

1.0 Introduction

I am now where I aimed to be years ago: a camera operator for major professional wrestling companies around the world – namely **WWE**, **AEW** and **ICW**. With WWE I have travelled to Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, all around the UK, and have worked on sold-out shows at the O2 in London. I have worked as a first-choice ringside camera operator for their NXT UK brand and made a good wage doing so. I have been behind the camera for major moments in the company and have been able to work alongside and learn from the absolute best in the business.

With AEW, I worked on the most attended show in paid wrestling history when I operated camera in front of over 80,000 people at Wembley Stadium in London.

At ICW, where I have worked for over 12 years, I have been pivotal in taking the company from 200 spectators in a night club to over 6000 in The SSE Hydro arena. I have toured extensively over the UK and Ireland with them and have encountered almost every imaginable scenario imaginable when it comes to shooting wrestling. I have streamed many events to various partners all over the world. I have directed both experienced and new-start camera operators on these shows and have called the camera shots for the biggest moments in modern wrestling history in the UK.

I have worked in the television industry for over fifteen years. Starting out as a runner/driver for a facilities house (a great place to start by the way), I worked my way up through various roles such as camera trainee, camera assistant, video editor, jib assistant, camera operator and eventually director.

The jobs I have worked on are very varied and include football, rugby, quiz shows, panel shows, studio music, live music festivals, comedy and now of course professional wrestling. Companies on my CV include BBC, Sky, Channel 4, ITV, National Geographic, and of course the world's major wrestling organisations.

This puts me in a unique position to comprehensively impart my knowledge and experience, and to help the upcoming generation of crew who want to work behind the camera and behind the scenes in professional wrestling.

My professional career was preceded by a **MA in Film & Television Studies** at The University of Glasgow. As with many industries, it's important to know about the origins and background of what you are involved with. Film theory, established



practice in TV and a general knowledge of the what and the why are so important in the big picture of presenting an entertainment product to the viewer, as we will discuss in the course.

My initial technical knowledge came from working at the facilities house - Procam TV. Here I had hands-on experience of a huge variety of video, audio and lighting equipment. This has proved invaluable in my career, and certainly in my work with professional wrestling, and in this course, I will take that experience and pass it on to you.

1.1 - Overview of the Course Objectives

My aim with this course is to give you the head-start that I didn't have. There are so many roads I went down, and mistakes I made that I would not have if I were under the guidance of an experienced hand early on in my career. This course will put you at the ideal starting point for your journey into professional wrestling TV production, and I can't wait to get started.

Topics this course will cover include:

- Camera equipment
- Editing and editing software
- Directing
- Etiquette
- Live streaming
- Technical equipment and setups

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2.0 Why shoot professional wrestling?

There are several reasons to shoot professional wrestling. They include:

- To make money
- To help a wrestling promotion become more visible (so they can make money)
- To further your own career
- To record a match for one or more of the wrestlers
- To be involved in wrestling
- For fun

Whatever your reasons, it's going to be better for everyone involved if you shoot it well.

Your reasons for taking on this task will have an impact on how much time and money you wish to spend on it. Whatever end of the scale you are on, this course will help you to produce a quality product.

3.0 - Which Equipment should you use?

3.1 - Camera

I'm going to assume a top level of prosumer equipment here; not studio level cameras, and not very basic handi-cams, but somewhere in between.

This is all going to depend on budget, but let's start off from a scenario where you have some money to spend. Wrestling looks a lot better if your camera:

- Has proper manual lens controls – zoom, focus and exposure
- Is shoulder-mounted

A DSLR is not a good camera to shoot professional wrestling on. I understand that they are the only option available to some, but as we will discuss they have many limitations.

An affordable level of camera for many could be Sony ZX190, PMW-200 or even an old PMW-EX1 or EX3. I've used the latter for years, and they perform very well for what I need them to do. To shoot wrestling properly at this level, you need good control over your focus, zoom and exposure, and this should be by controlling three separate ring or servo controls on the lens. Many prosumer cameras will have a focus ring and then a much smaller exposure control. This is no good when you are having to adjust quickly to the lighting at your venue and will probably result in many over and under-exposed shots, reducing the quality of your product.



Figure 1: Sony PMW 200 - good choice when you add a shoulder-mount



Figure 2: So you can operate like this!



Figure 3: And not this.

My reason for focussing on focus/iris rings and shoulder mounts is versatility. Shooting pro-wrestling is like shooting nothing else. The action is so fast and so nuanced, you need to be able to react immediately to adequately cover it.

If you are operating a camera mounted against your chest, or as part of an unwieldy rig that you've attached to your DSLR to keep it steady, you will not be able to react properly to the action in the ring. If you imagine Batman when his head gear was welded to his shoulder gear, compared to when the two were separate, you will understand what I mean.



Figure 4: Servo zoom

With a shoulder-mounted camera you can react and reframe your shot quickly. You are also able to zoom, focus and expose quickly. With a DSLR you are unlikely to have suitable control over zoom. Having to zoom by turning the zoom ring will not produce a smooth zoom, but rather a sudden and inaccurate movement. This is where a servo zoom comes in. When I talk about 'servo', I mean the control that is usually marked T/W and sits on top of your lens and is also often called the 'rocker'. This lets you zoom in and out smoothly using the same hand that is holding the lens. Your other hand is then free to control the zoom and exposure rings.

Most cameras will have a zoom speed setting for the servo. It's down to personal preference to an extent, but in my experience, this is best set to be on the faster side. If your director is calling for you to get a close-up of a wrestler's face as they express an important emotion, you need to be able to get there quickly. It does mean that if you are required to do a very slow zoom, for a wrestler's entrance for example, you must have that accuracy and control to very gently press the servo with the exact amount of pressure required. We will explore these camera moves later.

3.2 - Camera Audio

If you have a prosumer level camera, you will have the ability to mount a directional or 'shotgun' microphone on top of it. Rode does a range of these that are generally quite affordable. These microphones take audio from directly in front of them, and work at a decent distance. This allows you to pick up the noise from what you are pointing your lens at, rather than what is around you. Most cameras will have an internal microphone. This is OK as a backup, but it will pick up all the noise of you handling the camera. Even a small omnidirectional mic – the kind that often comes with the camera – is better than relying on the internal mic.

3.3 - Tripod

The quality of affordable prosumer tripods out there is luckily much higher than it was when I started in the industry. If you have the budget, then anything by Sachtler, Vinten or Manfrotto is going to be a good way to go. There are also some emerging brands that are nice too. Look at the weight rating for your desired tripod. It should be able to hold and balance your camera. Don't go for a DSLR tripod when you are using a bigger camera. An unsuitable tripod will not allow you to create smooth movement in your shots, and jerky movement is going to tell your viewer that they are not watching a professional product.

