

Q&A

Valencia CF photographer Lázaro de la Peña on the art of the perfect social media shot

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Valencia CF was one of Blinkfire's first customers back in 2015 — and still are today. While we're in awe of the team's great athletes and the plays they make on the field, we've become groupies of one member of Valencia CF's organization: their photographer. Meet Lázaro de la Peña. He's been Valencia CF's photographer for more than 12 years. Lázaro's work is often used as social media best practices when we meet with partners — from training photos where a player is set against the backdrop of an adboard to in-game action photos like goal celebrations.

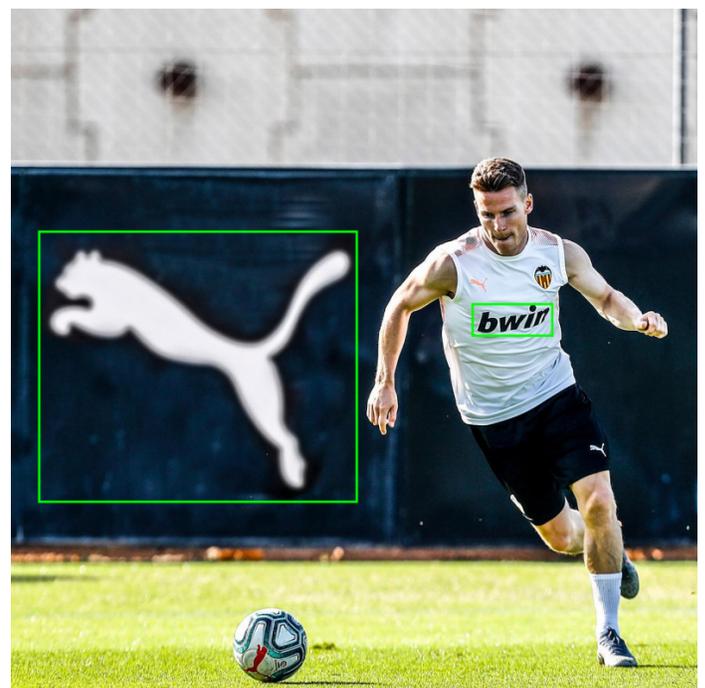
Our team in Valencia sat down with Lázaro to learn more about his photography, relationship with the players, and the elements of a great photo. Take a read through the Q&A, and browse some of his work — you'll understand why Lázaro's so popular amongst the Blinkfire team and his peers.

How has the rise of social media changed your daily work?

The workflow has changed completely. Priorities, timing, formats, public, exposure...everything has evolved and is still evolving at lightning speed. On top of that, each social platform has its own rules you need to adapt to stay ahead. Every day is a new challenge.

How do you maintain the balance between taking good photos while also giving brand exposure?

I try to think ahead and be in the right spot so the photos capture the protagonist(s) of the moment, but also the brands that I want to feature. This is the best way to get the different elements of the photograph together in a natural way.



To take the “perfect shot” how much do you improvise versus plan?

There's little place for planning when it comes to elite sports, but I certainly like to know what's expected of me as soon as possible. The right data is key for good planning, and I work with colleagues that help me get the information I need.

Chance often creates a great photo now and then, but good planning lets you get good shots every time.



Does brand tracking affect your work?

Having access to metrics can increase the pressure and urgency, but it also helps polish your work and implement improvements. Even more so if those metrics help you monetize content.

Describe your typical job on game days? What things do you need to keep in mind?

I try to keep a work process that ensures high-quality content for all the different social platforms. There are actually six different photoshoots: arrival of the team, pregame, game, goals, fans, and the post-game report.

Once I have that controlled, the only thing I need to focus on is the extra stuff such as the requests from the different departments of the club: communication, marketing, and so on...This changes every game.

What are the biggest challenges you face as Valencia CF's photographer?

To keep improving. Right now I'm really focused on the management of color and publishing times.

Any story you can tell us about?

I could tell you a thousand! The first one that comes to mind was the Cup title celebration last May. As the double-decker bus entered Valencia, I was hit really hard on my forehead. I thought Geoffrey Kondogbia hit me, so I just kept taking pictures. Everyone in the city was so excited; it was crazy. Suddenly, I noticed I was covered in blood. We had gone under a bridge, and I didn't see it coming. The team doctor patched me up, and I wore a scarf on my forehead and kept working. Almost no one noticed. When we got to Mestalla they had to stitch my forehead, but I wear the scar with pride.



