



| FIELD GUIDE · LIVE EVENTS

Pro Wrestling Video Production

How to film and live stream a wrestling show: camera positions, shot by shot framing, live switching, audio, lighting and streaming.

By Jeff Schniers, founder of The Studio Creative. Nearly twenty years in the ring, and the years since behind the camera.

How to use this guide

Pro wrestling is the hardest live sport to film well, because it is a sport and a stage show at the same time. The action is fast, it leaves the ring without warning, and the most important shot of the night is often a face in the corner rather than the move in the middle.

This guide is written for promoters, camera operators and directors. It is general craft, the way a working crew approaches a show, and it scales: the same ideas apply to two cameras in a hall and six in an arena. Read the seven rules first. Everything after them is detail.

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The seven rules

- 1 Every camera has one job**
One wide camera that never moves, handhelds at ringside for the close work, one camera for entrances.
- 2 Keep the lens low**
At ringside, shoot through the gap between the bottom rope and the second rope whenever you can.
- 3 Go wide before a big move**
The leap and the landing both have to fit in the frame.
- 4 Never cut during a pin**
Hold the shot with the referee's hand and both shoulders until the count is over.
- 5 Faces tell the story**
One camera on the hero, one on the villain, so there is always a reaction to cut to.
- 6 Cut on the impact, then the face**
The hit is the sport. The reaction is the show.
- 7 Record every camera**
The live cut is one night. The separate recordings are months of marketing.

Promoters

Use it to plan a show, brief a crew, and know what to ask for before you hire one. Start with pages 3, 13 and 15.

Camera operators

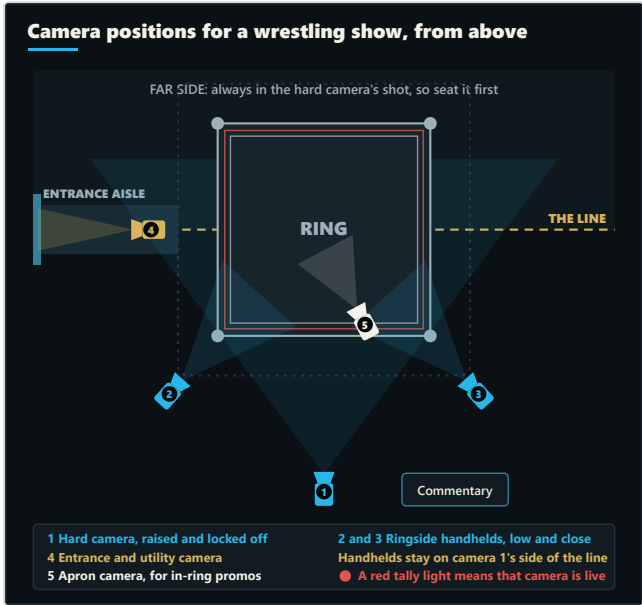
Pages 4 to 8 are yours: lens height, the line, and the shot for every moment of a match.

Directors

Pages 8 and 9 cover the cut: one camera per wrestler, the calls, and when not to cut at all.

The crew and the cameras

A professional wrestling broadcast is built on a small number of cameras that each have one job.



Where each operator stands. The dashed gold line is the one rule nobody crosses.

1. The hard camera

Elevated, centered on one side of the ring, locked off on a tripod. It carries most of the match and defines the front of the show. Wrestlers work toward it, the director always has it as a safe shot, and the crowd on the far side is in its frame all night, so seat that side first.

2 and 3. Ringside handhelds

Low, mobile and close: faces, near falls, strikes, action on the floor. They stay on the hard camera's side of the ring so the action never flips direction on screen.

4. Entrance and utility

Entrances, crowd reactions, brawls through the audience, and the curtain after the match.

5. The apron, for promos

When a wrestler takes the microphone, a handheld operator steps onto the apron, outside the ropes, on the hard camera's side.

Who does what

ROLE	JOB ON THE NIGHT
Director	Calls every cut, warns the floor what is coming, keeps one eye on the next shot.
Technical director	Runs the switcher, graphics and replays. On small crews the director does this too.
Camera operators	Hold the frame while live, reposition while not. They need to read a match.
Audio mixer	Builds the broadcast mix, separate from the house sound.
Stream engineer	Watches the encoder, the connection and the backup recording.