One thing I did not comprehend properly when starting out was how to balance a tripod. Ideally you should not have to lock your tripod head for the camera to remain in the same place. Start by moving the camera backwards and forwards on the tripod to find roughly where it falls backwards and forwards at the same speed. Use a little resistance on your tilt control to find this. Once this is done, you can start adding counterbalance until the camera remains in the same place on the tilt, even when you are not touching the tripod. You should not have to be locking the tilt at times when you are shooting. Locking should really be for when you are walking away from the tripod.

3.4 - Useful Terms

Camera Left/Right – If you were standing behind the camera, camera left would be YOUR left, so it is left as the camera sees it, and vice versa with right.

Stage Left/Right – If you are a performer standing on a stage, looking out at the audience in front of you, stage left would be YOUR left, and again vice versa with right.

Upstage/Downstage – From the camera or viewer's point of view, upstage is further away, and downstage is closer. These terms come from the theatre world, where in the past the stage was higher at the back, to help with spectator's line of sight, and with perspective of scenery.

Hard Cam – I have worked in many areas of TV. Professional Wrestling is the only one that I've ever heard this term used. It is used to describe the cameras in the venue that are on heavy tripods and do not move position. Often these cameras will have large studio lenses on them, rather than the lenses we are used to seeing on the handhelds. So really a large WWE or AEW show might have four or five hard cams.

However, as a fan you are probably used to hearing 'hard cam' as being the cameras that provides the main coverage of the matches, and that wrestlers deliver their promos towards and 'play out' (show off their moves, emotions etc.). So, although the cameras in that position are not the only 'hard cams', it is acceptable to refer to them as such when directing crew and talent.

4.0 - Camera Placement

Camera placement is a vital part of shooting professional wrestling. It sets the framework for how you are going to cover the event and doing it well can be the difference between someone watching your whole show or switching off after 30 seconds.

In this section, I'm going to suggest several ways you can place your cameras, all of which depend on how many cameras you have, and how many people you have to operate them during the show.

Before you place your cameras, you must decide which direction you want them all to point in. The wrestling most of us have grown up watching on television - WWE, WCW, AEW – has its main camera pointing towards the crowd on one side of the arena. The entrance ramp then sits to the left of this view. Here's what I mean:

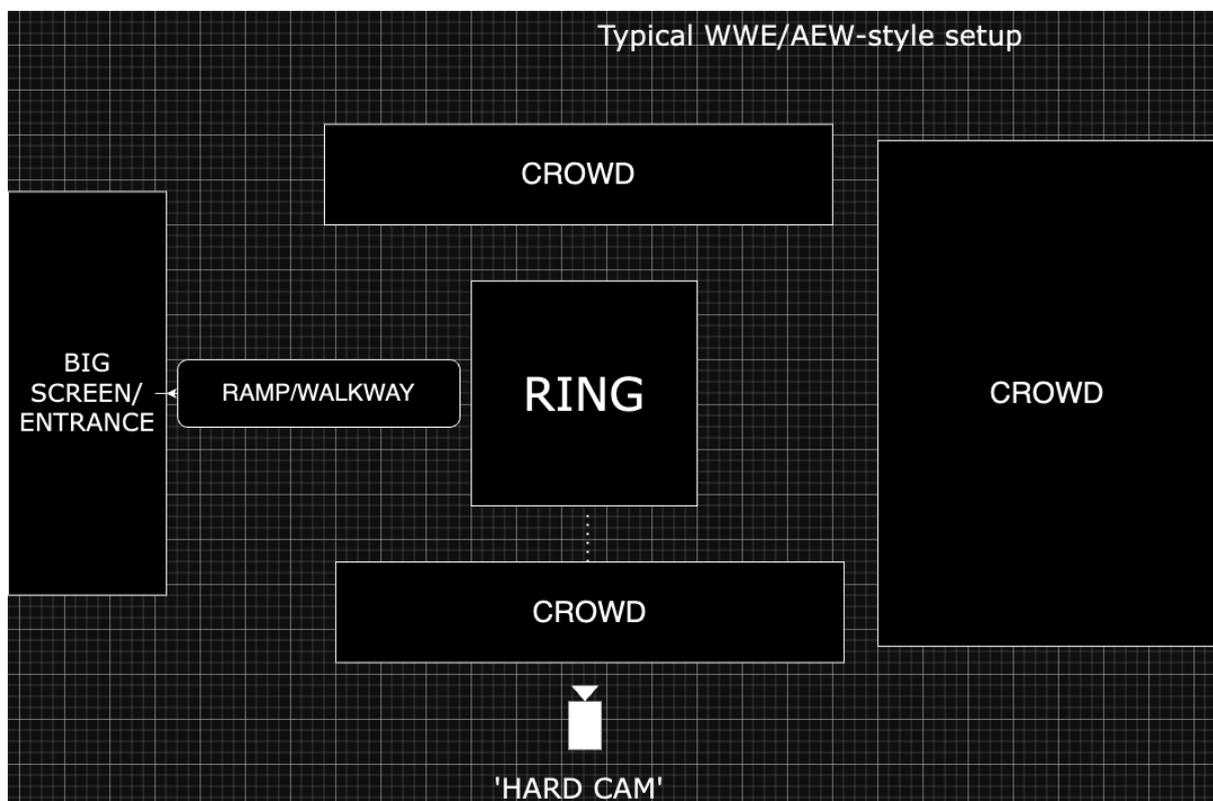


Figure 5: Typical WWE/AEW Setup

Of course, when starting out shooting wrestling, you are unlikely to be doing so in the massive arenas that these major companies run. Depending on where in the world you are, you could be filming a show that is being run in a town hall, hotel conference suite, armoury, warehouse, nightclub, or various other kinds of building. It could well be the case that you are in a narrow venue that does not allow you space to position your hard cam as shown above, and instead you need your hard cam to face the entrance/big screen/stage, like this:

