

Melbourne has a reputation for four seasons in a day. For sports photographers that reputation is a threat and an opportunity at once. Wind, rain, low sun, sudden cold fronts, and swirling dust can wreck a shoot if you are unprepared, or they can deliver dramatic, editorial images that separate a run-of-the-mill game day gallery from a portfolio that gets noticed. I shoot regularly for community clubs, state-level competitions and commercial clients through Pure Sport Images, so I have learned which preparations actually matter, when to accept compromise, and how to protect people and gear without missing the decisive moment.

Why this matters Sport is unpredictable already; weather multiplies that unpredictability. A single unprotected lens element can fog, a camera battery can die faster in cold, a gust of wind can send a goal celebration off-balance. Those failures translate into lost assignments and unhappy clients. Managing weather is not only about gear insurance, it is about maintaining trust and producing consistent work under conditions most photographers avoid.

Plan before you arrive A full season's worth of small decisions pays off more than one heroic sprint on match day. Start with basic recon. Check the forecast from two reputable services, then re-check 90 minutes before kick-off. In Melbourne, a light drizzle in the morning can become a heavy shower by afternoon. Know the venue layout. Where are the sheltered areas for players and officials? Which parts of the field are exposed to prevailing winds? Is the course or pitch soggy underfoot? Having this knowledge ahead of time allows you to place yourself where light and shelter meet, not where you happened to park.

Communicate with stakeholders. Tell the coach, event manager, or club contact what you need to execute the job safely: a covered position for team photos, a place to charge batteries, or a brief time-out to swap lenses. Most clubs know the value of good photography and will cooperate if you present practical, minimal requests. If you work regularly with a venue, develop a small venue notebook: ideal shot locations, power outlets, safe spots for equipment. Over a season that notebook becomes a strategic [local sports photographer Melbourne](#) advantage.

Gear choices that change outcomes Camera bodies and lenses are not equal in wet or windy conditions. Weather-sealed bodies and lenses reduce risk, but they do not make you invulnerable. Even the best seals can fail at mounting points or with repeated exposure. That is why redundancy is essential. Carry at least one spare camera body and a second battery for every hour you expect to shoot in cold conditions. Batteries lose capacity as temperature drops. A rule of thumb I use: for every 10 degrees Celsius below 20, expect a 10 to 20 percent reduction in battery life. Keep spares warm in an inner jacket pocket and swap them before they die, not after.

Lens choices matter here too. Fast telephoto primes focus quicker and isolate subjects, but swapping a prime in the rain is risky. A telephoto zoom with weather sealing gives flexibility and reduces the need to change lenses. For most club and state-level sports in Melbourne, I prefer a 70-200mm f/2.8 and a 24-70mm f/2.8 or 24-105mm for wider context and after-game coverage. If you must change lenses, do it under shelter and point the camera mount down to reduce the chance of droplets landing on the sensor.

Protective accessories are not optional. Use lens hoods to reduce flare and protect the front element. A squeeze-style rain sleeve or a commercially available rain cover will keep a camera operational in moderate rain. Clear, close-fitting rain covers allow access to controls. For heavier downpours, an umbrella mounted to a monopod or stand gives shelter while keeping both hands free to operate the camera. I also always carry high-quality microfibre cloths, silica gel packs for kit storage, and resealable plastic bags for temporary storage of wet items.

Checklist before match day Use this short checklist when packing to shoot in unpredictable Melbourne weather:

- two camera bodies and three batteries minimum
- a weather-resistant telephoto zoom and a versatile wide-to-standard zoom

- rain cover or sleeve, lens hoods, microfibre cloths
- small umbrella and gaffer tape or clamps for quick mounting
- a waterproof bag or dry bag for electronics and paperwork

Field tactics under wind and rain Being physically on the field modifies the way you think about light, composition, and safety. Wind affects stability and trajectory. In outdoor sports where balls or equipment move unpredictably, anticipate the wind's pattern rather than reacting to it. If the wind is gusting from the left, place yourself on the right side of play where athletes' faces will be clearer when they turn into the wind, and where thrown or kicked balls are more likely to travel into your frame. Positioning reduces the number of frames you need and increases your keeper rate.

Rain changes light and tone. Overcast skies provide even, soft lighting that flatters skin and removes harsh contrast. Use that to your advantage for portraits and sideline captures. When rain is heavy, highlight droplets and reflections: a low angle that includes wet turf or puddles can create compelling reflections of players mid-action. Use faster shutter speeds to freeze falling rain if you want to show motion in the droplets. I typically aim for a shutter speed 1/1000 for high-speed ball sports, but where moisture in the air reduces contrast, opening the aperture a stop or increasing ISO preserves exposure without sacrificing sharpness dramatically. Judging the trade-off between noise and motion blur is an editorial choice that depends on client expectations.

Keep your distance from sidelines that are saturated or unstable. Turf can become treacherous; a slipping photographer is an insurance problem and a distraction for officials. Avoid positions where a sliding player could collide with your tripod or you. If you must work near the action, secure your monopod or tripod with sandbags and use a tether for your camera.

Practical camera settings for adverse weather There is no single correct exposure setting when conditions change, but there are reliable starting points. Use continuous autofocus and back-button focus to track subjects. Select an AF area mode that matches the sport and your lens: single-point AF for headshots, zone AF for dynamic plays. If shooting with a telephoto in rain, use a slightly larger AF area to account for reduced contrast and falling droplets.

