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EL ESTOQUE, MONTA VISTA HIGH SCHOOL

Photojournalist of the Year Portfolio
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My first experience with photojournalism was in April of 2021, during my sophomore year. My school had just reinstated sports for the first time since the onset of COVID, and I had decided to cover a softball game. We couldn't check out cameras because of remote learning, so I ventured to the game alone, armed with just my phone. Even after the referee told me I wasn't allowed in the stadium due to safety concerns, I didn't want to give up: I stayed for the entire three hour game, taking photos with my phone through the fence. However, shuffling through the photos at the end, I had to admit that they weren't even close to good enough to be published: I had been way too far away from the athletes, and the quality of the phone's camera just wasn't good enough. I returned home discouraged, with a sunburn, a dead phone battery and no good photos to speak of. At that time, I never could've imagined the extent to which I would devote myself to photojournalism the following year, spending countless hours photographing sports games and events, mentoring others and becoming the go-to photojournalist on our staff.

That May, when I was chosen to be a sports editor for my school's newspaper, *El Estoque*, for my junior year, I was excited but apprehensive. I knew that a large part of being a sports editor was covering games, which meant taking photos. At the time, the only event I had photographed was that single softball game. I was afraid of leading others and lacked confidence in my abilities.

When this school year started, our editors-in-chief decided that we should fill our first issue of the year with vibrant photos to celebrate our return to in-person school. In sports, I proposed that we put together photo essays featuring each fall sport. I had to learn how to use a camera for the first time along with the staff writers that I also had a responsibility to instruct. It was nerve-wracking for me: I was afraid of others judging my skill, afraid that I wouldn't be able to set a good example. Being an athlete myself made it even harder: I somehow had to participate in sports and cover sports simultaneously. And Journalism was the last period of the day, so I often had to leave class early to play field hockey, which made it hard to lead my section. I even missed the first staff-wide lesson on photography.

However, I had a responsibility to my position as a sports editor and to my publication, so I made it work. First, I took it upon myself to learn how to take photos. I scoured other publications for inspiration, begged the more experienced photographers to accompany me to games and most importantly, I practiced. I have never been as busy as I was during that time: a typical day after school could have been field hockey practice from 3 to 6 p.m. followed by photographing a football game from 6 to 9 p.m., and then finally returning home at night, exhausted but fulfilled, to begin my other schoolwork.

My work paid off. By the end of October, I was known as one of the best photographers on staff. As the year progressed and the field hockey season ended, I devoted more and more hours into taking photos and settled into my niche in sports photography. By the end of the year, I accumulated over 100,000 photos in more than 20 different sports, and have attended and photographed over 100 sports games. Although I'm not on the yearbook staff, 25 of my photos have been featured in the book, adorning almost every sports page. On *El Estoque*, people know that if they need photos as visuals for one of their stories, there's a very high chance that I've taken a photo of whatever they're looking for.

One of the highlights of my time in photojournalism this year was my coverage of our Girls Volleyball team. Girls Volleyball is a fall sport, and it was one of the sports where I spent a lot of time at the start of the school year when I was still familiarizing myself with using a camera. I photographed almost all of their home league games and was already invested in their success, so when the team started doing extremely well in playoffs at the end of the season, it was only natural that I traveled to their away games to photograph them. One of my favorite memories from journalism ever was traveling to one of the team's NorCal playoff away games to photograph them. It required a two hour bus ride in each direction and a nine hour trip overall, but it was worth it to be able to preserve the winning moment for the team, to have immortalized that moment of success for them. In the future, when their memories have faded, the team will always have our photos to look back on, to transport them back to those moments of victory.

Photography is a specific, meticulous effort. Behind each photo is a deep understanding of each sport and hours that go into getting the perfect shot. In every photograph I take, I must carefully consider how to best use leading lines, contrast and unique angles to capture the best image. When I photograph sports, the satisfaction that I get when I capture a winning moment is unlike any other activity: the joy on the athletes' faces is reflected in myself when I am able to preserve those moments for them.

