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# Famed sports photographer speaks at WKU

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Simon Bruty, known for his work with Sports Illustrated, ESPN and the I covering multiple World Cups, Olympics and Super Bowls, traveling for Megan Rapinoe, Alex Ovechkin and Brad Pitt to a group of Western Kent community members in WKU's Jody Richards Hall auditorium on Wedn Canon's Explorers of Light program, which connects industry figures with lectures and workshops. (Grace Ramey/[grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com](mailto:grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com))

Grace Ramey

Photojournalism students packed into Western Kentucky University's Jody Richards Hall auditorium Wednesday night to learn from a decorated sports photographer.

Simon Bruty, known for his work with Sports Illustrated, ESPN and the International Olympic Committee, visited WKU this week to impart knowledge gained over the course of his career onto the next generation of photojournalists.

"Sports photography can look a little misleading," Bruty told attendees. "It looks like you could show up at just the right time, point your new, long shiny lens at what's happening in front of you, and let the autofocus do its job – 'hey presto' – and walk away with a Picasso in your back pocket."

But reality, Bruty said, is a little bit different than that.

"You have to fight for your position, make sure that the decisions you make are the right ones early on and then believe in them," he said. "Because with sports photography, there are no second chances."

His trip to Bowling Green came about thanks to Canon's Explorers of Light program, which connects industry figures with photography students, businesses and freelancers through lectures and workshops. WKU participated in the program's inaugural run back in 1994.

A UK native from the Southampton area, the young Bruty got his start in the photo industry thanks to his persistence. He earned a visit with famed photo agency Allsport after calling incessantly.

“Eventually they were (like) – ‘how do we stop this guy from phoning us?’ ” Bruty recalled. “They said, ‘why don’t you come up and see us?’ ”

He said Allsport wasn’t interested in his work at the time, as his portfolio wasn’t anything special.

“High school stuff, not exactly cutting edge sports photography,” Bruty said. But since the agency needed someone to handle day-to-day chores, he was taken on.

“A lot of great photographers were working there, and that was my education right there and then,” Bruty said.

Working with Allsport opened Bruty’s mind to other ways of shooting athletics. The agency had deals with others around the globe, and he was able to view the shots that came in. The work of an agency in France in particular challenged what Bruty thought sports photography was.

“I would see a lot of stuff from an agency in France, and they had a very different take on what I was doing,” he said. “They had sports I had never seen photographed before ... [they] had this incredibly artistic view of photographing the same event that I was going to.”



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His time at Allsport kicked off a career that has seen Bruty cover multiple World Cups, Olympics and Super Bowls, traveling from Zambia to Colombia to Qatar and getting up close and personal with stars like Megan Rapinoe, Alex Ovechkin and even Brad Pitt.

No matter how famous the subject, Bruty said the critical part of a one-on-one shoot is ensuring that both parties have bought into the process.

“The important thing is how you interact, and how invested they are in what you’re doing,” he said. “If they’re not interested in it, you’re really going to struggle.”

Bruty said he feels as though sports photographers may get the short end of the stick sometimes, even though their contributions to the field – shooting in all weather conditions, utilizing strobe lighting – have been crucial to its development.

Nonetheless, he said sports photography has the ability to capture an athletic moment better than other mediums.

“A still image, in a sporting event, is something that makes people stop, makes them look and makes them remember,” Bruty said. “I don’t think you can really recall too much TV footage, but you can recall a still image.”

His recipe for a great sports photo? A combination of concentration, preparation and luck.

“It’s one thing to be lucky. It’s another thing to take advantage of the luck that is presented to you,” Bruty said.

Some of the work he presented during his lecture included frames of tennis great Roger Federer hitting a between-the-legs shot, Argentina’s celebration after winning the 2022 World Cup and sideline moments from the New England Patriots’ victory in Super Bowl LI.

He said it’s hard for him to name his favorite shoot from his diverse body of work, as he doesn’t wish to remain in the past.

“I’m still thinking I’m going to take the next great sports photograph,” Bruty said. “I haven’t retired, I’m not a statue. I want to keep moving forward.”

His work isn’t finished. Once he’s left the Hill, Bruty is set to cover Sunday’s NFC Championship between the Philadelphia Eagles and San Francisco 49ers.

“That’s where I want to take my all-time greatest photograph – at the ‘next’ assignment,” Bruty said.

