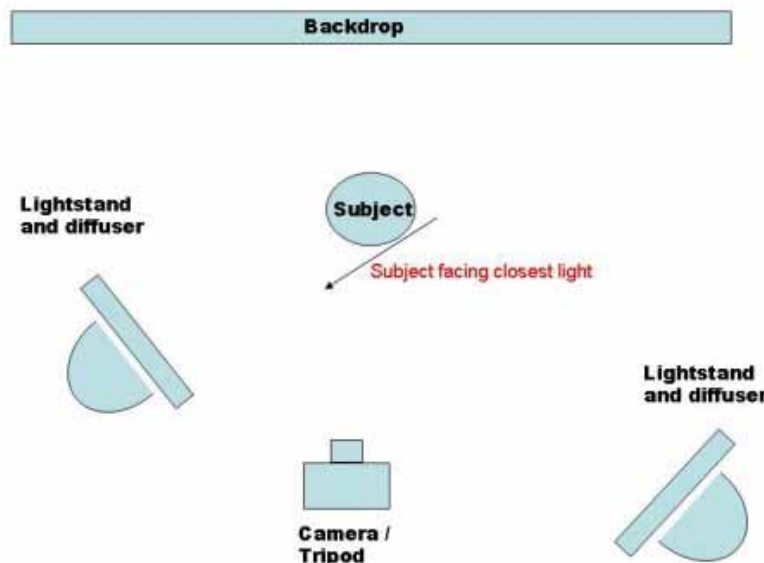
by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

Move the lights, move the camera

Setting up the two cameras at 45 degree angles provides a nice, safe light coverage on your subject. You can also move the lights around to create greater contrasts between light and dark areas for other photographic effects.

For example, if your SP is facing to the left you can move the left floodlight in closer, pull the right floodlight back and the shadows on the backside of the figure will be more pronounced.



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Custom Photography Tutorial

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Shooting your SP Portraits:

Move the lights, move the camera

You can increase this effect by turning off the right floodlight completely and just holding a white posterboard to the right to bounce a little light onto that side of the subject.