Serving as a sports editor this year has taught me much more than I could have ever imagined when I first got the position. This March, I covered another softball game. But this time, I wasn't an inexperienced sophomore anymore. At the game, I mentored two staff writers who had hardly ever taken photos before, teaching them where to stand and what angles and camera settings to use to get the best shots. Going through my photos after the game, I realized that I had come full circle. I thought back to my sophomore self, taking photos of a softball game with my phone through a chain link fence in the blazing sun, with no idea what I was doing. Now, I was no longer inexperienced, I had hundreds of hours of photography experience under my belt and I had transformed from an inexperienced sophomore into a confident mentor.

Next year, I will be serving as a co-editor-in-chief of *El Estoque*. As I enter my senior year and prepare to instruct a new generation of journalists, my ultimate goal for next year is to not only teach them how to take photos, but to inspire in them a love for photojournalism that will last for the rest of their careers in journalism.



COMING UP FOR AIR

Junior Rojel Acot swims in the breaststroke during a swim meet against Los Gatos High School on March 25. MVHS won the meet.

BEHIND THE SCENES

I used my 70-180mm lens for this photo, and took this photo at 97mm. My favorite strokes to photograph for swim are breaststroke and butterfly, because by sitting along the sidelines of the pool as the swimmers come towards you, you are able to capture the facial expressions of swimmers when they come up for air. To take this photo, I used a shutter speed of 1/2000 to freeze the water and continuously took photos while zooming out as the swimmer got closer.



SERVE RECEIVE

Sophomore Henry Hu receives the ball in the Varsity Boys Volleyball team's game against Lynbrook High School on Friday, April 15. Despite a valiant effort, the team lost with a final score of 3-1.

BEHIND THE SCENES

I took this photo sitting on the sideline next to the referee stand. This game occurred in April near the end of my junior year, and I had photographed over twenty girls and boys volleyball games by this time, which meant that I was able to predict the action occurring on the court, which helped me take this photo. I used a fast shutter speed of 1/2000 in order to freeze the ball in motion and continuously took photos of Henry as the other team served to catch this shot.



UP TO BAT

Sophomore Cara Constant prepares to bat in a non-league game against Fremont High School on Tuesday, March 15. Although MVHS led 1-0 at the end of the second inning, FHS was able to overtake them and MVHS ultimately lost 11-5.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This photo is special to me because the first event I ever photographed was a softball game, and looking at this photo reminds me of how much my abilities have improved over the course of this year. When I asked the referee for permission to be inside the fence before the game, he said it would be all right as long as I stayed a safe distance away from the batter, so I zoomed in to 180mm to capture this shot. My favorite part of this photo is the batter's facial expression: most of the players opted to wear masks while playing, but in this photo you are able to see her full facial expression, including the determination in her eyes.

DANCING TO THE BEAT

Junior Kushagra Srivastava dances passionately during the MV Bhangra team's pep rally performance on the fifth and final day of Culture Week. Three Indian dance teams performed during lunch, and Bhangra performed last, preceded by Andaaz and Raas.

BEHIND THE SCENES

During the school year, I made an effort to diversify my photography skill set by photographing school events and performances in addition to sports games. For this photo, I used a 24-70mm lens to capture this shot and took this photo at 33mm, getting extremely close to the performers. I took this photo vertically and from a low angle to emphasize the performer's passion and energy.





EYES ON THE PRIZE

Pursued by multiple defenders, junior Joey Bloom scores a goal in the Varsity Boys Water Polo team's game against Saratoga High School on Thursday, Oct. 7, where MVHS lost with a final score of 17-11. Despite trailing 7-1 in the first quarter, offensive pushes in the second half allowed MVHS to maintain its point margin throughout the game.

BEHIND THE SCENES

I brought a 24-70mm lens to the game, and I struggled at first with taking photos from the sidelines, as I was far away from the players, and I hadn't been capturing their facial expressions. Then, I decided to go behind the goal, where I was much closer to the players, which allowed me to capture this moment. The frozen water droplets, the clear facial expressions of every player and the framing of the goal are all reasons why this remains one of my favorite photos I've taken.