

Director Taylor Kavanaugh running a Canon EOS C300 Mark II on a gimbal for some action shots during a practice at Washington State University.

PHOTO: Andrew Sakai - Blue Ox Films



# CANON LENSES AND CAMERAS HELP STEER *'THE DRIVE'*

**// SERVO-POWERED CINEMA LENSES PROVE VITAL TO CAPTURING THE DRAMA  
BEHIND COLLEGE FOOTBALL**

**T**he drama, action, and passion of sports have long been drivers of innovations in broadcast television. Going a step further to tell the tales of the coaches and players behind the games requires a similarly innovative approach. The Pac-12 Network's series *The Drive* has sought to chronicle the on- and off-field stories of the 12 college football teams that make up The Pac-12 Conference. For Matt Wilcox and Taylor Kavanaugh of Blue Ox Films, the production team behind *The Drive*, the project is close to home, as Kavanaugh played Pac-12 football. When developing the concept of this behind-the-scenes peek at the intense world of big-time college football, they decided on the cinematic look and mobility of Canon's EOS C300 Mark II Cinema Cameras, along with a broad assortment of Canon Cinema Lenses.

The frenetic shooting schedule of *The Drive* matches the fast pace of the season. Structured as a 12-part documentary series, it follows each of the 12 football teams in the conference both on and off the field, giving fans a true inside look at football in The Pac-12 Conference. The show is shot, edited and aired in near real-time, which means there is the ever present dichotomy of efficiency and production value that The Pac-12 Network & Blue Ox are asked to walk the line between. Mike Tolajian, co-director of *The Drive* and Senior Coordinating Producer for The Pac-12 Network, worked with each football program to outline an aggressive production schedule in which the entire 12 episodes would be shot in nearly 12 weeks. Post production and editing for each episode was done at The Pac-12 Network studios by staff editors

Rich Allard and Steve Kundrat. In order to execute the production feat, Blue Ox utilized a 40-foot tour bus for nearly all travel throughout the conference, traversing nearly 15,000 miles via highway, to 12 cities, shooting 12 episodes, in 12 weeks.

Shooting *The Drive* has been a collaborative endeavor between The Pac-12 Network and Blue Ox Films, borne from previous successful projects. “We are extremely grateful for a true creative partnership with Mike Tolajian and The Pac-12 Network. We feel fortunate to have been able to grow with them and to continue to help tell the Network’s stories cinematically” recalled Kavanaugh. “We initially connected with The Pac-12 Network production team because Matt and I had created a non-profit documentary about a group of Pac-12 student-athletes doing service work in developing countries. The Pac-12 Network was interested in this content and from there we started shooting a variety of feature stories for them, which then grew into the opportunity to shoot and direct their flagship show, *The Drive*. The 2017 football season was our second season shooting the show, and it has continued to grow in both its ratings and production value.”



As the premiere show on the network, expectations for the production quality were high. “We demanded the very best equipment, and there were very specific parameters we had when it came to gear,” explained Kavanaugh. “We essentially distilled those parameters down into two items: image quality and mobility. In terms of image quality, we needed a camera/lens package that could achieve a variety of framings. Additionally, we really needed camera specs that supported episodic sports production. Things like full timecode support, slow/quick motion capabilities, Log shooting, etc. were all ‘must haves’ for us. But with all this said, we also had to consider the fact that we were traveling over 1,000 miles by

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**TOP** Camera Operator Ilja Maran shoots the C300 Mark II and 70-200 Compact Servo from the TV platform at University Of Washington. **PHOTO** Courtesy Blue Ox Films Blue Ox Films.  
**BOTTOM** Taylor Kavanaugh shoots an interior scene on the C300 Mark II and 50-1000 at Washington State University. **PHOTO** Courtesy Andrew Sakai - Blue Ox Films Blue Ox Films.

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bus each week. All of the gear needed to be packed up in no more than 6 cases. Nothing that wasn't absolutely necessary made the pack list."

**// SERVO POWERED PRODUCTION //**

In order to satisfy their need for quality and versatility in their lensing options, The Pac-12 Network and Blue Ox selected an array of Canon lenses that included the CINE-SERVO 50-1000mm, CINE-SERVO 17-120mm, COMPACT-SERVO 18-80mm, COMPACT-SERVO 70-200mm, and CN-E30-

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300mm. "We've been shooting on Canon our entire careers in filmmaking, and have continued to build trust in the brand and products," Kavanaugh noted. "Given the unique rigors and pace of the show, the lenses performed incredibly well. The zooms were incredible, and each had its own purpose and strength."

A common thread among many of the lenses used on *The Drive* is that they come standard with a servo unit to provide mechanical control of the lens. This was a conscientious choice by the production to keep up with the pace of the action. "We really utilize the servo functionality on these lenses, which is common when shooting sports," Kavanaugh remarked. "Shooting football is unique and challenging because of the physical distances the players can be from the camera, as well as the insane pace at which it moves. There are times when a subject may be a full 100 yards from the camera and within a few seconds be within 10 feet of us, and we're required to capture that span with razor sharp focus. These unique scenarios required us to demand the right lensing tools, and the servo drives that came standard on the Canon lenses were absolutely critical."