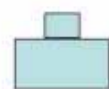
Lightstand
and diffuser



Subject



Subject facing closest light

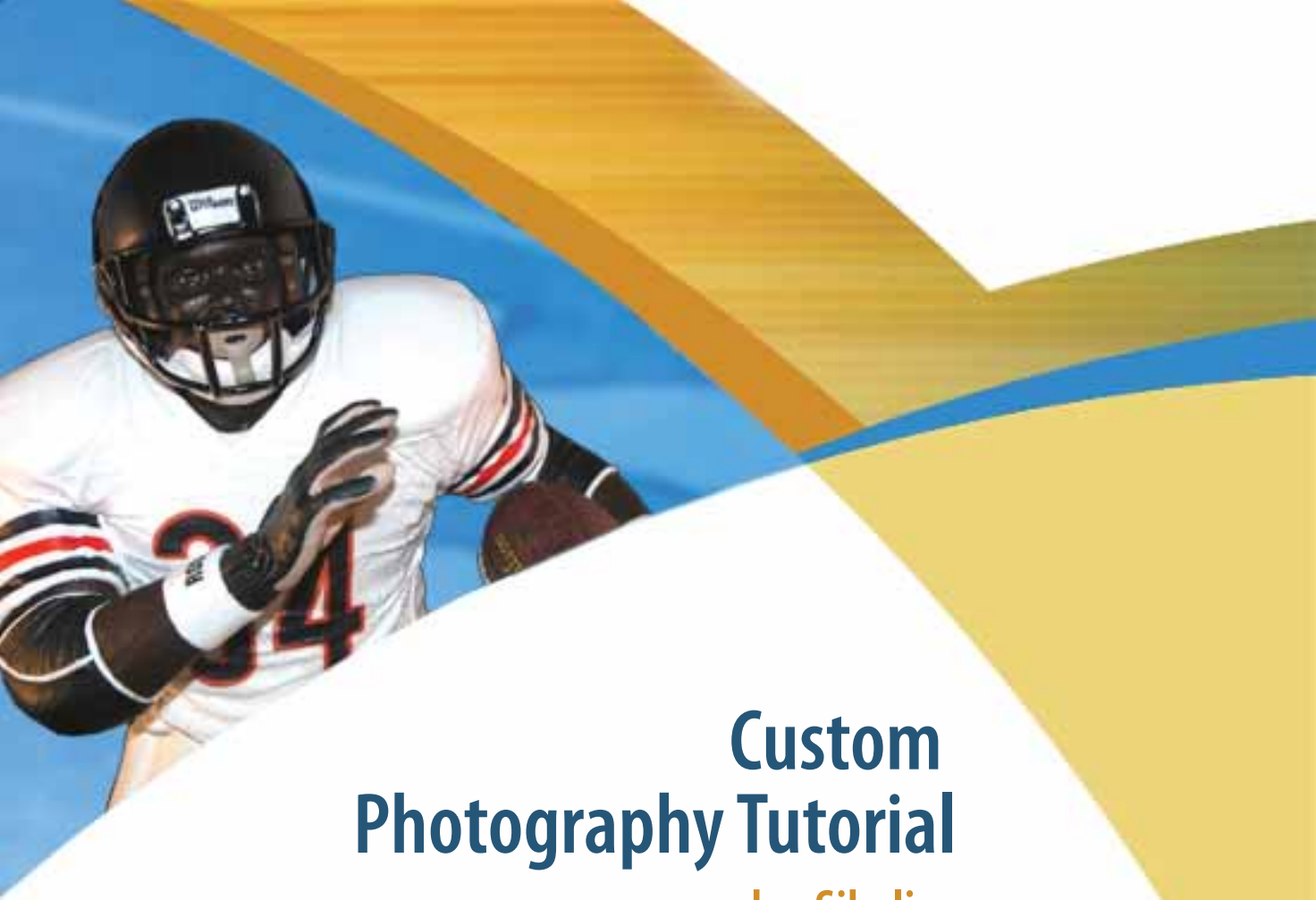


Camera /
Tripod

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Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

This is another reason why you should use a remote shutter release. Besides the fact that pushing the button causes camera shake, if you have a remote you can step away from the camera and hold reflectors or do other things while you shoot.

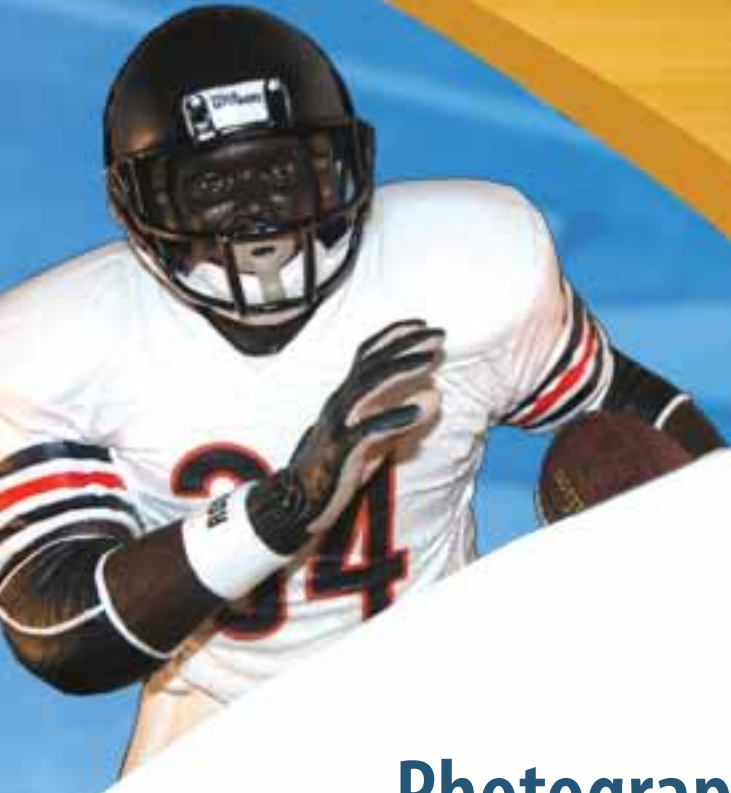
If you move a light in where it is closer to the figure than the camera, watch out for lens flare. This happens when part of the light actually shines into the lens and it washes out the image. If you start to experience lens flare, just get a piece of black poster board and hold it between the light and the camera. Look through the viewfinder to make sure the cardboard isn't in the image. But this board will block the light going into the lens from the side and eliminate the flare.

Moving the light can make a tremendous difference. Look at the three shots below. Each picture tells a different story, and the difference was created by moving one light slightly and (in the third shot) turning off the second light.

