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Reaching out to NABJ, AWSM and beyond

On Page 7 of the USBWA directory is a short statement about the organization's history, its functions and its goals.

In the very first paragraph is this phrase, "to serve the interests of journalists who cover college basketball."

Over the years – and we're talking about a 64-year-old organization – the USBWA has done an incredible job of serving the interests of its members.

Two things are critically important to the future of the USBWA.

One is to continue to reflect the ever-changing population of journalists covering the college game and the second is to be more prepared to protect their interests when necessary.

The USBWA's membership hovers between 800 and 850 writers, sports information directors and others in the media. Although efforts have been made to become more diverse, the USBWA is still largely made up of white males. That's partly to be expected. The industry itself is mainly white and male.

But diversity is still crucial to our future.

We must continue to reach out to younger writers, especially those who are female, African-African, Asian-American, etc., to help keep our organization relevant.

I encourage every current USBWA member to stop and take a look around the media work room at the next game you attend. If there are reporters there who are not members of the USBWA, go up to them and mention our organization. Let them know that we not only need them and want them, but that we want to hear them and represent them. Give them my name, number and email.

Mike Waters Syracuse Post-Standard President



That brings me to the second point about being more prepared to protect journalists' interests.

I have reached out to the leadership of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and the Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM) to create a link between our organizations.

I saw the need and the value of such a liaison last spring when the USBWA joined forces with the APSE to mediate a situation when a reporter covering Bradley University had been banned from events open to other media. Our joint efforts proved effective and the reporter was able to resume covering the team.

Then I watched the awful post-game scene when a Houston Astros front-office official harassed a group of female reporters in the clubhouse after a game.

I thought, "What if that had been a female reporter covering a college basketball game? What if it was an African-American female reporter?"

The USBWA would have responded, of course, but we would have done so alone. We didn't have the same

relationship with either NABJ or AWSM that we have with APSE.

I'm happy to report that both NABJ and AWSM reacted enthusiastically to my interest in forming an alliance of sorts.

I'm also proud to say that I'm now a card-carrying member of the NABJ. I didn't know that was possible until reaching out to my old friend A. Sherrod Blakely of NBC Sports Boston.

I have invited both groups to send representatives to the USBWA's events at the Final Four in Atlanta, including

our meetings with the NCAA and our annual awards luncheon. This invitation extends to any current female or African-American members of the USBWA. Heck, I don't care if you're not currently a member. If you cover college hoops and are going to be at the Final Four, reach out to me or USBWA executive director Malcolm Moran.

Come to an event, find out how things work.

If you're interested, become a USBWA district rep. Meet our board members. Perhaps you become a board member down the line.

One concern I have is that younger, minority reporters might not see this column if they're not USBWA members. So I ask of our membership, the next game you go to, please look around the media work room. Reach out to a reporter and show tell this about this column and what we're trying to do at the USBWA.

Tell them we would value their membership and that we'd love to see them in Atlanta.

And give them my email address: mwaters@syracuse.com.

Five Hall of Famers: two centuries of experience

By Malcolm Moran

The 2020 USBWA Hall of Fame class recognizes approximately two centuries of experience within the industry and our organization, covering the men's and the women's game from coast to coast. In alphabetical order:

For almost four decades with the USBWA, nearly all of them as executive director, Joe Mitch has been the face of the organization. Joe grew the membership to its current level of more than 800. He developed programs to promote coverage of college basketball by offering scholarships to journalism students and developing such awards as the Oscar Robertson Trophy, the Henry Iba Award, the Wayman Tisdale Award and the annual recognition of women. Joe was named in 2015 to the Hall of Fame of the Missouri Valley Conference, where he spent about 30 years as an administrator, and was awarded the NABC's Cliff Wells Appreciation Award in 2019.

As a member of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution staff, Wendy Parker was regarded as one of the first national authorities on women's college basketball.

For years, her columns in Basketball Times provided essential information for an audience that had traditionally concentrated on the men's game. She regularly covered Atlantic Coast Conference and Southeastern Conference basketball and was a consistent presence at the Women's Final Four. Wendy was respected for her work on the impact of Title IX and the women's sports establishment.

Since Bill Reynolds began working at the Providence Journal in 1981, not far from the headquarters of the Big East conference, he has been an authority on the dramatic rise of the collection of northeast independents and one of the most prolific basketball writers in the country. Last August, after more than 38 years, he decided "I'm easing off a bit" at the age of 74. His books include "Fall River Dreams," "Success Is a Choice" (with Rick Pitino), "Glory Days" and "Basketball Junkie" (with Chris Herren).

After graduating from the University of North Carolina in 1974, Mark Whicker covered college basketball in Winston-Salem, Dallas and Philadelphia,

where he wrote about David Thompson and Dean Smith, the Big Five and Rollie Massimino. After moving west to the Orange County Register, he continued to delve into the college game with insight and illumination amid the focus on the L.A. pro scene. An award-winning columnist many times over, his roots have always been in college basketball.