HOW MANY CAMERAS?

Three is the working minimum: a hard camera, one handheld, and an entrance camera. A second handheld is the biggest single upgrade, because it lets one camera stay on each wrestler. One well operated camera beats three poorly operated ones.

Lens height and the line

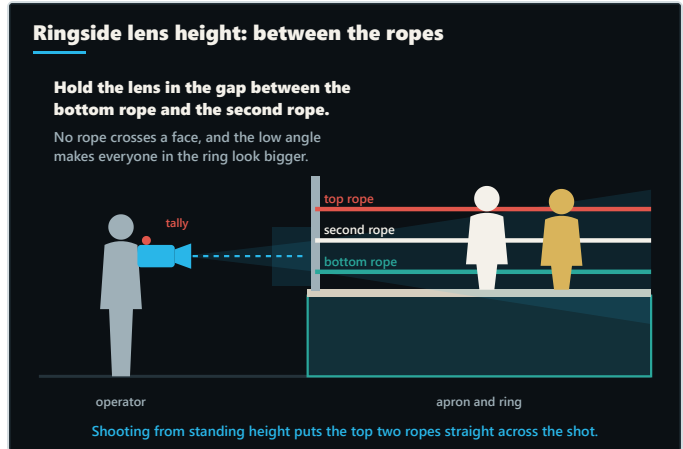
Shoot between the ropes

The single most useful habit for a ringside operator is lens height. Three ropes run across every shot of the ring, and from standing height the top two sit straight across the wrestlers' faces.

Drop the camera so the lens looks through the gap between the bottom rope and the second rope, and the ropes frame the action instead of covering it. It is a low, physically tiring position to hold for a full match, which is one reason experienced wrestling shooters are worth having.

MAKE IT EASIER

Knee pads, a shoulder rig or an easy-rig style support, and a monitor you can see from below make a three hour show at that height possible.



Lens height at ringside. From standing height the same shot has two ropes across it.



What that height looks like at Lucha Boom. Nothing crosses the wrestlers, and the crowd fills the background.

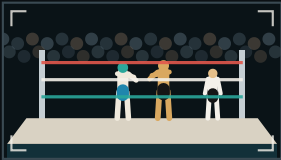
Never cross the line

Draw a line through the ring, parallel to the hard camera. Every camera stays on the hard camera's side of it. If a camera crosses, a wrestler who was running left to right is suddenly running right to left, and the viewer loses track of who is where. It is the same rule that governs every televised sport. The one exception is a deliberate reverse angle for a replay, labeled as one.

The six shots of a match

A match is a series of moments, and each one has a shot that suits it. Learn these six and the rest follows.

How to frame each moment of a wrestling match



WIDE

The lock-up

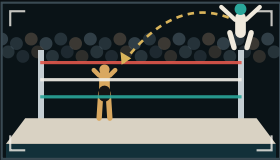
Start wide. Show both wrestlers, the referee and where they are.



CLOSE

The strike, then the face

Cut on the impact, then go to the reaction. The face sells it.



WIDE, EARLY

High-flying moves

Go wide before the climb, so the leap and the landing both fit.



MEDIUM, LOW

The pin attempt

Referee's hand and both shoulders in frame. Never cut during a count.



CLOSE, TWICE

The kick-out

One camera is on each wrestler, so there are two faces to cut between.



CLOSE, FROM THE APRON

The in-ring promo

Step onto the apron. Face and microphone, crowd behind, no ropes.

MOMENT	SHOT	THE RULE
Lock-up, chain wrestling	Wide	Position only reads from a distance. Do not go close too soon.
Strikes	Medium, then close	Cut on the impact, then go to the face of whoever took it.
High-flying moves	Wide, early	Be wide before the climb. Frame for the landing, not the takeoff.
Pin attempts	Medium, low	Referee's hand, both shoulders. Never cut during a count.
Kick-outs	Close, twice	Disbelief on one face, relief on the other. Cut between them.
In-ring promos	Close, from the apron	Face and microphone, crowd behind, no ropes in the way.

Shot sizes, defined

SIZE	WHAT IS IN FRAME
Wide	The whole ring, the referee, and the first rows of the crowd.
Medium	Both wrestlers head to toe, with a little room to move.
Close	Head and shoulders of one wrestler. The face fills the frame.

