

## Shooting in the NBA

As a contributing and happy member of the FM community, and more specifically the Sports Corner, I had been asked to write something about shooting professional level basketball here in America, otherwise known as the NBA. Before I continue, I must explain what this write up will be and won't be. This article will not explain how to get access to any NBA venue, nor will it discuss how to shoot basketball or where to shoot from in depth, as that is a personal preference, and will mostly depend on the circumstances under which you are shooting. This article will cover some of the nuances of shooting in the NBA, though my experience comes from shooting one team in particular (the Phoenix Suns) and one venue in particular (America West Arena, soon to be U.S. Airways Center). Every team and venue has their own operating procedures, and procedures may change throughout the season and post-season, as well as from season to season. With this in mind, let's continue.

**Credential Pick Up and Media Entrance:** As a credentialed shooter, you usually have to do things a little different than a ticket holder. You may be required to pick up your credential at a specific time and/or area, as well as entering the venue from a different entrance. Ask your contact for the proper procedure, otherwise the team staff should have a Communications (or similarly named) department, that deal with credentials.

For a variety of reasons, it would be in your best interest to show up early to the game.

The popularity of either team, whether or not the game is regionally or nationally

televised, and timing of the event (weekend, night/late night) all factor into not only the attendance by fans, but also the attendance by media, which in turn could very easily affect your shooting options as far as where you can and will end up sitting. If your venue has assigned shooting spots, then you want to apply for your credential early, in order to secure a spot for yourself. Latecomers and late applications often have to take leftover spots, shoot behind other shooters, and from areas other than the floor. If you have to set up remotes at all, you may need to show up even earlier, as you cannot set up anything while players are on the court. As a rule of thumb, I show up two hours before scheduled tip-off because there are no assigned spots. By doing so, I can usually shoot from my preferred spot.

When passing through the media entrance, expect to go through some sort of bag check. This is normal for most venues, and security is just doing their job. Despite already having a media credential venues may sometimes require that you also wear a secondary piece (badge, bracelet) on yourself and/or equipment. Be sure you have the appropriate pieces in order to shoot without any problems.

Most single game passes are thin pieces of paper with no photo ID, and have a hole punched through them with a string through it so you can wear it. Basically, they are very easy to lose or rip. Too often, people will lose their credentials, and get hassled by security at inopportune times. If you have a credential holder with its own lanyard, use

that to secure your credential. If you don't, you can reinforce the pass and string with gaffers tape.

**Media Areas:** Once you are allowed access, try to get a lay of the land. For those transmitting, find out where to connect to the internet, as well as what kind of access you will have. Be prepared, and have a phone line, Ethernet cable, or Wifi capable laptop or transmitter adapter for your laptop. Each venue is different and better you prepare for any situation (or call ahead to cut down on bringing stuff). This area will also usually have update notes with stats per quarter as well as a final box score. You can also pick up rosters, notes, and media guides from this or another designated area. There may be a notice of seating assignments here as well, so be sure to look for one just in case.

Depending on the team, there may or may not be a lounge area with food and drink. I have seen anything from just a communal water bottle to a full out spread (not free) with a soda fountain, buffet including dessert, and snacks at half time. You may need to be on the catering list, so if you are interested in the pre-game meal, make sure that those credentialing you ask you be put on the list. Be more than prepared to not eat, or get something from a vendor. Some venues offer a discount with a media pass, others nothing.

While media areas are fairly secure, your equipment is your own responsibility. If you're new to an area you may want to consider keeping everything with you. Getting a feel for the general security of areas, and common sense will really help you determine the best way to deal with excess equipment.

Once you find your way to the court, be prepared to find your spot. If there is a seating assignment, you should already know where you are assigned, but if not, there are usually labels behind the stripe on the baseline, with the name of the media outlet (SI, Fox, NBA Photos), so look for your outlet. If there is no assigned seating, you can mark your spot by putting your business card with some gaffer tape on the floor. Some shooters leave portable chairs (such as the Crazy Creek) in their spots to mark it. Look around and see what the norm is and you should be ok. If you have no clue, ask someone before assuming something wrongly.

**Floor Layout and Shooting Spots:** If there is no assigned seating, then your assignment should dictate where you will sit. Photographers can only shoot from the baseline while on the floor. Off-court, there should be "pit" areas for overhead shots, and also for remote cameras. Talk to the team photographer for a better layout of the venue, and where you can/can't set up remotes and shoot from. If you plan to remote or strobe, then make sure you discuss everything necessary to comply with the venue and team as far as safety and liability concerns.

When shooting from the floor, be mindful of a few things. First, you need to know what the rules are regarding attire and equipment. Some venues require rubber soled shoes (my guess is to avoid scuffing), and certain venues have rules requiring that you use rubber lens hoods. Make sure you have the right badges and bracelets to shoot from the floor during the game. Every venue has different levels of access, and rules regarding that access. It is best you find this out before the game, and while at the game, well before tip-off time.