Jack Wilkinson, the Georgia Sportswriter of the Year in 2001 and 2004, was a regular at Final Fours during a career of more than 30 years. After starting at Newsday while a student at Hofstra University, he worked at the Miami News, Chicago Daily News, New York Daily News and Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Some of his best work included coverage of the St. John's teams coached by Lou Carnesecca and the Georgia Tech teams coached by Bobby Cremins. When Atlanta hosted the Final Four in 2002, Jack's essay about his family's love of the game – including the devotion of his younger brother Tom and the day Jack scored 23 points in a ninth-grade game while guarded by Julius Erving – was one of the most talked-about stories of the weekend.

The United States Basketball Writers Association
PO Box 257; Zionsville IN 46077-9998.
Visit us at: www.usbwa.com
814-574-1485.

PRESIDENT – Mike Waters, Syracuse
Post-Standard; C: 315-416-6031;
mwaters@syracuse.com

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT – Seth Davis, The
Athletic/CBS; C: 917-225-5788;
sethdavishoops@gmail.com

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT – Shannon Ryan,
Chicago Tribune; C: 312-451-7692;
sryan@chicagotribune.com

THIRD VICE PRESIDENT – Luke DeCock,
Raleigh News & Observer; C: 919-812-7195;
ldecock@newsobserver.com

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Malcolm Moran,
H: 814-574-1485; C: 317-278-5329;
malcolm@usbwa.com

BOARD MEMBERS

DISTRICT I – Gavin Keefe, New London Day;
C: 401-527-8625; g.keefe@theday.com

DISTRICT II – Gene Wang, Washington Post;
C: 202-509-4502; O: 202-334-6571;
gene.wang@washpost.com

DISTRICT III – David Hale, ESPN; C: 858-405-
8280; david.hale@espn.com

DISTRICT IV – Michelle Kaufman, Miami Herald;
O: 305-376-3438; mkaufman@miamiherald.com

DISTRICT V – Brendan Quinn, The Athletic;
C: 734-660-6659; bfquinn06@gmail.com

DISTRICT VI – Stu Durando, St. Louis
Post-Dispatch; 314-650-1760;
sdurando@post-dispatch.com

DISTRICT VII – Bob Holt, Arkansas
Democrat-Gazette; C: 479-601-4339;
bobholt59@gmail.com

DISTRICT VIII – Kelly Lyell, Fort Collins
Coloradoan; O: 970-224-7712; C: 970-214-1337;
kellylyell@coloradoan.com

DISTRICT IX – James Crepea, Oregonian,
C: 631-987-8308; james.crepea@gmail.com

WOMEN – Mel Greenberg; C: 215-815-5943;
poll416@gmail.com

AT-LARGE – George Schroeder, USA Today;
C: 541-953-4080; gschroeder@usatoday.com

AT-LARGE – Jon Wilner, Bay Area News Group;
408-859-5268; jwilner@bayareanewsgroup.com

SID – Craig Pinkerton, Southeastern Conference; O:
205-458-3000; cpinkerton@sec.org

NEW MEDIA LIAISON – Mike Rutherford, SB
Nation; C: 502-644-9976; mikeruth5@aol.com

TIPOFF EDITOR – John Akers, Basketball Times;
H: 704-849-8627; C: 980-422-1294;
johna19081@gmail.com

WEBMASTER – Ted Gangi, C: 214-909-9314;
ted@collegepressbox.com

Let's recognize best schools that allow media do its job

We're really good at complaining.

Sometimes we complain because we're right, or we're dealing with deadline stress. Members of a certain age will remember when the USBWA made complaining an annual event that required an appointment.

We would sit in a meeting room during the Final Four – rows of chairs surrounded by bare walls – and take aim at poor Dave Cawood over missing media buses, an absence of telephones or the need for more telecopiers.

(We'll wait for a moment while students stop to google the word *telecopier*.)

That is why the most important fundamental advance executed by my predecessor, Joe Mitch, was the tone of communication this organization established in the way it conducts business.

I am proposing an extension of that tone in the form of an annual award to recognize the schools that most effectively provide us with a chance to do our jobs.

This is not a good-guy award. This recognition would draw attention to specific policies, on game days and beyond, that determine conditions for beat reporters and other interested media members.

In the spirit of full disclosure, this idea is not original. The Football Writers Association of America introduced its Super 11 in 2009 to recognize the schools setting the standard for media availability and accessibility. In more than a decade to follow, the FWAA has been able to shine the light on best practices and incentivize an open approach. The award has also created another form of incentive.

Suppose intermittently cooperative Team A makes the discovery that its rival, Team B, receives positive recognition on a regular basis. Maybe Team A decides it needs to tweak some things to improve working conditions.

Forde moves to Sports Illustrated

Past USBWA president Pat Forde joined Sports Illustrated as a senior writer after spending the past eight seasons at Yahoo Sports. Forde also worked seven years at ESPN and the first 17 years of his career at the Louisville Courier-Journal.

Paul Woody announced his retirement as columnist after 40 years at the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Recent Hall of Fame inductee Dan Wetzel and past Rising Star award winner Kevin Armstrong are executive producers of "Killer Inside: The Mind of Aaron Hernandez," a three-part documentary series on Netflix.