LEAVE ROOM TO MOVE

Frame a little looser than feels right. Wrestlers move suddenly and in any direction, and a shot that loses its subject is worse than one that is slightly wide.

HOLD STILL WHEN LIVE

A steady medium shot beats a shaky close one. Reframe when your tally light is off.

Moment by moment

The lock-up and chain wrestling

Open every match on the wide shot. The audience needs to see who is in the ring, where the referee is and how big the room is before any close-up means anything. Holds and counters early in a match are about position, and position only reads from a distance.

Strikes

The cut should land with the hit, not before it. Cutting early warns the viewer that something is coming, and cutting late misses it. Once the strike has landed, the next shot is the reaction: the pain on the face of the wrestler who took it, or the look of the one who threw it. That second shot is what makes a viewer at home feel the first one.



Low and close on a hold. The strain on the face is the shot, and the referee is still in frame.

High-flying moves



Anticipation: framed for the top rope before the wrestler leaves it.

When a wrestler starts to climb, the director goes to the wide shot before the move, not during it. A dive covers a lot of ground, and a tight shot shows the takeoff or the landing but never both.

Lucha libre is the fastest style there is to shoot for exactly this reason. The dives come off the top rope and over it, so the cameras have to be framed for where the wrestler is going to land.

ON HEADSET

The director's warning is simple: "top rope, going wide." The handheld that is not live moves to the landing side.

Anticipation is the skill

A wrestler climbing to the top rope, a referee getting into position, a partner reaching for a tag: a trained operator is already reframing before the move happens. Someone who has never shot wrestling is always one beat late, and in wrestling one beat late means the move happened off screen. If you are new to it, watch a few full shows from the promotion before you film one, and learn what each wrestler does before their biggest moves.

Moment by moment, continued

Pin attempts and near falls

On a pin attempt the story is the count. Frame it so the viewer can see three things at once: the referee's hand hitting the mat, the shoulders that are down, and the shoulder that might come up. Then hold it. Cutting away during a count is the most common mistake in amateur wrestling video, because the kick-out happens in a fraction of a second.

The moment the count breaks, the rule flips. Now the story is in the faces: the wrestler who cannot believe it was only two, and the one who just survived.



After a big moment: referee, both wrestlers and the crowd's reaction in one low frame.



Character lives in the close-up. A low angle makes a wrestler look larger than life.

The crowd

A reaction shot tells the viewer at home how to feel about what they just saw. It belongs right after the big moment, for a second or two, and never in the middle of the action.

When the action leaves the ring

The nearest handheld goes with the fight and the hard camera widens out to keep both wrestlers and the crowd in frame. The operator follows the action through a moving crowd without becoming part of it, and stays out of the landing zone.

Facial expressions

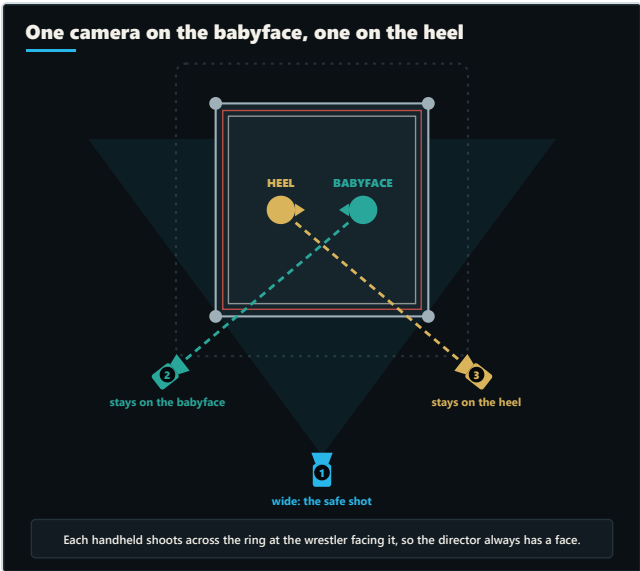
Wrestling is sold in close-ups. The exhausted look before a comeback, the villain's reaction to the crowd, the second of doubt before a big risk: these are the shots people remember, and the easiest to miss. An operator who knows when the match is about to slow down is already tight on a face when it happens.



A brawl at the barricade. The handheld follows, the hard camera holds the wide.