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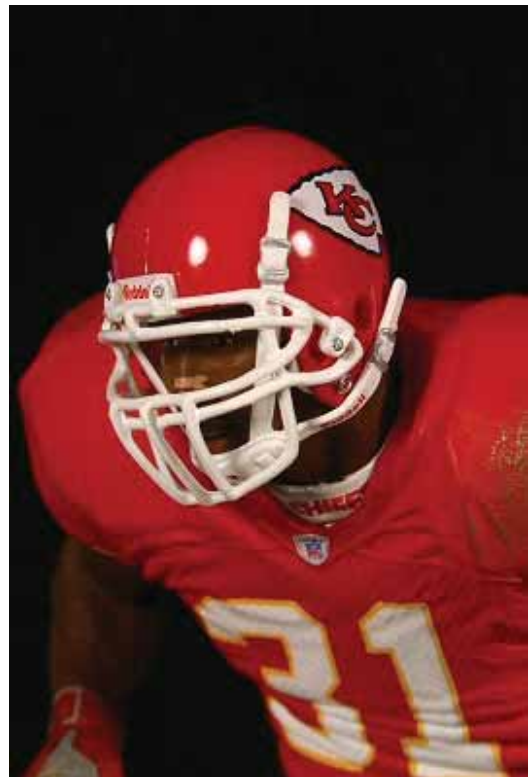


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Shooting your SP Portraits:

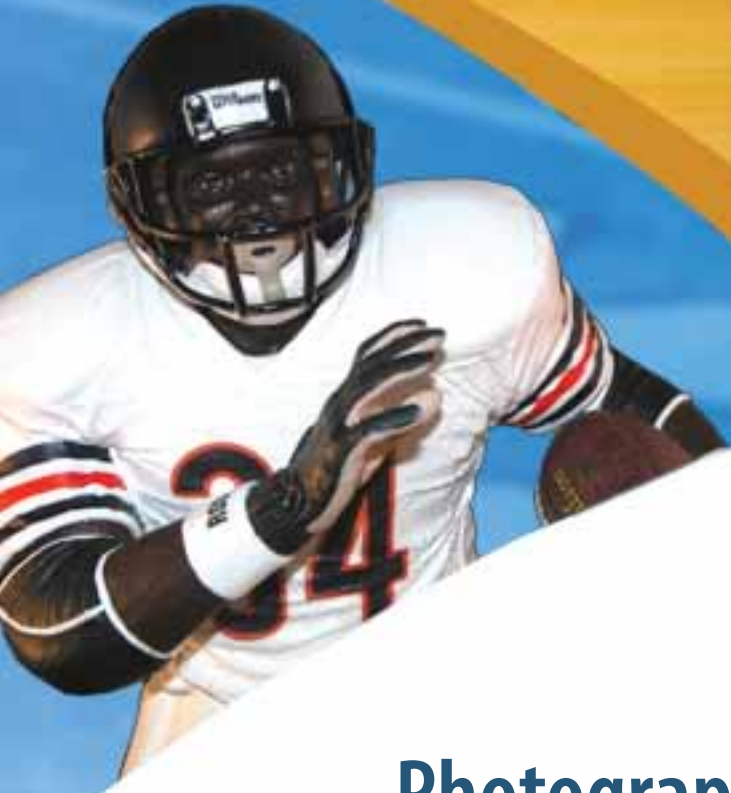
Main light close to figure, above eye level. Fill light further away. Emphasizes team logo on helmet and contour of helmet - face de-emphasized.



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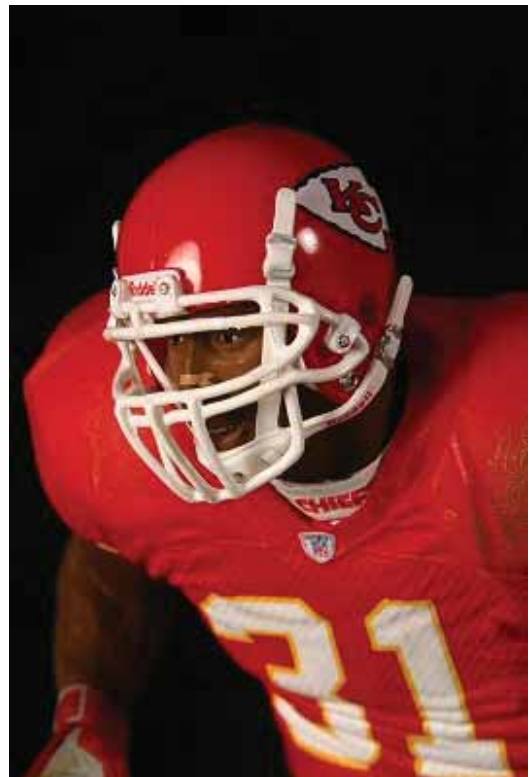


Custom Photography Tutorial

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Shooting your SP Portraits:

Main light dropped to eye level. Fill light left unchanged. Now the face takes on greater importance. Shows good detail but still lets you see the face - a nice balance.