How important is your relationship with the players?

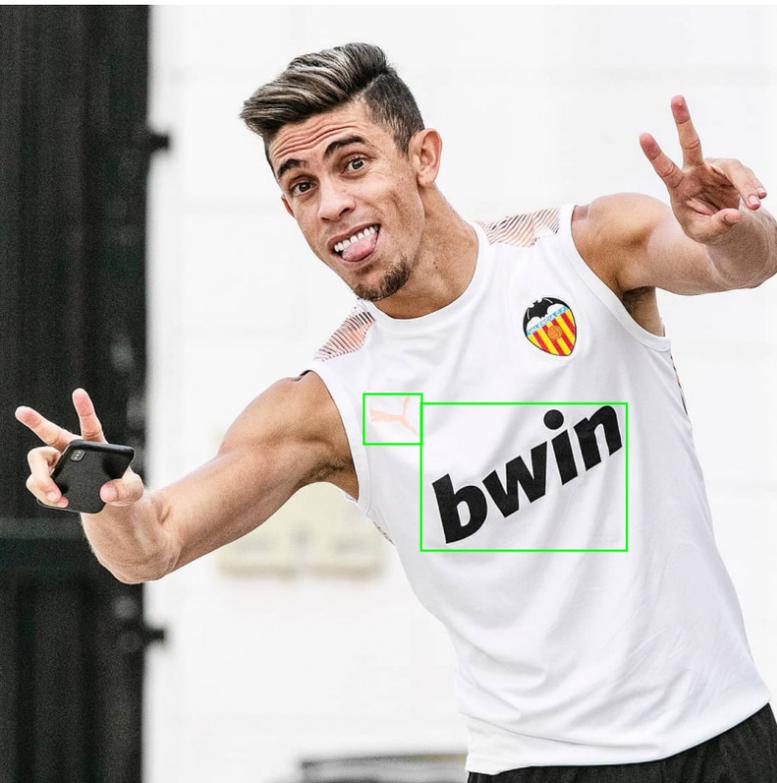
For a photographer, trust is almost as important as light. You need to have a good relationship with the players, of course, but it's also important to identify their moods and needs and to be able to stay ahead. It helps me to know what to do in every moment. Making the players feel comfortable in front of the camera is key and just as important as the information I get from my colleagues in the digital and communication departments.

There's nothing greater than a player instinctively looking for you when he's releasing all of his energy during a goal celebration. That image is the best content you can get. The celebration is part of the goal and having that connection with a player is a privilege.

We can't forget how photography helps improve motivation and self-confidence, and that's a key value for elite sports. About a year ago, a new player was injured before we could demonstrate his full potential. When he recovered, we posted an image where you could see the great effort he had made to regain his top level. The

image was shared by LaLiga, UEFA, and Champions League on their social channels. As photographers, we might not score goals, but we help improve the confidence of players as well as their public image.

Editing is also key. We work with feelings, with emotions. Idols sell themselves but sometimes we go beyond simple action photography and use certain techniques to make the player look like a superhero, highlighting the figure or the sensation of velocity. Somehow you are making people admire that player. It's like Ancient Greece's artists adjusting sculptures to a certain beauty.



Are you in touch with other teams' photographers?

I have a very good relationship with all the official photographers I know. I consider some of them friends. I follow their posts every day and even call them when they do something extraordinary and I want to know how they do it. For those I don't know personally but like their work, I contact them on social.

Daniele (Juventus), Stuart (Arsenal), Ángel (Real Madrid), Claudio (Inter), Simon (Chivas), and Lucas (Brazil)... There's no better teacher than a colleague you admire.

What would be a dream to achieve or a moment to capture?

As a Valencia CF photographer, shooting a victory in the Champions League final. I know this club deserves living that experience, and I know that will happen sooner or later. I hope I can be the one photographing it.

On a personal level, I think representing your country is the greatest pride so working for Spain's national team is another personal dream of mine.



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