One camera on the babyface, one on the heel

The hero is the babyface and the villain is the heel, and a match is a conversation between the two. The simplest way to never miss a reaction is to give each of them a camera.



Each handheld shoots across the ring at the wrestler facing it.

One ringside handheld stays on the babyface. The other stays on the heel. The hard camera holds the wide. With that setup the director always has three useful pictures: the whole ring, the babyface's face and the heel's face.

The heel lands a cheap shot, and the cut goes to the babyface in pain, then to the heel enjoying it. The babyface fires up, and the cut goes to the heel backing away. The operators do not have to guess who matters. Each of them already knows.

Why across the ring?

Two wrestlers facing each other have their backs to the near corners. The camera on the left sees the face of the wrestler on the right, and the other way round. When they swap sides, the operators swap subjects, not positions.

A sequence, cut by cut

BEAT	CAMERA	WHY
Lock-up	1 wide	The audience learns where everyone is.
The heel loads up	3 heel	The sneer before the shot is half the story.
Impact	2 babyface	The pain on that face sells the hit.
The comeback	2 babyface, then 3	Stay through the fire-up, then show the heel's fear.
Big move coming	1 wide	Before the lift, so the lift and the landing both fit.
Pin attempt	1, pushed in	Hold it. Referee's hand and both shoulders.
Kick-out at two	2, then 3	Disbelief, then the scramble for the ropes.

TRY IT

The article that goes with this guide has a control room simulator: three live cameras, a switcher, and a director who explains every cut. thestudiocreative.com/post/pro-wrestling-video-production-live-streaming

Directing, tally lights and headsets

With four or five cameras pointed at one ring, every operator has to know whether their shot is the one going out.

Tally lights

A red tally light on the camera comes on the moment the director cuts to it. Red means hold the frame steady: do not reframe, do not move, do not refocus. When the light goes out, the operator is free to reposition for the next shot.

Production headsets

The headsets carry the rest. The director calls a camera ready before taking it, warns the floor about what is coming, and sends whichever handheld is not live to where the action is heading. That is how the right camera is already in position when a wrestler goes to the top rope. It is the difference between a broadcast that follows a match and one that chases it.

When to cut, and when not to

- ☐ Cut on the impact, not on the wind-up
- ☐ Cut to the wide BEFORE a climb or a lift
- ☐ Cut to a face when the match slows down
- ☐ Cut to the crowd right AFTER the pop
- ☐ Run the replay in the next rest hold
- ☒ Never cut during a pin count
- ☒ Never cut to a camera that is still moving
- ☒ Never cross the line for a live cut
- ☒ Never leave a finish early for a reaction
- ☒ Never show a camera operator by accident

Scaling the plan to the crew you have

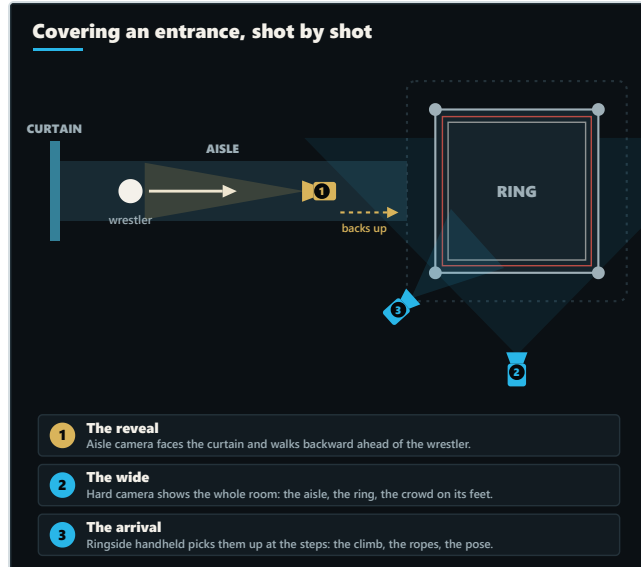
CAMERAS	THE SETUP	WHAT YOU GAIN
One	Hard camera only, operated, not locked off.	A complete record of the show. Zoom for pins and promos.
Two	Hard camera and one ringside handheld.	Faces and near falls. The first real cut.
Three	Add an entrance and utility camera.	Entrances, crowd shots, brawls on the floor.
Four	Add the second ringside handheld.	One camera on each wrestler. Always a face to cut to.
Five or six	Add a high wide shot and a roaming or jib camera.	Scale, replays from a second angle, arena shows.