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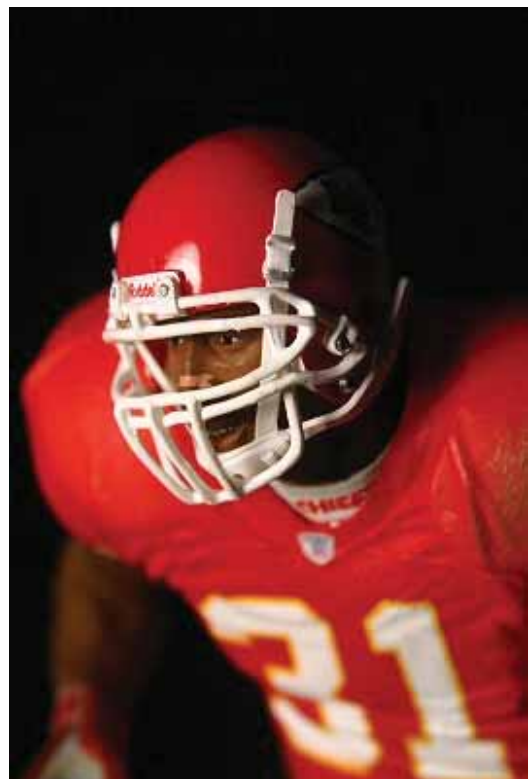


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Shooting your SP Portraits:

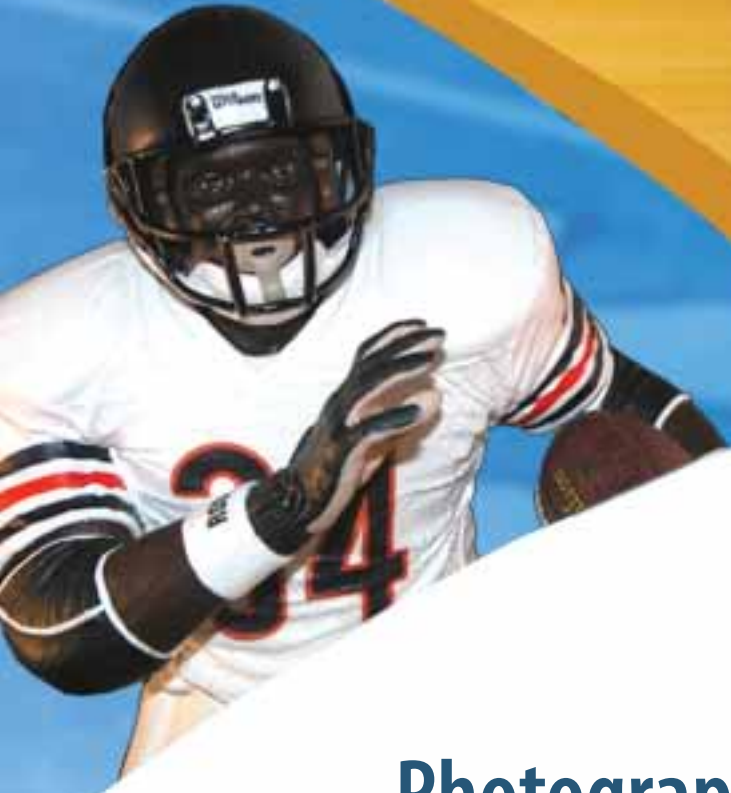
Main light left at eye level. Fill light turned off. Now the face is everything. Can't even see helmet logo. Shallow DOF enhances the effect. This is much more dramatic but you lose some details.



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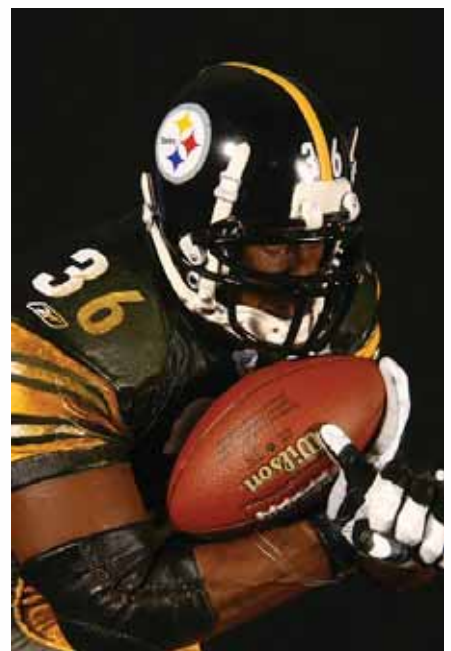
Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

As you move the lights around, pay close attention to reflections. SPs have shiny finishes on them, particularly on the helmets. Depending on where you place the lights, their reflection may wash out a logo or some other part of the subject that you want to be seen. Watch out for glare! For example, I like the photo below but I don't like how the glare wipes out the 3 on the helmet.