Shutter speed choices depend on the sport. For rugby or Australian rules football where players accelerate quickly, start at 1/1250 and adjust by discipline. For soccer, 1/1000 often works. If you want motion blur to suggest speed on a wet field, drop to 1/500 while panning. For panning, lower shutter speeds require practice, but on wet grass you can produce evocative images that show spray and movement. Adjust ISO conservatively; modern cameras handle high ISO well, but keep noise reduction minimal to preserve texture.

Dealing with condensation and temperature swings Condensation is a silent killer for optics. Moving from a warm car or [Melbourne sports photographer](#) tent to a cold, wet field can cause moisture to form on lenses and inside bodies. To avoid this, keep bodies and lenses in a sealed camera bag when leaving warm environments. If you must move gear between temperature extremes, sealing it in a resealable plastic bag while it acclimatizes reduces internal condensation risk. When condensation appears, do not power up electronics until they dry. Wiping the exterior with a microfibre cloth and allowing items to air-dry in a dry, warm place is safer than trying to speed-dry with a hairdryer.

After the event, open your kit and let it dry naturally in a ventilated space. Insert silica gel or desiccant packets in camera bags and cases. For long-term storage during a wet season, a small dry cabinet makes a difference for expensive glass.

Safety and people management Weather affects people more than gear. Players, officials, and spectators have safety concerns that can create liability if ignored. Photographing under dangerous conditions without clear safety measures is not professionalism; it is exposure to risk. Communicate with event staff about dangerous conditions

and follow their lead. If a match is paused for lightning or severe weather, respect that pause. A quick photograph is not worth endangering lives or equipment.

Keep your own first-aid kit and water. In cold rain, hypothermia is a real risk, especially for volunteers and junior athletes. Offer a spare towel or a rain poncho to someone at the side when they need it. Those small acts build rapport and often result in better images because people relax around you.

Editing with weather in mind Post-processing choices should reflect the narrative you want to tell. Rain and overcast conditions often benefit from contrast adjustments and selective sharpening that brings out droplets and fabric texture. When highlights reflect wet surfaces, control specular highlights with local adjustments rather than global clipping. For editorial work, maintain natural skin tones and avoid over-saturating drenched jerseys; water changes color saturation and you should respect that in the final images.

If you deliver galleries quickly after a game, prioritize a balanced subset of images: a few action frames, a couple of emotional portraits, and a wide establishing shot that shows conditions. Clients often prefer quick turnaround with clear selection, then a more complete edit if requested.

Trade-offs and judgement calls Shooting in bad weather is a series of judgement calls. Sometimes the safest, most professional choice is to decline a shoot rather than risk personnel and equipment. If you have insurance and the client accepts shared risk, proceed with explicit terms. If you are out in the elements, you will face trade-offs: accept more noise in exchange for a sharp subject, or embrace motion blur to convey atmosphere. There is no single right choice, only choices that serve the story and the client's needs.

When to accept compromise: team photos and official portraits deserve crisp, controlled conditions. If the weather prevents that, arrange a reshoot or an indoor alternative. Action images, however, can gain a cinematic quality in wind and rain, and clients who value editorial flair will often prefer those to technically perfect but sterile images.

Case studies from the field One Friday evening game at a suburban ground stands out. Rain arrived ten minutes into the second half. I had a single body and one lens on me because the late arrival had been a schedule snafu. The ground had pockets of standing water. Rather than chase every play, I moved to a lower angle and shot through the splashing turf as players slid past. I chose a slightly slower shutter speed, panned with the main attackers, and exposed to keep detail in the jerseys. The result was a small portfolio of images that communicated the intensity of the match more effectively than a crisp, dry-series would have. The client used those images to promote the club and the series. The lesson was simple: when gear is limited, composition and choices matter more than hardware.

Another time, a state-level tournament had a strong wind that turned flags into hazards. I called the event manager and requested that volunteers remove loose objects from the sidelines and to flag me if a gust created a safety issue. That simple communication prevented near-misses and allowed me to focus on capturing decisive moments rather than dodging debris.

Branding and client expectations with Pure Sport Images If you work through a brand like Pure Sport Images, the relationship to weather management is collaborative. Clients expect consistent quality across a season. Set expectations early: describe how weather affects shooting, what you can guarantee, and what you will do to mitigate issues. Offer packages that include a reshoot or indoor portrait session for key team shots. That transparency protects your reputation and reduces conflict when the weather turns sour.

Final practical habits that last Good habits compound. Clean your gear after each wet shoot, rotate batteries, and log any failures so you can prevent them next time. Invest in a small trolley or waterproof bag to carry spares and a folding stool. Learn how to shoot quickly with one hand when you are holding an umbrella in the other. Build relationships with clubs so they understand when you need a 10-minute break to change lenses under cover. Those social contracts matter as much as your technical kit.

A closing thought without cliché: Melbourne weather will keep testing you. Each soggy match teaches a useful skill. If you prepare, communicate, and make careful trade-offs, you will deliver images that are both reliable and memorable. That combination is what keeps clients coming back, and what turns challenging conditions into a professional advantage.



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