The language of the cut

CALL	MEANING
"Ready two."	Camera 2 is next. Hold what you have.
"Take two."	Camera 2 is live. Its tally goes red.
"Three, find the heel."	Off-air instruction to reposition.
"Going wide."	Big move coming. Handhelds get clear.
"Stay, stay, stay."	A count is on. Nobody moves.
"Replay is ready."	The move is cued for the next lull.

Entrances and promos

Entrances: three shots, set before the music hits



Entrance coverage, in the order the shots are cut.

An entrance is a wrestler's first impression, and it gets its own camera. The operators have to be in place before the music hits.

The aisle camera starts at the ring end of the aisle, facing the curtain, and walks backward ahead of the wrestler so they are always coming toward the lens.

The hard camera holds the wide shot that shows the whole room reacting.

A ringside handheld waits at the ring steps and takes over for the climb, the ropes and the pose. The handheld that is not being used moves to the opposite corner, ready for the opponent.

WALKING BACKWARD

Clear the aisle of cables before doors, and give the aisle operator a spotter's hand on the shoulder if the room allows it.



The introduction at Lucha Boom.

In-ring promos: shoot from the apron

When a wrestler takes the microphone, the handheld operator steps up onto the ring apron, outside the ropes, on the hard camera's side. From there the shot is close enough for the face and the microphone with the crowd behind, and there is no rope in the way at all.

The hard camera holds the wide for the moments when the whole room reacts. Take a direct feed of the ring microphone: a promo recorded off the PA speakers is unusable.

After the bell

The match is not over when the bell rings. Stay wide for the finish and the referee's call, go close on the winner as the hand is raised, then find the loser: the walk back up the aisle is often the start of the next story. The entrance camera picks them up at the curtain. Keep recording until the ring is empty.

Camera settings and lighting

Settings for fast action

SETTING	STARTING POINT	WHY
Frame rate	60 frames per second where the platform allows it	Strikes and dives stay smooth, and slow motion replays hold up.
Shutter	About 1/120, faster for dives	Keeps fast movement sharp instead of smeared.
Exposure	Manual, set for the ring	Auto exposure pulses with every strobe and video wall change.
White balance	Manual, matched across every camera	Skin tones must not change color from one cut to the next.
Focus	Manual or face tracking you trust	Autofocus loves ropes. Ropes are always closer than faces.
Lenses	Wide zoom on the handhelds, long zoom on the hard camera	Handhelds work within a few feet. The hard camera works across the room.

MATCH THE CAMERAS BEFORE DOORS

Point every camera at the same spot in the ring under show lighting and match them on the multiview. Mismatched cameras are the fastest way for a stream to look cheap.

Light the ring, not the room



Bright ring, darker room. That contrast is what makes it look like television.

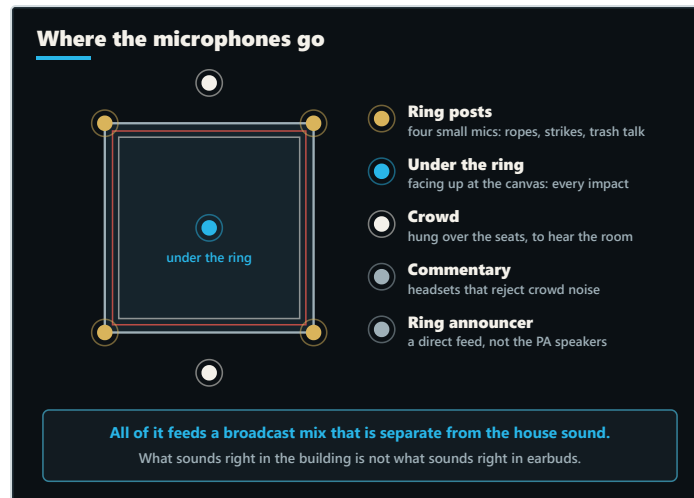
Cameras need even, bright light on the ring and less of it on the crowd. That contrast is what makes a wrestling ring look like television instead of a gymnasium.