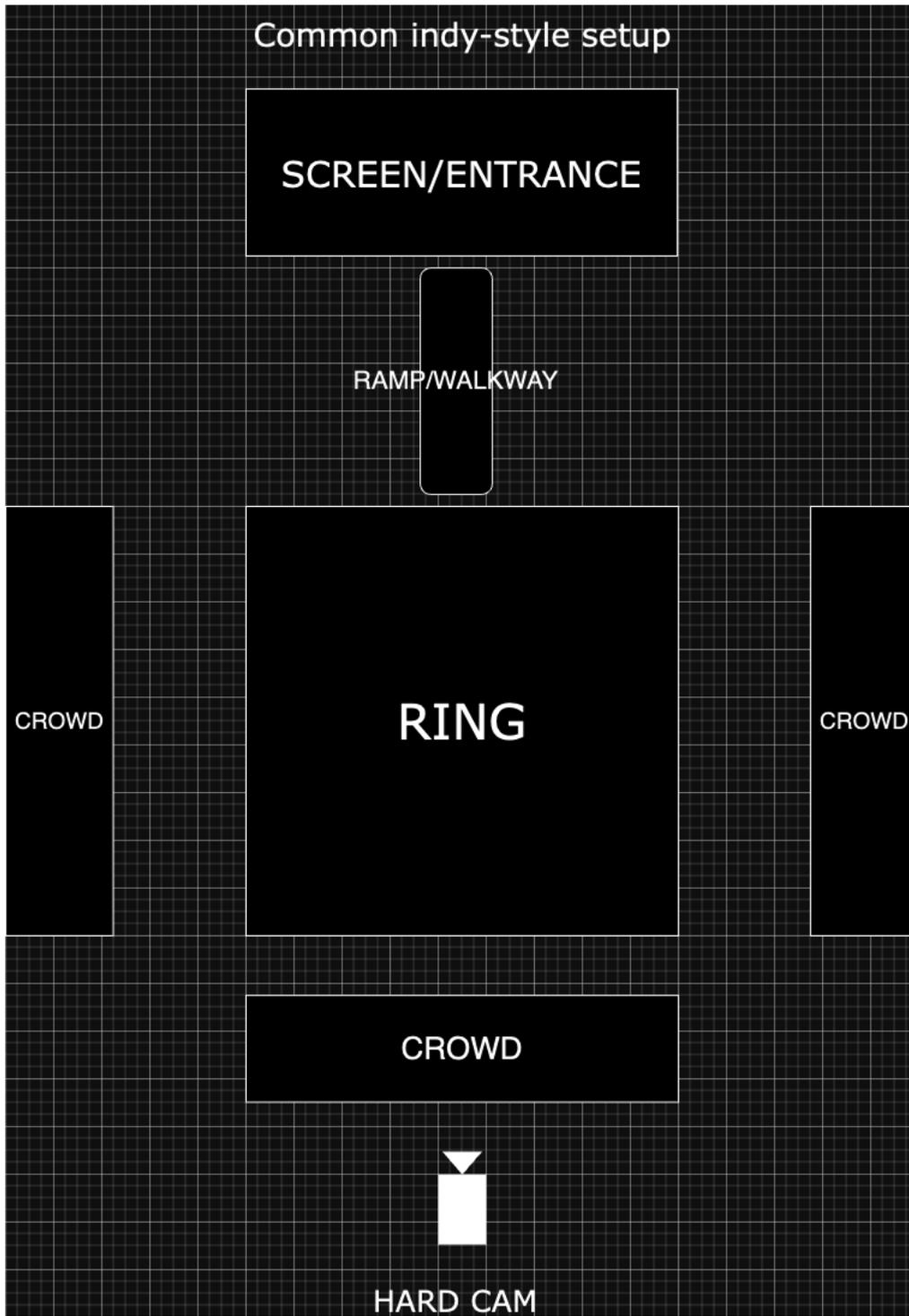


Figure 6: Common Indy Setup

There are pros and cons to both. Let's call the first diagram 'Pro Style', and the second 'Indy Style'.

4.1 - Advantages of Pro Style Setup

- It's what audiences are used to watching.
- You can see the reactions of the audience throughout the show.

- It frees up your big screen or projector to show the action. If your main camera shot includes not only the ring and wrestlers, but a camera feed of it too, you risk having an infinite loop of that camera angle on screen, which doesn't look professional.
- It gives a clear separation between when wrestlers are making their entrances and when the focus has moved on to the match.

4.2 - Disadvantages of Pro Style Setup

- You need a large venue.
- If you have directed your wrestlers and announcers to address the hard cam, it may feel strange to an audience who are used to being in that venue and looking towards the stage as the main focal point.
- You may have focussed the bulk of your production budget on the stage. You could have screens and lights on there that look better than a badly lit audience opposite your camera.

4.3 - Advantages of Indy Style Setup

- Convenience - Smaller venues often consist of a stage, floor and balcony that faces the stage. Placing the hard cam on this balcony gives a clear shot of the ring and the stage.
- The crowd is familiar with the setup. Most of them will be facing the stage, and they will expect the announcer to be facing them.
- You can point your cameras towards the production values on the stage, potentially hiding areas of the room that don't look as good.

4.4 - Disadvantages of Indy Style Setup

- It can immediately look 'other' to a viewer who has only watched WWE.
- It can often lead to most of the crowd being out of shot for the majority of the shows. With your hard cam on a balcony, a lot of the crowd could be underneath you. This could lead to your show looking like it was not well-attended, even if it was.
- Any screens opposite of hard cam are potentially always in shot. If you are putting a live view of the action from one of the cameras onto your screen, you risk having an infinite loop, which does not look professional.

4.5 – Examples of camera placement setups in the Indy Style

Here are some more examples of camera layouts to consider:

Indy Style

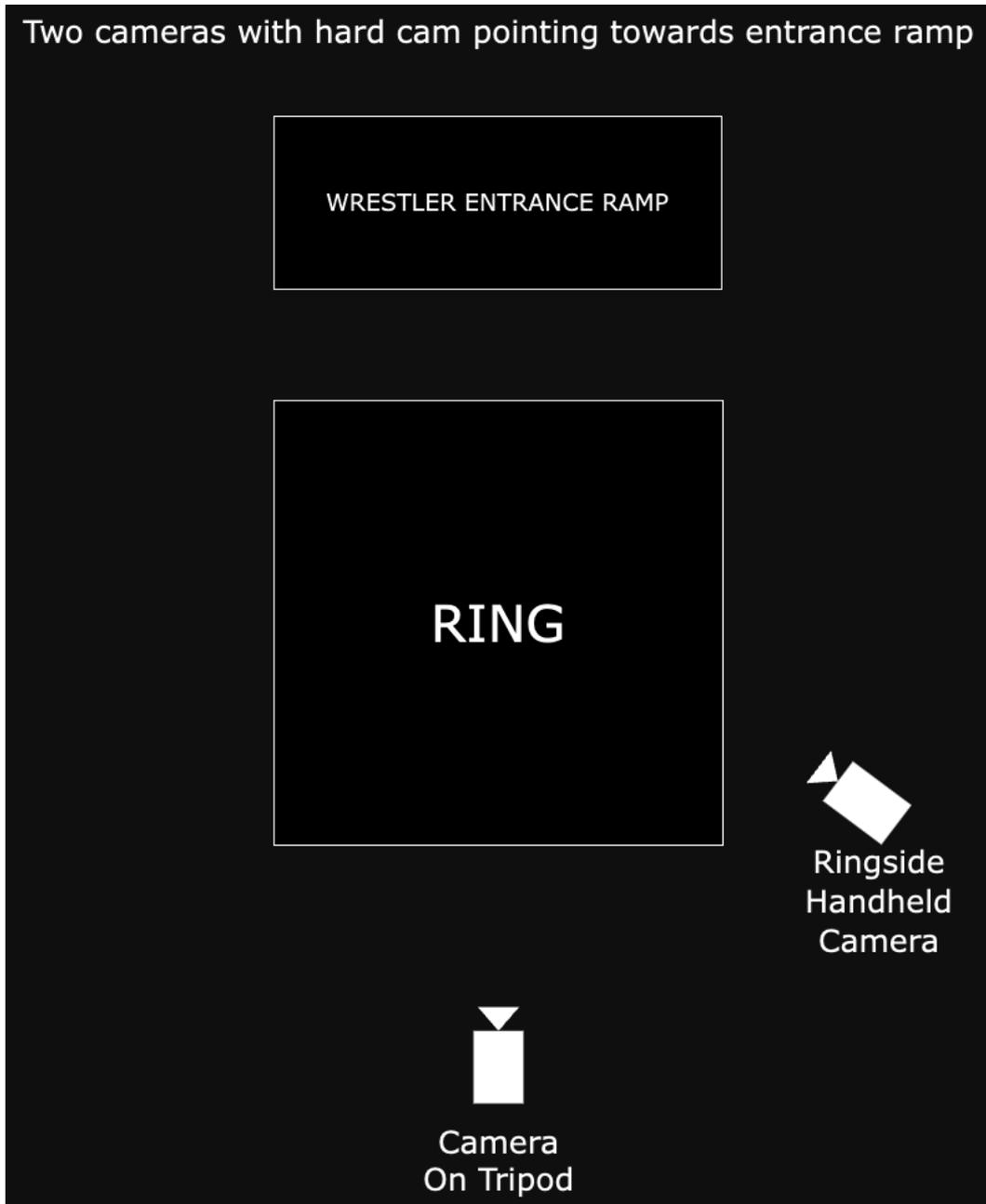


Figure 7: Two cameras towards entrance

Three cameras with hard cam pointing towards entrance ramp

WRESTLER ENTRANCE RAMP

RING

Ringside
Handheld
Camera



Two cameras on tripods. One is locked off, other is operated.
Both elevated on platform

