

A Look Back at the Beijing Olympics:  
**Through  
the Lens  
of Ron Wyatt**

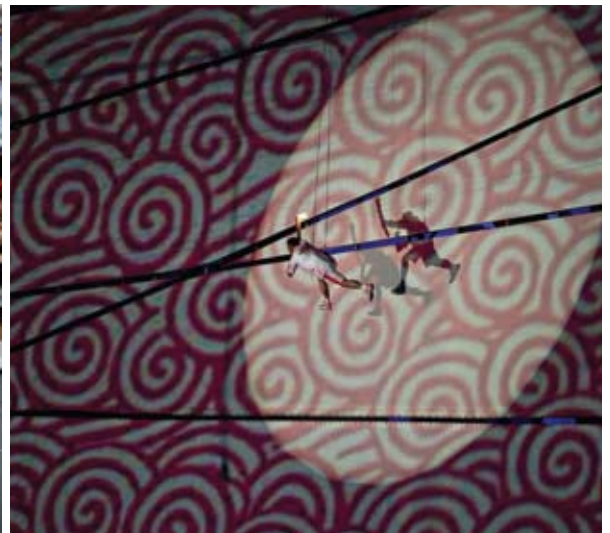
*While the 2008 Olympics are distant, albeit unforgettable memories, we thought it would be appropriate to show the Games again through the lenses of master sports photographer Ron Wyatt. As breathtaking as the TV coverage was, great still images provide a completely different, yet just as impressive, perspective. —Ed.*

By Alice B. Miller

For photographer Ron Wyatt ([www.ronwyattphotos.com](http://www.ronwyattphotos.com)), of Piscataway, NJ, covering the 2008 Olympic Games was nothing short of amazing. A corporate photographer, Wyatt was in Beijing working for Kodak, creating dramatic super-sized sporting and cultural images for the Kodak Hospitality Suite and recording hospitality program events, such as tours of the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square.

I spoke with Wyatt just days after his return to the U.S., when the experience was still fresh in his mind. He shared his strategy, workflow and observations, providing a 360-degree look at capturing a world-class sporting event.





## Plan of Attack

Wyatt's top priority while in Beijing was to ensure maximum image variety and impact for the Kodak hospitality suite. "I was hired by Kodak because I have a corporate background and I'm able to work well with executives," he says. "Plus they liked my work at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens."

In preparation, Wyatt arrived in China a week early to scope things out and develop a shooting strategy. From the opening ceremony through the closing of the Games, he was frequently up at 7 a.m., after post-production and back-up sessions that often continued until four in the morning. Relying on a system of buses, taxis and a comfortable pair of walking shoes, Wyatt made his way to multiple venues each day, capturing magnificent images of basketball, water polo, diving, women's 100 meter, tennis, boxing, tae kwon do, kayaking, wrestling, beach volleyball, ping pong, et al. Using the press center as a transportation hub, he returned between each event in order to catch a bus to his next venue. "You could actually miss events waiting for buses," says Wyatt.

Given the gamut of imagery he captured, it's a wonder Wyatt didn't have a personal escort. "Depending on the schedule of the next event and how long it would take to get there, I figured out how long I could stay at any one event," he explains. "At night, I grabbed a cab back to the hotel from the press center and processed my digital files, backing them up on the hard drive. When I had to shoot a hospitality party or program event, I covered two or three events and finished by two in the afternoon. I would get back to the hotel, change clothes and go to dinner." On those early nights, he was back at the hotel by 11 p.m. to catch up on sleep.

Wyatt shot RAW on his Nikon D3, with final images requiring

just a little extra contrast. He filled up two 320GB Western Digital Passport Portable hard drives then backed up everything on a 2TB Western Digital My Book back at the hotel before erasing it from the computer hard drive.

For daytime events, sun glare and backlighting were not a problem because the sun rarely shined. Most outdoor events were held at night to avoid the afternoon heat. The U.S. beach volleyball games were in the morning so they could be broadcast prime time back home. "Morning events helped you get in multiple events in a day. One day, I covered seven events to catch up from covering the Great Wall tour the day before."

For the opening ceremony, scheduled to start at 8 p.m., photographers had to be at the bird's nest by 3 p.m. Wyatt recalls, "It must have been 100 degrees. We sat in the hot sun with no food, just water, for five hours before it even started. Fortunately, I had credentials for the rehearsal, so I knew what to expect. It blew me away. By the time I got back to the Press Center, it was about 1:00 a.m. Back at the hotel, around 2:00 or 2:30 a.m., I edited my files in Aperture, lightly touching up some 30 shots in Photoshop for the Kodak hospitality suite. I threw my pix on Apple's MobileMe Web Gallery every few days, so clients and prospective clients could see what I was doing."

Every night when he got back to his hotel Wyatt would select the shots he needed for the suite and for his blog. After a quick edit, he would burn a CD for Kodak, one for Zuma Press—where he sent some stock images—and set aside files for his blog. Once he had all those selections, he would save them to his portable hard drive, then to his 2TB My Book.