Many independent venues are armories, halls and ballrooms with overhead lights that flicker on camera or leave one corner of the ring dark. Check the lighting during the site visit and supplement it where needed. No camera setting fixes a ring that is half in shadow.

- ☐ All four corners lit evenly
- ☐ No flicker at your frame rate and shutter
- ☐ Entrance area lit, not just the ring
- ☐ House lights low enough for contrast

Audio and entrance music

Wrestling that sounds thin looks fake. The sound of a body hitting the mat, a chop echoing through the building and a crowd reacting is what makes the action feel real at home.



Microphone placement for a wrestling broadcast.

Ring microphones

Mics under the ring facing up at the canvas and small mics on the ring posts capture impacts. Shotgun mics on the handhelds pick up whatever is closest to the lens.

Crowd microphones

Placed to hear the room rather than the three loudest people near a camera.

Commentary

Headset mics that reject crowd noise, a monitor feed of the program output, and a position quiet enough that the announcers are not shouting all night.

The ring announcer and the house

A direct feed from the ring microphone and the venue's sound board, so introductions and promos are clean.

The stream gets its own mix. What sounds right in the building is not what sounds right in earbuds, so the broadcast audio is balanced separately from the house.

Entrance music and the rights problem

This is the detail that catches new promotions. Entrance themes are a huge part of wrestling, and commercial music will get a stream muted, blocked or taken down on YouTube, Facebook and Twitch, sometimes in the middle of the main event. The options:

- ☐ Cleared or original entrance music for every wrestler on the card
- ☐ A distribution platform whose licensing covers the music you use
- ☐ A broadcast mix that handles entrances differently from the house

Decide before the show, not during it. This is not legal advice: ask a licensing professional about your own situation.

Internet, streaming and recording

Most failed wrestling streams fail on the connection, not the cameras. Wrestling venues are rarely built for broadcasting, and the building's Wi-Fi is shared with every fan's phone the moment the doors open.

The connection checklist

- ☐ A wired connection, tested in advance at the time of day the show runs
- ☐ Upload speed at least double the stream's bitrate
- ☐ A bonded cellular backup that combines several carriers
- ☐ The encoder on its own network, not the public Wi-Fi
- ☐ A test stream to a private destination before doors

Record everything

Record the program output and every camera separately, no matter what happens to the stream. If the internet fails, the show still exists, and the video on demand version can be better than the live one.

Bitrate, in plain numbers

STREAM	TYPICAL BITRATE	UPLOAD TO HAVE
720p at 60 frames	4 to 6 Mbps	12 Mbps or more
1080p at 60 frames	6 to 9 Mbps	18 Mbps or more

Platforms publish their own recommended settings and change them. Check the current numbers for the platform you stream to.

Where the show goes

A free stream on social platforms builds an audience. **Pay per view or subscription** earns from the fans a promotion already has. **Video on demand** keeps earning after the night is over. One show can go to more than one destination at the same time.

CAN YOU STREAM FROM A VENUE WITH BAD INTERNET?

Usually, yes. Bonded cellular combines multiple carriers into one connection, and it is how most independent wrestling gets streamed from buildings that were never wired for it. Test the venue ahead of time so there are no surprises at bell time.

When something breaks

WHAT FAILS	WHAT THE VIEWER SEES	WHAT YOU DO
Venue internet	Buffering, then a frozen frame.	Fail over to the bonded backup. Keep recording locally.
A camera	Nothing, if the director is awake.	Stay off it. The hard camera is always the safe shot.
House audio feed	A promo with no voice.	Bring up the ring and camera mics. Check the feed at the next break.
The encoder	The stream ends.	Restart to the same stream key. Post the full show on demand after.
Power	Everything stops.	Battery backup on the switcher, encoder and network gear buys time.

Graphics and the video after the show

Graphics that make it look like television

Match graphics, wrestler name bars, championship indicators, a countdown to bell time and sponsor placements are what separate a broadcast from a camera pointed at a ring. They are also where a promotion's sponsors get their value, since a logo on the stream is seen by everyone who watches live and everyone who watches the replay.