Figure 8: Three cameras towards entrance

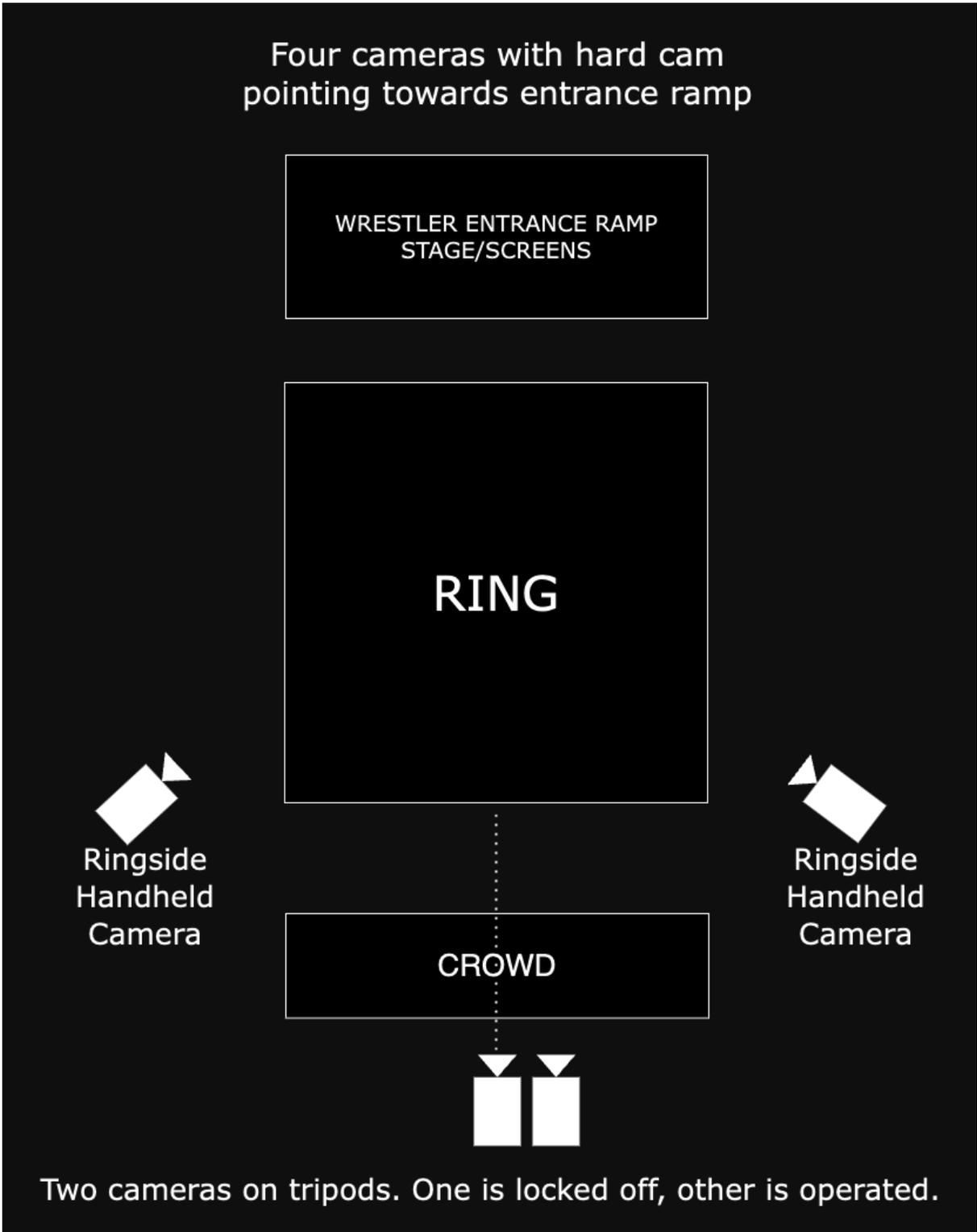


Figure 9: Four cameras towards entrance

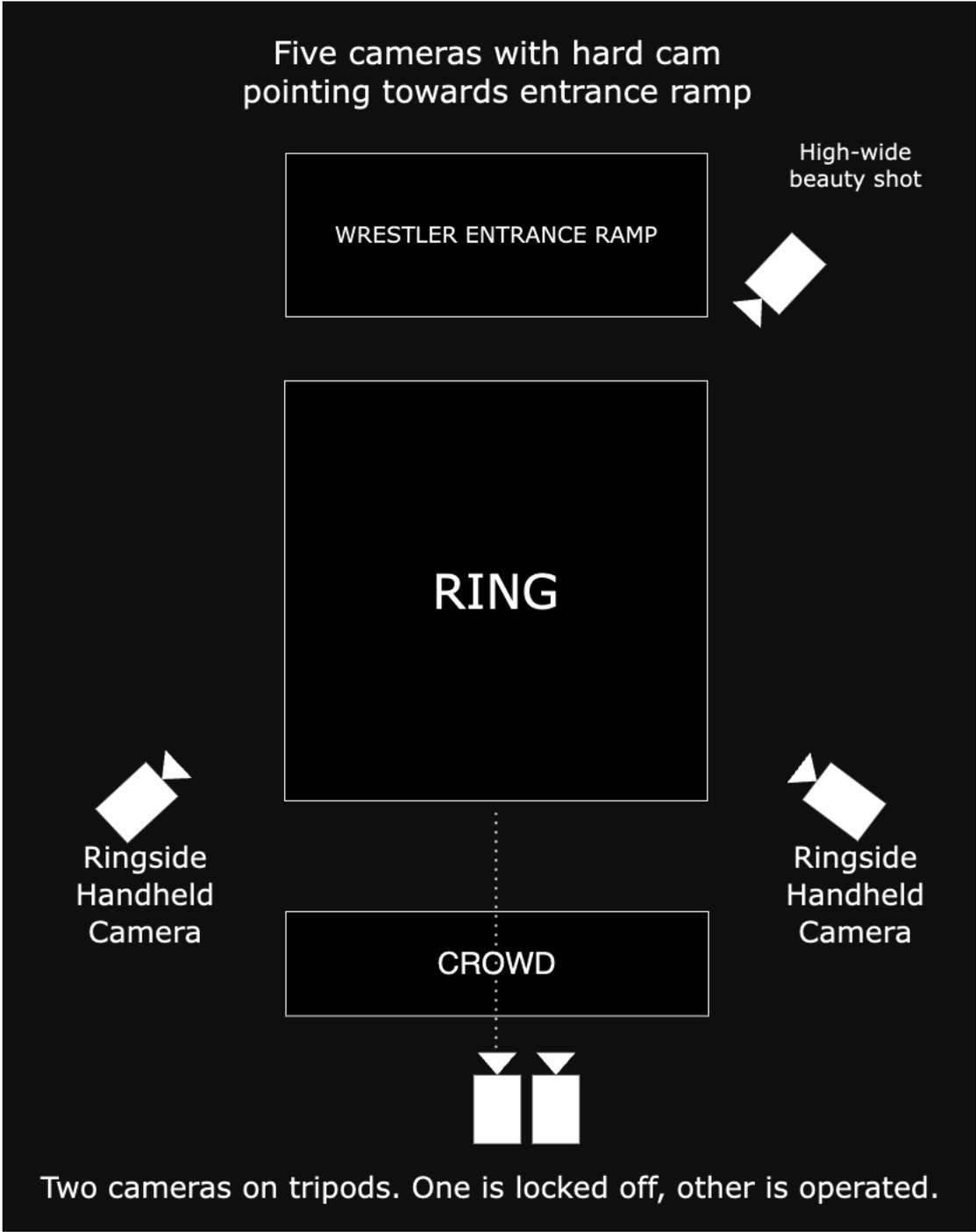


Figure 10: Five cameras towards entrance

4.6 – Examples of camera setups in the Pro Style

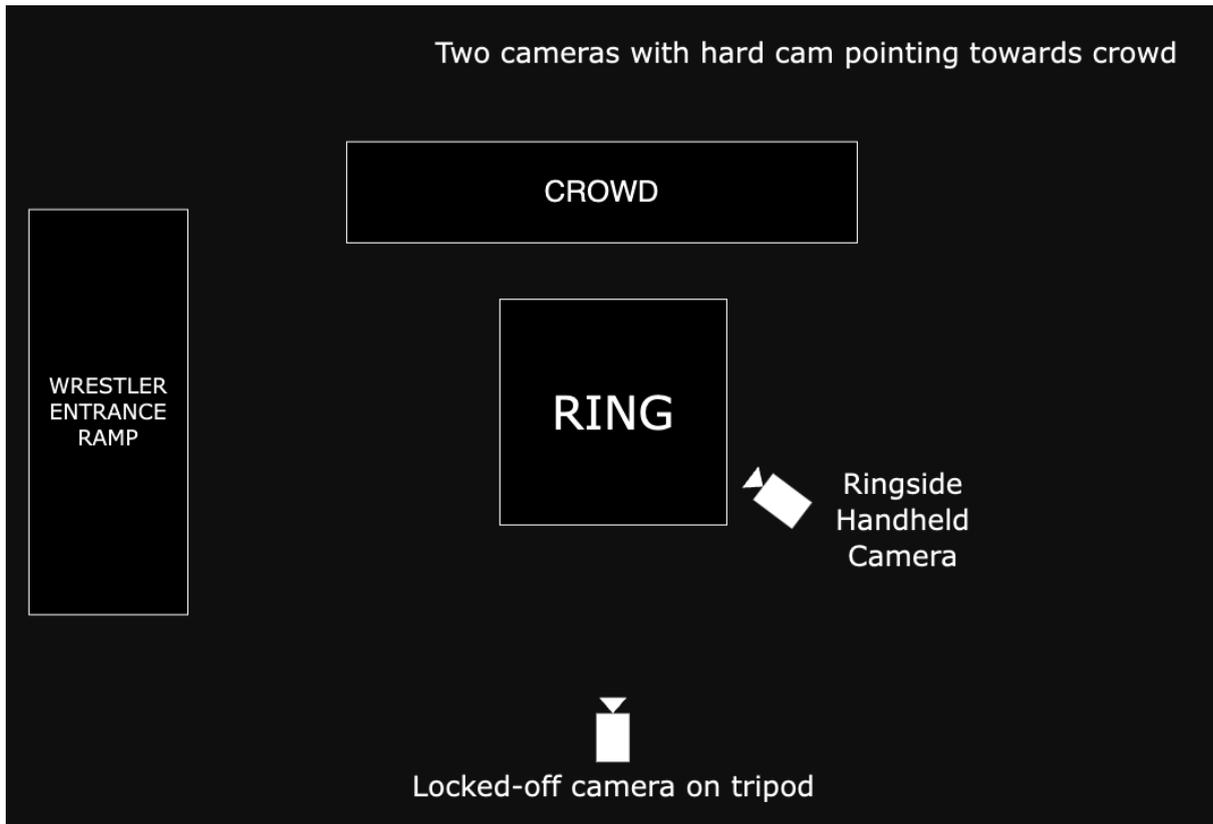


Figure 11: Two cameras towards crowd

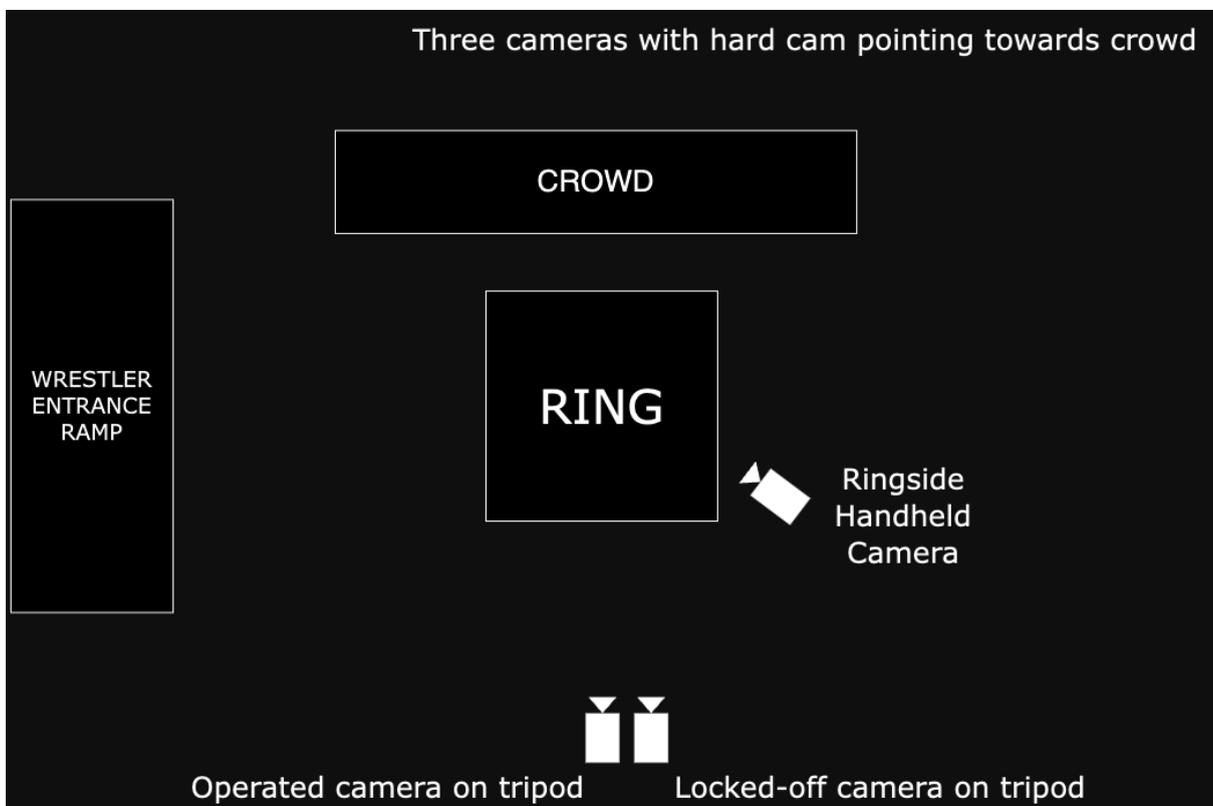


Figure 12: Three cameras towards crowd