"There was one shot I worked very hard to get and finally got it,"





says Wyatt. “While an archer was lining up and waiting to shoot his arrow, I had to guess when he’d release it. I was hoping he’d do it before I ran out of buffer. Finally, he released the arrow and my image stopped it. I won’t say how many frames it took me to get that image (pg. 50), but it was worth it. The archer went on to win the gold medal.”

There was no rehearsal for the closing ceremony, so it was difficult to know what to expect and where. “Everything was happening so fast, I had to be ready for anything,” he recalls. “I had a 200–400mm f/4 lens on a D3, another body with a 70–200mm f/2.8, and a D300 with a 14–24mm f/2.8 lens. Having to navigate with all my equipment, with photographers to the left and right, and lamps in the way was quite a hassle. I gave my ticket to the people sitting behind me and told them I would send them some pictures so I could stand and shoot. I felt bad because they paid for a ticket and I was blocking their view, but I wasn’t going to miss my shots. I also gave them a couple of Kodak pins. Pins were a big deal over there.”

### Gearing Up

Well prepared for any photographic eventuality, Wyatt modified a suitcase to accommodate a range of photo gear. “I had a good system that included a Samsonite suitcase converted to use for my

equipment,” he says. “Continental Airlines is one of my clients, so I called them and asked for permission to bring three carry-ons onto the plane. I was very grateful that they agreed. When I packed to leave Beijing, I wondered how I had managed to make everything fit. Next time, I’ll take pictures so I’ll know.”

This was the first time Wyatt used Nikon equipment on assignment. In his words, he was “impressed with the whole system and blown away with the results.” He packed a 200–400mm f/4 lens, a 24–70mm f/2.8 and a D3 locked in one compartment. Another compartment held a second D3 with various gadgets and necessities. A 400mm f/2.8, 300mm f/2.8, 70–200mm f/2.8, 24–70mm and a 14–24mm rounded out his lens options. “I used the Nikkor 14–17mm wide-angle lens a lot during the opening ceremony,” he says. “My favorite lens is the Nikkor 200–400mm f/4. I did 99 percent of my work with that lens. Clarity, no noise, easy to use. Most of the time I shot ISO 2000. I had two Nikon Speedlight SB-800s with me; good thing. One of them broke when the bag fell over.”

One day, even when shooting beach volleyball in the rain, Wyatt’s camera got soaked and still pulled through like a champ. He recalls, “I wanted to get the beach volleyball games out to Zuma Press because it involved the U.S. women’s team and they were going for the gold medal [which they went on to win]. I had the camera covered, but it was raining hard. Soon, none of the func-



tions worked. Fortunately, both Nikon and Canon had professional services there to handle any and all technical problems. After the game, I went to the Press Center. Nikon fixed the camera in less than an hour. Very impressive.”

The Olympic Committee required that photographers wear fishnet jackets, which worked well for Wyatt. “I kept my wallet in one pocket, where I could zip it up. I had my four SanDisk Extreme Ducati Edition 8GBs, Ultra2 8GB, Ultra2 4GB and 2GB cards, and 512MB cards in ThinkTank cases in another zipped pocket. My BlackBerry, just for emails, was in another pocket. I purchased a phone in China so I could receive and make calls because it was cheaper to call home on this phone than to use my Blackberry. The BlackBerry was one of my most important pieces of equipment. Its strong vibrations alerted me of new messages; its blinking signal told me messages were waiting.”

The Olympic organizers offered many conveniences to minimize wear and tear on photographers. They provided a system for working out your next day’s schedule so you’d know what time you had to get up and be able to output a copy of your schedule. Once the Games started, McDonald’s was opened at the Press Center. “By the time I left, McDonald’s gave me two Olympic pins because I was one of their best customers,” recalls Wyatt. “The service was excellent, the food was always hot and convenient. There was also a post office, UPS, cafeteria, massage, beauty parlor and fitness center.”

When pressed, Wyatt admitted he had one complaint: It was very difficult to get images with clean backgrounds. All the photo positions had TV cameras. “The organizers thought of everything, but I don’t think they considered making the photo positions clear for photographers. As a sports photographer, basically you want to have Beijing 2008 or the rings in every image, if possible. As a corporate photographer, I wanted to catch the peak action. Either way, it was difficult to find a clear background for your images.

“I am a news junkie, but for my 20 days in Beijing, there was no news for me. It’s far better to go and experience things yourself. I had such a wonderful experience in China. Being a photographer is the greatest job in the world.”



*Alice B. Miller is the founder of Plum Communications ([www.plumcomm.com](http://www.plumcomm.com)), an editorial services resource for the photoimaging industry. Formerly editor of Studio Photography magazine, Alice has a clientele that includes photographers, manufacturers, publications and associations. She is a vice president, board member and director of public relations for the International Photographic Council.*