

A day in the life

of Ian Griffiths



A 4am start, no breakfast and much screaming are all par for the course for event photographer Ian Griffiths when he covers a cheerleading qualifier

WORDS & PICTURES Ian Griffiths

IT'S EARLY FEBRUARY 2008, 4am on a cold, wet and dreary Saturday morning. Three of us, including my son Colin, photographer/friend Ian Cann and me, are loading our van. My wife, Sharon, and other Event-Photos team member, Jade, are already in the front. We are getting ready to head for the new sports hall at Loughborough University to cover a two-day cheerleading regional qualifier for the biggest UK Cheer group, Futurecheer. We're expecting about 2000 competitors, ranging in age from 6 to 46 years old. Now we are ready and hit the road in convoy. "Event-Photos are GO!"

6.30am We arrive at Loughborough Uni, and luckily get there just at the right time so we're able to pull up at the front doors to unload all our gear onto trolleys and wheel it inside. It's not raining here but it is bitterly cold and the ground is like an ice-rink, so we take extra care. The cameras don't like being bounced.

We are greeted by yet another Ian, director of Futurecheer, who is grinning from ear to ear as they managed to get their Marley sprung floor laid in the night before, (it's the only one in the UK, so they're a bit ahead of the game). Ian shows us where we can set up, so we get on with the task.

We have four sales stations, each with a laptop, Mitsubishi CP9550

printer, and either CP3020 or the new CP3800 attached, plus external monitors and Expressdigital's Darkroom Pro. We set up a file server PC with a proof printer attached. Power cables and extension leads are everywhere, and each table is wrapped with display boards and a bin placed in between tables. It's amazing how much rubbish is generated at these events.

Then it's time to erect four large A-frame boards to receive the proof sheets for competitors and their parents to identify and review their team photographs. These aren't really of a high enough standard to make a final purchasing choice, but they do work well in allowing people to find their photographs reasonably quickly, and act as entertainment for the younger children as they search for any photo of themselves or friends. We make sure we supply pens and business cards so that people can write down the reference numbers of the photographs they'd like to buy.

8.00am We set up two studio lights about 25 feet apart to illuminate the 60-foot wide sprung floor. We try a test fire, but it trips out the power and we are plunged into darkness. We manage to restore power, but another test fire has the same outcome – complete darkness. I start to worry; they had been working fine the day before during a test session. I quickly grab one of the back-up

heads, swap it and try a test fire. It works. We manage to keep all the lights on, the jeering stops and we are good to go. Breakfast time.

8.30am The five of us head off for breakfast, only to discover the café doesn't open until 9.30am; the exact time the competition starts. Colin and Jade are dispatched to find a McDonalds.

8.45am We get changed in to our 'corporate wear', the doors are opened, and about 4500 people flood in. Glitter and Pom Poms everywhere!

9.20am Ev, the DJ, cranks up the volume and the beat. B52's *Love Shack* shatters the hustle and bustle. People are dancing everywhere; in the reception, the toilets, the bleachers (seats). You can feel the excitement of the day building; meanwhile Ian Cann and I are setting up a 6X5m backdrop for the team shots before competitors hit the floor. The cameras are set up for the team shots. Ian has a pair of Canon EOS 1s, one with a 17-40mm and the other a 24-70mm lens, and two flash heads. He's ready to go, the first team is standing against the backdrop.

I head down to the front of the sprung floor with another set of EOS 1s. This time one has a 70-200mm, the other a 24-70mm. I have 50 memory cards with me, mainly 256MB. Every three minutes a new



team arrives on the floor, with anything from two to 70 members. It's tough work, as the teams have just 90 seconds to perform and I have to get multiple shots of everyone.

I've developed a pattern and a pretty good memory for who I've shot. I can't remember what day it is most of the time but somehow I remember this much.

Very rarely do I miss anyone out, but it does happen from time to

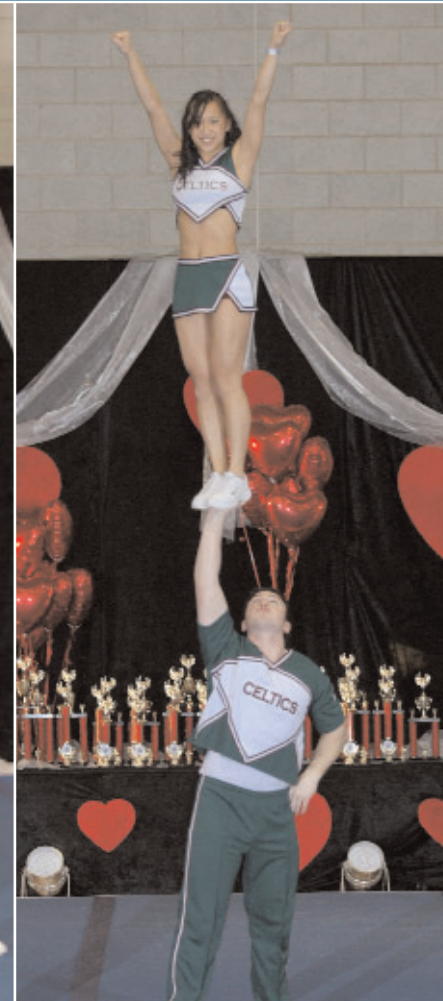
time, especially when it's a new team I've not seen before.

I'm sure I've got a shot of everyone and head back to the sales station. Horror of horrors; I've managed to miss one girl out completely. It turns out she is one of the twins in the last team, and I thought I'd already got her picture. Oops!

4.30pm The memory cards are collected for download. A quick buzz

on the walkie-talkie and Jade comes running. She copies the files to the server. The program, Watch Directory, notices a change in the folder's contents and automatically copies all the files to a 'hot folder' on each of the four sales stations simultaneously. The sales guys are in full flow, inundated by hundreds of girls all shouting: "Can I see?"