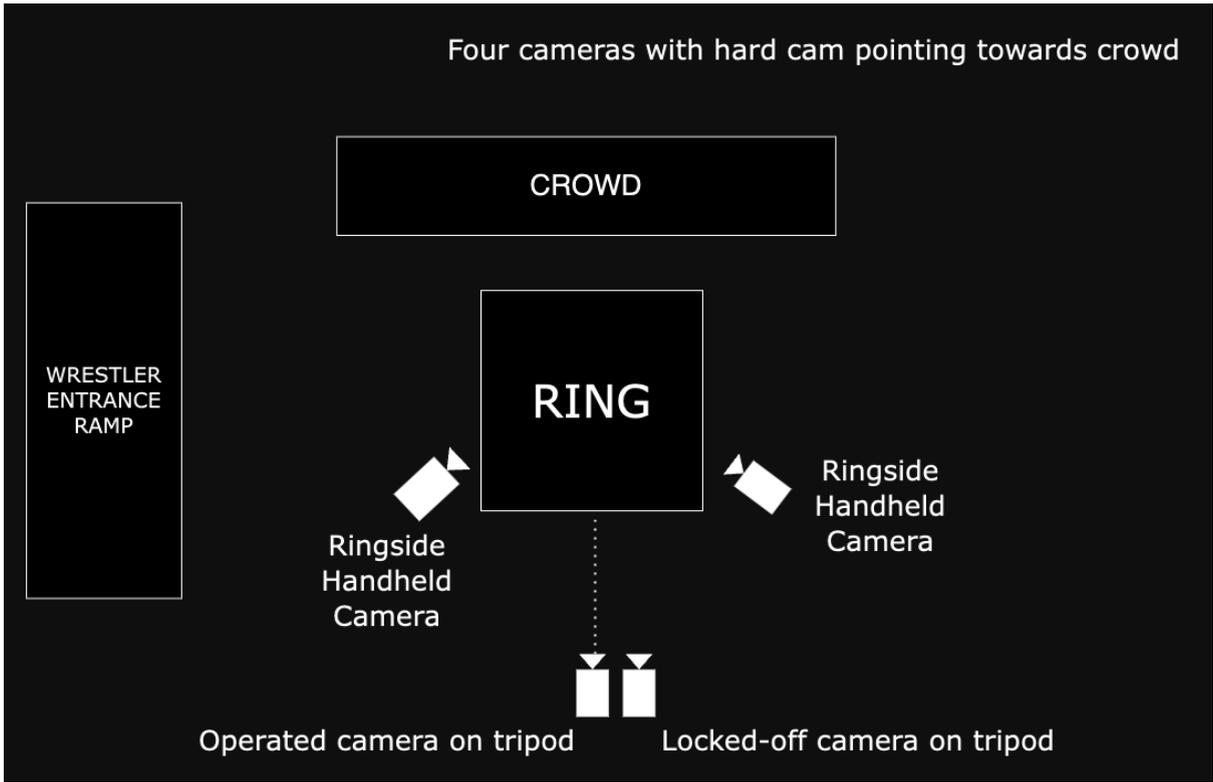


Figure 13: Four cameras towards crowd

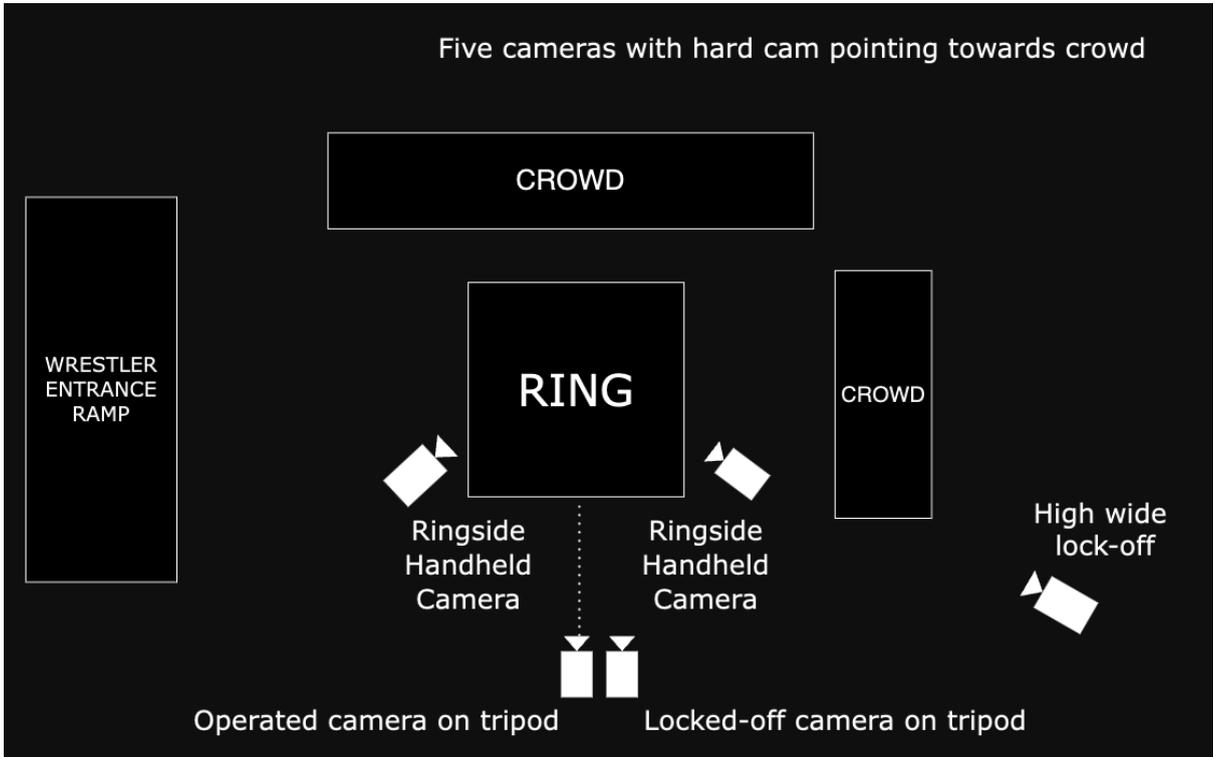


Figure 14: Five cameras towards crowd

4.7 – Questions to ask yourself about setup

As you can see, there are many ways in which you can configure your cameras. It's going to depend on your budget, resources and the venue in which you are shooting. Have a think about your local promotion. What is the venue like? Where would you place your cameras to shoot the event in the best way possible?

5.0 - Shooting a Match

Have a look at *Figure 15*. This is the setup we are going to use as an example of how to setup a show. I have chosen a setup that points the cameras towards the crowd because this is the one I have encountered most here in the UK independent scene.