You are expected to sit on the floor during the game, kneeling and standing is not allowed so you will not obstruct a fan's view of the game. If you don't like sitting on the floor, get a portable chair. They offer back support, a place to sit without getting your pants dirty, and in venues with a hockey rink underneath, a way to avoid sitting on a cold floor. You should also consider a second shirt or sweater if you tend to get cold, as venues with rinks often are colder than the ambient temperature.

Before tip-off, the away team will decide which basket to score on and defend first.

When the teams run out for warm-ups 15-20 minutes before tip-off, they will practice on the side of the court they plan to score on. Do not confuse a few players shooting around before a game with the team warm-ups. Team warm-ups involve layup drills and team shootaround. Teams switch sides at the half. By choosing courts, the away team decides to be near their bench for the first or second half, which can help them hear their coach when the crowd gets loud.

You are limited to shooting from the baseline. Only network TV (ESPN, ABC, TNT) is allowed access from the sideline. If there is no assigned seating, choose a baseline, and an angle for your shots. Keep in mind that if you choose a baseline near a bench, that players will sometimes run out in front of you to watch a play. Also keep in mind that equipment managers, coaches, towel boys, team doctors, and other team people will sometimes put equipment out, and can get in your way.

Referee's also roam up and down the baseline. How much they interfere with your shots depends on where the ball is, and their own officiating style. You can avoid them slightly (but never completely) by shooting very close or very far away from the basket. Never expect them to completely be out of your way, you're just fooling yourself.

Once you picked a spot, don't expect to move around much. You can move during stoppage in play, but be quick about it. At the half, if you want to cover a specific team, you may want to switch to the other court to cover them close up again. If you stay put, you will get that team on defense. If you have to transmit, consider quickly getting a spot first.

Your assignment for the game will play into the decisions you make on where you sit, when you should change spots, and when you should leave to transmit.

**Lens and camera choices:** How you shoot a game is up to you, and the available light.

Do some research on the venue and the lighting. If you don't find any relevant information, be prepared. Carry a lens faster than 2.8 if possible. If you're shooting with a long lens (200 and up), have a 2.8 lens for action or lens with some sort of camera shake reduction (IS, VR, OS, etc.) for shooting interaction shots between a player, coach and referee.

As far as camera choices, I won't tell anyone what to buy. I will recommend that you bring 2 bodies. On the main body you can use your standard lens, to get the nearcourt action. A secondary body can be used for a longer lens and farcourt action as well as tighter individual shots and shots of coach's players and refs. You can also use a second body for a specialty lens such as a fisheye, to get a different look from what you're already shooting. Also, a second body makes for a good backup, in case anything ever happens to your primary camera.

A second camera is not necessary, but the benefits are there. It is up to you to decide if it's worth having one for your situation. During the NBA playoffs, I used up to four cameras a game, each with their own specific use. It wasn't needed, but I found it useful.

**Conclusion:** Before you leave the court after the game, make sure to do a check on your equipment, so as not to lose anything. If you stay until the buzzer, expect fans to rush the exits, with little regard for you or your equipment. Pack fast.

**Miscellaneous:** Nothing specific here, but I thought I'd add a few more thoughts about shooting an NBA game, and they didn't fit in any other sections.

If you're only shooting a single game, then over prepare. You can't go back, and you'll want to do your best, so bring your best.

If you're shooting for the season, or for a series of games, figure out what you did wrong each time out and how to correct it.

If you're shooting for a season, get to know the regulars. This includes the team's media relations people, event security, and other photographers. You'll find the games become a smoother ride each time out.

If you're shooting for a season, get into a routine. I find that routines make it easier for me to avoid knucklehead mistakes (like forgetting my credential or charging my batteries).

In the media room, even if there is wireless, there may be a login process involved. Talk to the team about access, or be prepared to dial out.

It's not necessary, but teams usually distribute stat sheets by quarter as well as a final box. All that information is useful for captioning.

Might want to pick up a media guide, they're chock full of random information, some of it can be pretty useful.

Getting a lay of the land isn't just about knowing where the media room is. Figure out where anything relevant to you is and how to get to it quickly. Before the game, it's not a big issue, but during and after, you'll have fans to deal with.

Oh yeah, find out about media parking. Why waste time finding some when the venue may offer it freely and in a convenient location.

Depending on the teams involved, you may want to apply for a credential pretty early.

Some teams accept applications for single game passes until noon of game day, others want everything in by the day prior to the game, and it's best to do things well ahead of time when the teams involved are big. Teams have a maximum occupancy limit for media, and bigger games means television crews, foreign media outlets, and smaller local outlets all want in.

**Final Words:** I hope this write-up has covered the basics of shooting an NBA game. If you find I completely missed something, let me know. Did I do a good/bad job, let me know. I had other photographers proof this, so I could stick to the essentials, without any bias. As the rules change, I hope to address them in further revisions. I will list revisions as they occur, and check back often for any new changes.

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### **Revisions**

Version 1.0, 1/4/2006: First release

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DATE \@ "M/d/yyyy" 1/4/2006