We use Expressdigital's Digital Darkroom Pro for our entire on-site



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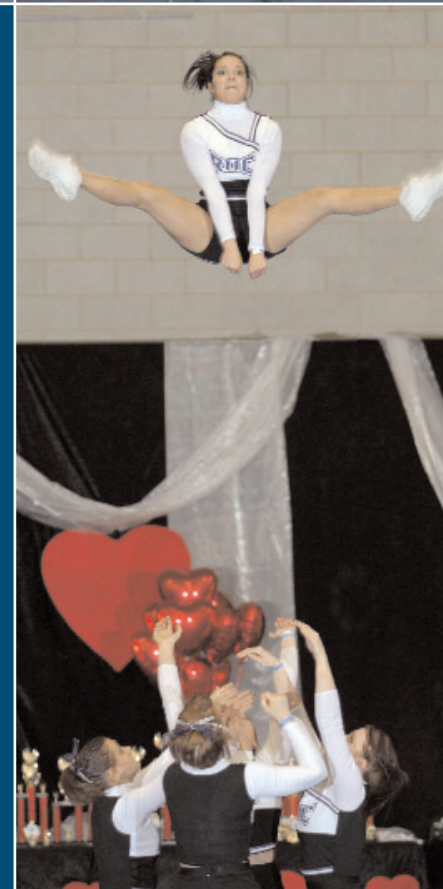
workflow. It's easy to learn and very reliable. The embedded printer drives appear to reduce the data transfer time compared to the manufacturer's own drive, so the productivity of our Mitsubishi printers is increased.

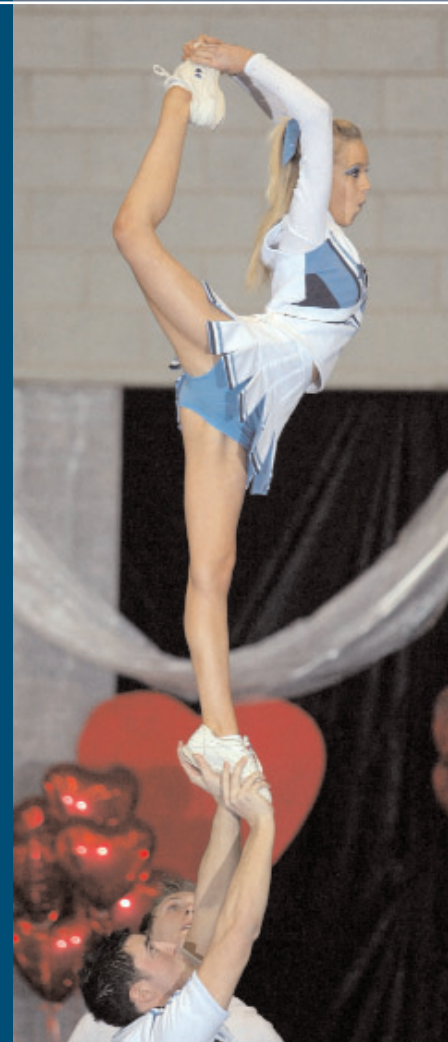
6.30pm Every six performances there is a 10-minute break, but this does not offer me any relief as a competition for the spectators is conducted during this time and I must capture it. The competitions can be anything from best dressed fan, or best dancing, to standing on one leg for the longest amount of time. We shoot these because spectators love to buy images of themselves involved in the competition. And it's an extra moneymaker for us.

Event-Photos sponsors a few of these ad-hoc competitions with a free

photograph. It's all a bit of fun and promotes our presence. Last year we accidentally introduced a new section of the competition. During an unplanned break in proceedings, due to a technical problem with the sound system, we invited teams to run on to the floor, pose in a mad way and then get off to allow the next group on, this went on for more than 30 minutes and was so much fun for the spectators as well as competitors that it has become a regular section on the program. The print sales we make from this are a welcome addition, too, so we make sure to do it again this year.

8.30pm Ian has finished taking team shots for the day, and the sales guys are on their knees crying: “no more, please”. We know things are about to get really manic. It's award





“It’s like a bomb going off when the winning team is called”

presentation time; now we are running on adrenalin.

Each division is called to the floor, and all the competitors sit in a circle with their team. Awards are given for 3rd, 2nd and 1st in each division, then, when all the competitors are seated, a grand prize is awarded to the best display of the day. This award is really valuable, as it can provide financial assistance for the best team to enter the world championships in Florida for up to 70 members. It’s much coveted.

9.30pm *We are the Champions* is belting out from the sound system around the hall. A hush falls and the main organiser, Andrea Kullberg, the highest ever achieving cheerleader, starts to read out the winners’ names.

Ian and I run around the floor like a pair of lunatics photographing each team as they are presented with their awards. The noise is unbelievable – the screaming, shouting and cheering from the crowd is deafening.

It’s time for the biggie – the Grand

Champions are about to be announced. Ian is standing next to me shouting but I can’t hear him. It’s like a bomb going off when the winning team is called. They’re on the far side of the floor and, between them and us, some 1000 or more people are jumping, screaming and crying. We run around and manage to get the shot. Quickly, download the files, and wait for more sales to follow.

10.30pm We are finally done. Just the Event-Photos team and the Futurecheer team of about 30 are left in the hall. It’s quiet, but we can still hear the screaming outside. We tidy up, re-stock with paper and mounts, empty the bins, put batteries on charge, and reflect on a manic but highly successful day. We’ve sold out of 8x10s so I put a call out to one of our Event-Teams, begging media.

But now, it’s curry time. More reflection can come later, because we have to do it all again in the morning with another 2000 cheerleaders. ■