- ☐ Match card graphic for every bout
- ☐ Name bars, checked for spelling by the promotion
- ☐ Championship and stipulation indicators
- ☐ Countdown to bell time
- ☐ Sponsor bugs and full screen sponsor reads
- ☐ Replay wipe in the promotion's branding

BUILD IT BEFORE THE SHOW

The graphics package is built to the promotion's branding ahead of time, so on the night the operator is only triggering it. Nobody should be typing a wrestler's name during an entrance.

After the bell: the video that sells the next show

The live stream is one night. The footage is months of marketing. Because every camera is recorded separately, one show becomes:

DELIVERABLE	WHAT IT IS FOR
Highlight package	Delivered the same week, while people are still talking about the card.
Promo or commercial for the next event	The best thirty seconds of this show sells tickets to the next one.
Vertical clips for social media	One big move, one big reaction, captioned and ready to post.
Entrance and hype videos	Wrestlers share them with their own followers on the promotion's behalf.
Story pieces	Edits that carry a feud between shows.
Full matches on demand	A library that keeps earning, and a calling card for talent.



The reaction shot is the clip people share.

Show day checklist

Print this page. Most problems on a wrestling broadcast were decided days before the bell.

The week before

- ☐ Site visit: power, lighting, sight lines, internet speed test
- ☐ Hard camera position agreed and a riser booked if needed
- ☐ Run sheet from the promoter: matches, entrances, promos
- ☐ Entrance music plan settled for the stream
- ☐ Graphics built and names approved
- ☐ Stream destinations created and tested

Load-in

- ☐ Cables taped and out of the aisle and the ringside lane
- ☐ Cameras matched under show lighting
- ☐ Tally lights and headsets checked on every position
- ☐ Ring, crowd, commentary and house feeds all reaching the mixer
- ☐ Encoder, backup connection and recorders running

Before doors

- ☐ Crew meeting: the card, the big moments, who covers what
- ☐ Operators walk their lanes and their escape routes
- ☐ Private test stream watched on a phone, with sound
- ☐ Fresh batteries and empty cards in everything

Bell time

- ☐ Every recorder rolling before the first entrance
- ☐ Director and operators on headset
- ☐ Someone watching the stream itself, not the multiview

After the show

- ☐ Stop recordings, then back up every card twice
- ☐ Note the time of every big moment while it is fresh
- ☐ Pull the first social clip that night

Questions to ask a production crew before you hire one

- ☐ Have your camera operators filmed wrestling before?
- ☐ How many cameras, and is every one recorded separately?
- ☐ Who directs, and have they called a match live?
- ☐ What is the backup if the venue internet fails?
- ☐ How do you handle entrance music on the stream?
- ☐ Do you build the graphics, and when do we approve them?
- ☐ What do we receive after the show, and how fast?
- ☐ Who owns the footage?

WHAT TO SEND YOUR CREW

The run sheet, the wrestlers' names as they should appear on screen, your logo and sponsor logos, the venue contact, and anything the cameras must not miss.

DISCRETION

Planning coverage sometimes means the crew needs to know where a big moment will happen. That information stays with the crew. Promoters have to be able to trust the people in the building.

Glossary

Apron

The strip of ring outside the ropes. Where the promo camera stands.

Babyface

The hero. The wrestler the crowd is meant to cheer.

Bonded cellular

Several mobile connections combined into one, used when venue internet cannot be trusted.

Hard camera

The fixed, raised, wide camera that defines the front of the show.

Heel

The villain. The wrestler the crowd is meant to boo.

ISO recording

Each camera recorded on its own, separate from the live cut.

Multiview

One monitor showing every camera at once, with the live one outlined in red.

Near fall

A pin attempt that is broken just before three.

Program

The output of the switcher: what the audience sees.

Switcher

The desk the director or technical director uses to choose the live camera.

Tally light

The red light on a camera that tells its operator they are live.

The line

An imaginary line through the ring, parallel to the hard camera. No live camera crosses it.

The pop

The crowd's reaction to a big moment.

Utility camera

A roaming camera for entrances, crowd shots and whatever else the show needs.

THE
STUDIO
CREATIVE**Want a crew that already works this way?**

The Studio Creative films and live streams pro wrestling, conferences and sports programs from Grand Blanc, Michigan, with a base in Lake Placid, Florida. Our founder wrestled for nearly twenty years, and our camera operators are experienced sports shooters who read a match the way a fan does.

Tell us about your next card: thestudiocreative.com/contact · (248) 243-9070

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