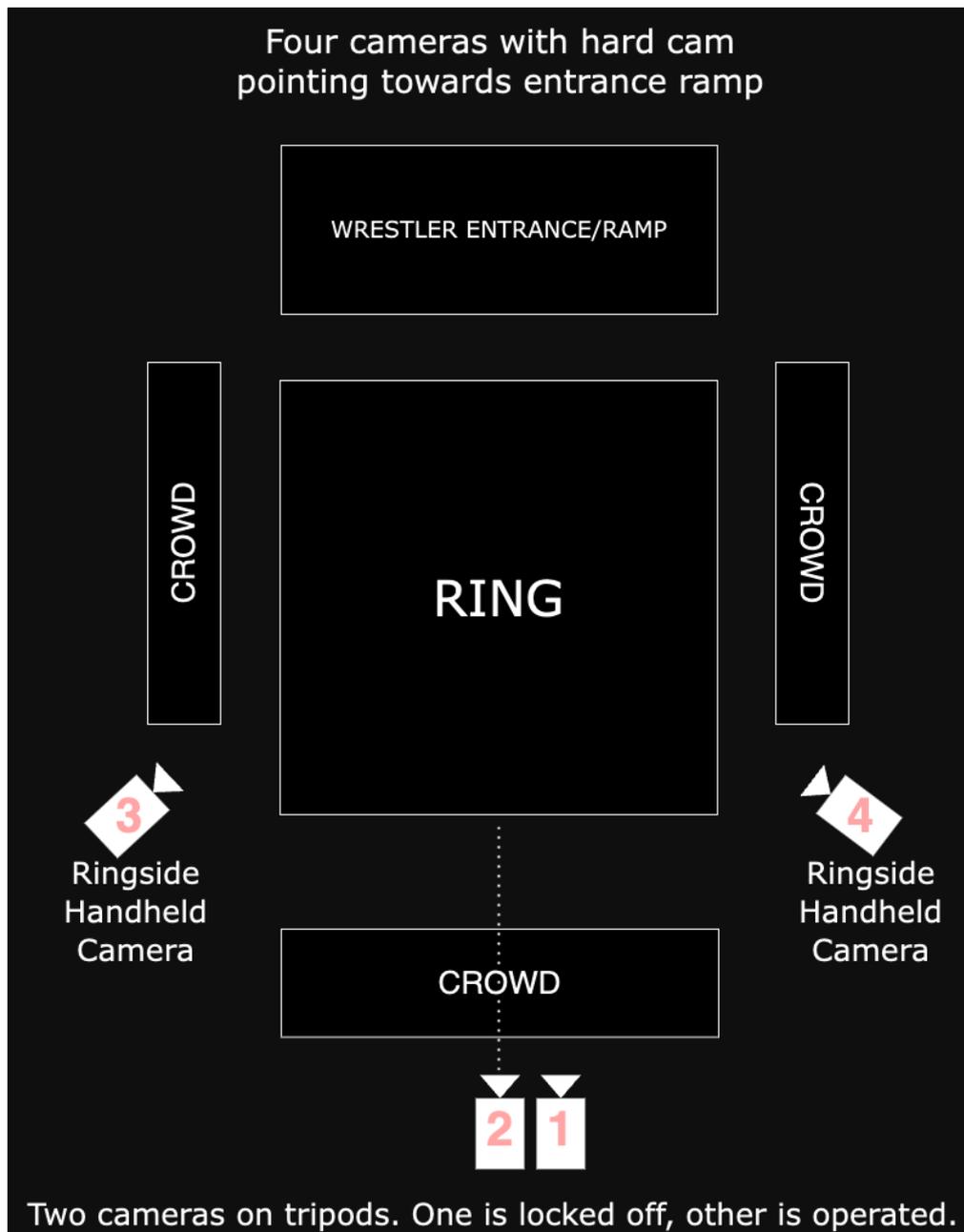


Figure 15: Four camera setup with numbers

Let's look at the role of each camera, and at some factors regarding their setup and operation that you will have to consider. In short, the camera's roles are:

Camera One – Lock-off wide shot

Camera Two – Main coverage camera

Camera Three – Ringside left

Camera Four – Ringside right

5.1 - Camera Roles – Hard Cams

Camera One

This camera will be a 'lock-off'. This terms to a camera that is unmanned and fixed in position on a tripod or mount of some sort. In terms of framing, I would have this wide and showing the entire ring, entrance way and some crowd. This will be the camera to use for lighting state changes, big crowd reactions, and as a safety. By safety I mean that if you get lost in your directing in a live show, or perhaps you don't know what is coming next when an important moment in the match is about to happen, you can go to this camera to make sure you catch it. Similarly, in the edit you could use it for a move or moment you missed.

Of course, it's better not to miss anything and use one of the other cameras for such a moment! A wide shot is not ideal for covering the action, but this camera can get you out of a sticky spot.

Here's an example of when I used this camera to quickly capture a big crowd reaction -

<https://youtu.be/iNpfY2vuO3o?si=QIALM841w6kTFqQR&t=153>

There are several advantages of using the camera this way. It allows you to show a large amount of the crowd quickly, and without telegraphing to any crowd members that the finish to the match is about to occur. If someone in the front row notices you are pointing a camera right in their face just before a three-count, they may realise that the match is about to finish and it could affect the way they respond. This shot also doesn't focus on one audience member, or even a small group. It gives a more general impression of the mood of the crowd. It shows hands going up in the air, people jumping around and very quickly shows the celebrations going on. I prefer to use this shot after a face has won, rather than a heel.

Using camera one in this way is very much something I'd do on the independents, but not for WWE or AEW. With a bigger budget there's no need to have this camera locked-off, but with the constraints you will face with budget and resources on an independent show, I find utilizing the camera in this way to be invaluable.

Camera Two

This is your main coverage camera. This is the camera that isn't allowed to miss anything. On a live show or edit this camera will be selected around 50% of the time, or even more.

Setup

It is very important to get the placement of this camera correct. It must be at a good level, and it has to be aligned properly with the ring and the rest of the arena. This is the camera that I always make sure is dead centre to the ring. I would much rather that camera one was off to the side slightly if it allowed me to place camera two exactly where I want it.



Figure 16: Note height of front top rope

The height of this camera is important. The front top rope looks equidistant from the back top and middle ropes. This is the height I always aim to achieve for this camera. Of course, when you are shooting a show at a town hall or gymnasium you are going to be more limited in the choice of height for your cameras. Perhaps you are having to shoot from a balcony that is a lot higher than what you would need for this rope split. At that point you may be stuck and will have to just do the best you can. If you are shooting from lower than the desired angle, you should really consider carefully what you can do to improve your shot. I have set up tables at the back of the hall and put my tripod on top. If you are doing this, you must make sure the position is safe. Look to borrow some barriers to keep the audience away from the equipment.

Shots and operation

During a match, I have this camera cover the action from head to toe. By this I mean that it includes both wrestlers in shot, and it shows their whole bodies. You may find that when operating this camera you are tempted to push in, to offer up a mid-shot or even tight shot of some of the action. If being told to do so by your director then ok,

but otherwise you should default to always offering up both wrestlers from head to toe.

In a tag match the shot will generally be wider to include the tag partners on the outside apron of the ring. You will find that this camera moves less during a tag match than a singles, but that's OK. Less experienced camera operators in all fields will try to do everything with one camera. At lower-level shows where you are not being directed, you too may feel the urge to be wide, then suddenly in a lot tighter on the action – during a rest hold for example. This is not how multi-cam shoots should work. The job of camera two here is to provide coverage – show the viewer what is happening. Yes, there are some instances like in-ring promos where you may frame up a tighter shot, but for the most time you will be shooting wrestling matches, and you need this camera to cover the action in a safe and reliable way.

5.2 - Ringside Cameras

Let's think about the basics of cameras 3 and 4 – the ringside cameras. Your ringside shots are very important. They need to provide good coverage, but also be interesting and dynamic. They need to be in the right place at the right time, but not get in the way of your cameras 1 and 2.

As we talked about previously, I would highly recommend that you use a shoulder-mounted camera setup for these cameras. I have seen gimbals, DSLRs, ring-lights being used here, but to me these are all completely unnecessary.

Ringside cameras should help with coverage of the match, but also help to tell the story of the match.

Unlike your hard cam, ringside cameras will not always be able to show the wrestlers head to toe. You are much closer to the action, and so your shots will be a lot more varied.

In general, the faster the action, the wider your shot should be. There's no point zooming in tight on two wrestlers who are running, hitting the ropes and flying all over the ring. Instead, think about how you can cover this action and then show the necessary emotion and story that is attached to it.

First though, check you are in the right place. In all the diagrams above, I have placed the main ringside cameras in their 'home' position. This is where you or your camera operator should be for 75% or more of the match. I have had promoters comment that I am not moving around the ring enough when shooting a match. From now on when you watch the major promotions, have a look at the positioning of the ringside camera operators (if you are like me, you've been doing this for years anyway!). They are not placed randomly or constantly looking for the best position to

get their shot from. They are in their home positions as they are every week. The wrestlers know where they are positioned and know how to work to them.

As we will discuss later in the course, you can help the wrestlers know how to work to this camera. In short, it is often the best camera for them to 'sell' to – to show their emotions. So as a start, think of it as a dynamic action camera that we can zoom in with to show wrestler emotion and help them tell the story of the match.