Each of the lenses had its respective strengths and stood out in its own way for Blue Ox. "The 50-1000 was a game-changer for us," Kavanaugh recalled. "It allowed us to capture shots that we wouldn't otherwise be able to get close to."





There's no other cinema lens on the market that can do what it can. Its servo function was a huge asset, and surprisingly, the lens wasn't as large or heavy as our team was expecting. We knew the 30-300 would be razor sharp, durable, and produce an extremely cinematic image, and there were no surprises there. The 30-300's image quality, speed, and toughness are unparalleled. For those reasons, we always leaned on it in a variety of environments. On a typical day, when shooting interviews, action, interiors, and exteriors, we would keep it on the camera all day. We cannot say enough about the reliability of this lens. The 17-120 is a do-it-all lens for interviews and off-field scenes. But it was the COMPACT-SERVO lenses that were the massive star of this production. The image quality, mobility, weight and functionality of the 18-80 and 70-200 were truly astounding. I honestly didn't expect these lenses to hold up, but we learned otherwise. These COMPACT-SERVO lenses will absolutely be in our kit on the next production. As an additional note, they were incredible tools when running the C300 Mark II on gimbal setups. Because they were so lightweight, they were of massive value in these scenarios."

### // SMALL AND STURDY WINS THE RACE //

Additionally, the EOS C300 Mark II cinema camera was an integral part of the production plan. Having worked with the camera before, Kavanaugh knew what to expect, and got the great image quality and reliability he's counted on in the past. "We expected the very best, and that is what we got; I was never surprised," he declared. "We take extreme pride in the cinematic quality of the images that we produce for The Pac-12 Network. Thus, the benefits of large sensor cameras lie in the image quality and cinematic depth of field for us. There is so much emotion, pace and visceral detail to be captured in sports. It really is everything. Large sensor cameras are a necessity in capturing this. The image quality we got out of our C300 Mark II cameras was pristine in nearly all situations. It was an all-star workhorse. There is literally nothing that camera cannot do in the doc-style environment. Its image and sensor are spectacular, its buttons and toggles are perfect for run and gun, and its size is very manageable. The C300 Mark II is also extremely efficient with battery life, which was a huge asset to us."

**TOP** Taylor Kavanaugh captures the excitement of the team run-out just moments before a game at University of Colorado. **PHOTO** courtesy Andrew Sakai, Blue Ox Films.

**CENTER LEFT** Two of the workhorse camera packages during a timeout at the University of Washington. Two C300 Mark II bodies, with a 30-300mm and 17-120mm. **PHOTO** courtesy Taylor Kavanaugh, Blue Ox Films.

**CENTER RIGHT** Co-Directors Taylor Kavanaugh & Michael Tolajian, along with editor Steve Kundrat on set during the Stanford episode of the show filmed in Sydney Australia. **PHOTO** courtesy Michael Tolajian, Pac-12 Networks.

**BOTTOM** Taylor Kavanaugh films on the sideline of a close game at Washington State University with the C300 Mark II and 17-120 Cine-Servo.



**ABOVE/RIGHT**

In order to achieve their desired mobility, all of the gear for filming "The Drive" needed to be packed up in no more than 6 cases. Nothing that wasn't absolutely necessary made the pack list.

**BOTTOM** Director Taylor Kavanaugh and Production Manager Andrew Sakai, of Blue Ox Films, on set during the episode shot at University of Colorado.



The rough-and-tumble nature of football, combined with the constant travel schedule, meant that durability and mobility were huge factors with both cameras and lenses. "Mobility was of critical importance for our production," said Kavanaugh. "We were traveling thousands of miles each week with this gear, so the cameras and lenses had to travel well. On set, we were constantly on the move - in huddles, locker rooms, apartments, football fields, etc. We were literally always running from one place to the next. The weight, mobility and durability of our

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**Taylor Kavanaugh,**  
*Blue Ox Films*

package were of the utmost importance. The style of shooting required on this show really is a true run-and-gun style. Canon supports that style of shooting with its durability, size, battery life and quality of products. It's comforting to know that there are not any sacrifices in image quality, even with the fantastic mobility."

While the project didn't have any major equipment maintenance issues, Blue Ox Films and The Pac-12 Network was nevertheless impressed by the service and support they received from Canon. The dedication they saw from the team has reaffirmed their commitment to staying with Canon on future projects. "The Canon staff was extremely helpful," Kavanaugh concluded. "They informed us about the COMPACT-SERVO 18-80 and 70-200 lens capabilities at the beginning of the project, which turned out to be super helpful, as we were otherwise unfamiliar with this lens category. Overall, the pride in the products, attention to detail, and service from Canon is top notch. I speak for Blue Ox's camera department, Mike Tolajian and the rest of The Pac-12 Network, in that we feel very fortunate to be using Canon products." //