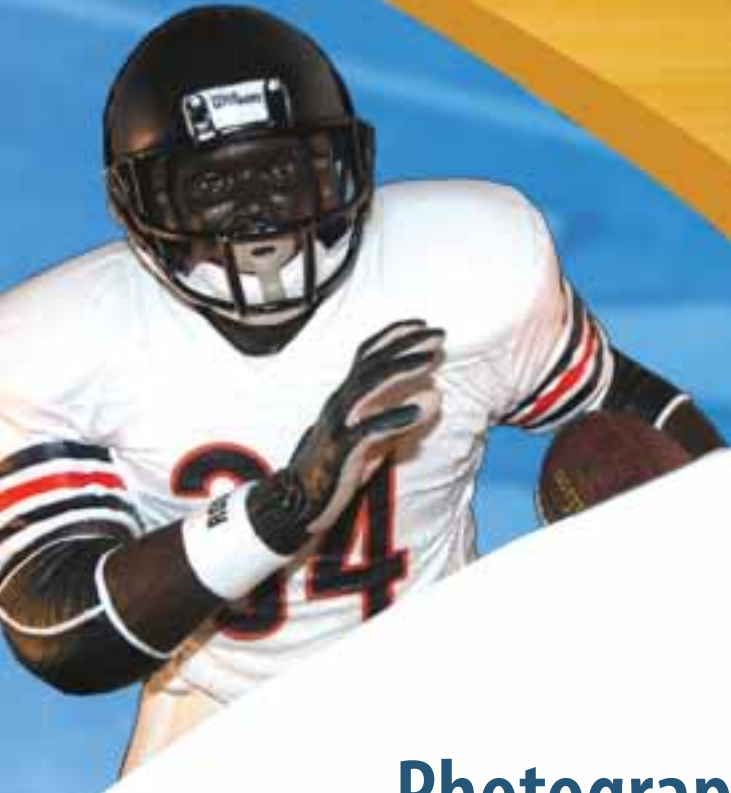
Now you can start moving the camera. Do you want to make your subject look bigger, almost larger than life? Bring the camera very close to the subject, put it below the subject so you're shooting up at it, and then use as wide an angle as you can. Don't zoom in - use a wideangle lens. Look at the following two shots - one was shot above the figure, the other was taken about at belt level. It creates a different effect even though the change is minimal.



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Custom Photography Tutorial

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Shooting your SP Portraits:

Above Eye Level



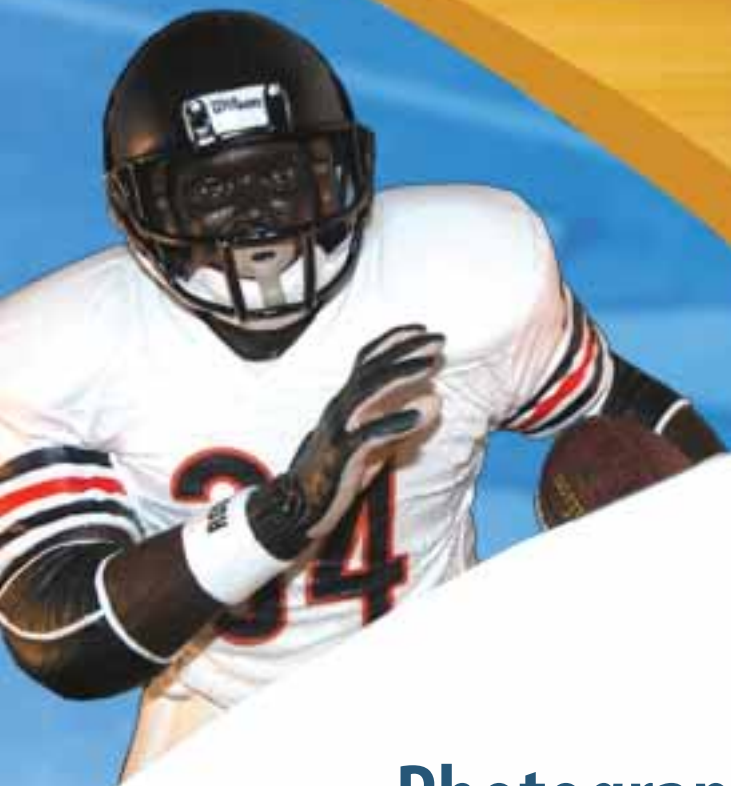
Below Eye Level



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by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

Want to create more of a demonic look? (Yankee fans will like this when shooting pictures of custom Red Sox SPs.) Move the lights below the subject so the light strikes the undersides of the features. If you watch any old monster movie you'll see they light the monsters from the ground up to give them a more evil look. You can enhance this even more by getting the camera in close and using an extreme wideangle lens to distort the features. Actually, this effect would probably work well for photographing Spawn figures more than SPs.

What about silhouettes? These can be a little tricky, but you can get a nice silhouette shot by using only one light, behind and below the subject. Point the light at the backside of the figure and make sure all lights from the front side are turned off.

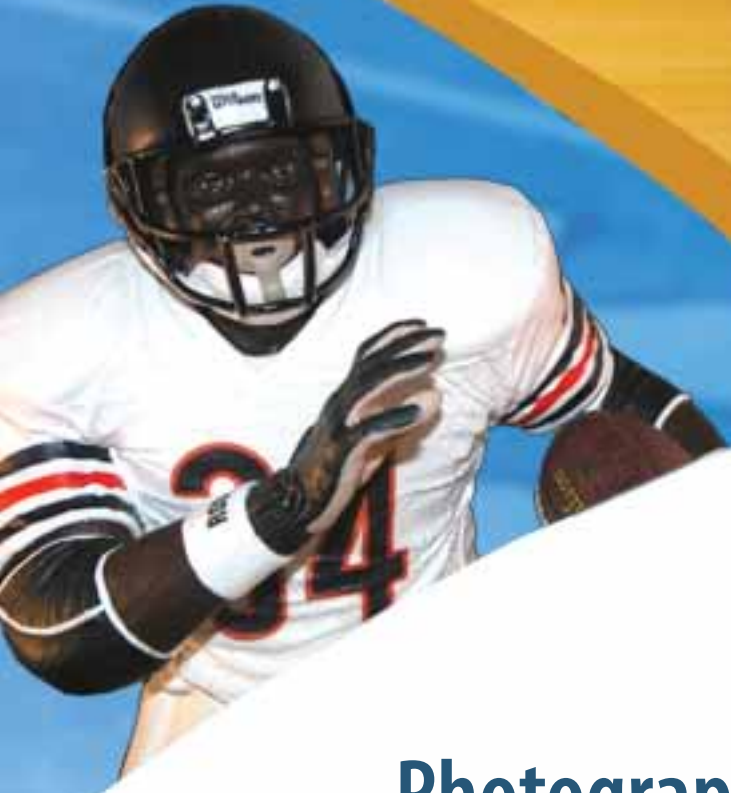
Grouping figures also results in nice photos, but group shots can be tricky. First, you must be sure to use a DOF that gets all the subjects in focus. So be sure to bracket like a maniac to ensure you get one that works. Second, you must be careful of shadows. The light striking the figure on one side doesn't get through to the figure on the other side. That puts one figure in shadow. This can be pretty subtle - maybe it's just one figure's arm blocking the light from reaching the other figure. Look at the group shot to the right. Hull's stick creates a shadow on Gretzky's jersey, but it's subdued and out of the way so it doesn't create a problem. If Hull's stick was pointed up, however, the shadow could easily fall on Gretzky's face - ruining the shot.

For group shots, try moving the main light directly over the camera - it can be a few feet above the camera, but not to either side. You could then place a second and third light at the 45 degree angles (or even greater) to the sides to fill in some smaller shadows on the image.

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Custom Photography Tutorial

by: Sibelius

Shooting your SP Portraits:

Closeups are also nice to shoot. Just remember that if you're shooting high resolution photos that will ultimately end up on web pages, you can crop them quite a bit. So you don't have to worry too much about extreme close-ups unless there is a specific feature you really want.

OK - you've got enough info now to get some good studio-styled shots of your customs. Take lots of shots with varying apertures to get the DOF you want. Start with a basic light set up and then move the lights around for some neat effects. Then try moving the camera up and down.

Good luck!



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