Longtime sports writer Irv Moss, who covered colleges among many other sports for the Denver Post, died on Jan. 8 from esophageal cancer. Moss, 85, retired in 2016 after a 60-year career at the Post.

The Athletic has added Charlotte Carroll, formerly of Sports Illustrated, to cover the UConn women's program and Brendan Marks, formerly of the Charlotte Observer, to cover Duke and North Carolina.

Malcolm Moran Executive Director



The idea is to create a group evaluation of nuts-and-bolts factors that determine how well we can do our jobs.

What are the conditions when the team plays? Where are our seats? Can we see the game?

(It is hard to believe that question needs to be asked, but it does.)

Is the dressing room open? If not, is there access to players that are the most relevant to the outcome of the game? How efficient is the distribution of statistics and notes? What is the access to the visiting team? If the media parking area is not close to the arena, is there a system to make sure reporters can safely reach their vehicles?

Does the head coach linger for a less-formal session after the postgame press conference? Are assistant coaches available?

Are practices open? Are portions of practices open? Are coaches and players available on a regular basis? Are freshmen available?

Are coaches and players available for individual sessions for profiles or other longer stories?

In other words: Is initiative rewarded? Or stifled?

Five seems like a good number for basketball. It's a number that also creates an exclusive feel. Let's see how the evaluation process develops. If the district representatives and officers feel that there is a small difference from the fifth to ninth-rated schools, we could establish a second team or honorable mention status. If the discussion creates a consensus that there is a distance between the top five schools and the next level, we can cap the recognition at five.

The goal is to highlight the best work that is being done, not unlike the way we highlight individual playing or coaching achievements.

This is a recognition that can be determined by all the media members in our organization. If you are aware of a program that should be considered, please contact your district representative. The contact information is in your USBWA directory. Please describe as many specifics as you can to make the case. You can be guided by the questions that were asked here, but feel free to add any observations you have discovered in your experience.

We could highlight each recognized school with an institutional profile that defines and explains its business model and why the decision was made to become accessible. My hope is that the award could be announced after the end of the season and presented each year at the annual CoSIDA convention.

So please share your thoughts and ideas. We are accepting nominations of schools. We are also looking for a name for the award. Please send those ideas to me at malcolm@usbwa.com.

There's just one request. In an effort to steer our organization clear of any name, image and likeness controversies, Fab Five is not on the table.

Mitch selected to Hall of Fame he helped originate

By John Akers

Fittingly, the USBWA's Hall of Fame welcomes the man who initiated the honor.

Joe Mitch was five years into his 36-year career as the executive director of the USBWA (plus three more as editor of the Tipoff) when he went to the board with an idea about how to honor members. USBWA founder Wayne Duke, past executive director Ray Marquette and writers Smith Barrier, Dick Herbert and Jay Simon became the inaugural Hall of Fame class of 1988.

Thirty-two productive years later, Mitch joins them.

"I'm humbled," he said. "When we started this – and I say 'we,' because I wasn't the only one behind it – I never felt that I'd be inducted into the Hall of Fame."

Under Mitch's leadership:

- The USBWA multiplied from roughly 200 members to today's membership of more than 800.
- The USBWA gained the financial stability it enjoys today through Mitch's fund-raising experience from his



Joe Mitch

work at the Metro and Missouri Valley conferences.

- Pool reporters gained access to officials and breakout sessions were provided for players during NCAA tournaments.

- Seminars and scholarships have been provided to high school and college students at each Final Four over the past two decades.

- The nation's top player, coach and freshman are honored at an annual post-season gala, currently in St. Louis.

- Hall of Fame inductees and winners of the Katha Quinn, Most Courageous and Rising Star awards are honored at a luncheon on the Monday of each NCAA championship game, though it took no

small amount of trial and error to transform an event that began as a poorly attended annual breakfast.

"I asked (past president Bill) Brill how we could get members to attend, and he said to serve beer," Mitch recalled. "The next year, we got Coors Light as a sponsor, and we had beer and scrambled eggs for breakfast."

Pause for effect. "It was well attended."

It can safely be said that no member has cared for – or worried about – the USBWA than Joe Mitch. Or likely ever will.

"It's been a great 39 years," Mitch said. "I would do it all over again if I had the opportunity."

Modestly, Mitch credits past presidents too numerous to mention for aiding him during a nearly four-decade run with the USBWA.

Fittingly, the tributes from these past presidents rolled in when Mitch announced last May that he was retiring as the USBWA's executive director.

"The USBWA would have curled up and died years ago without you," wrote Pat Forde.

John Feinstein wrote of Mitch's "remarkable decency." Bob Hammel said Mitch lifted a "good organization to heights none of us could have imagined way back when."

Mitch was leaving the USBWA at its apex, according to Dave Dorr.

"Back in the day, the USBWA was a feel-good organization," Dorr said. "Presidents' roles were largely honorary. Your management style of patience, sensitivity and ability to find sponsors carried the day. You transformed the USBWA. Members will long benefit from your legacy down the road."

Wilkinson stayed for the love of the game

By Steve Hummer

If it fast-twitched, Jack Wilkinson covered it for the more than 30 years he spent at sportswriter's fantasy camp.

No one-arena specialist, Jack was a proud and skilled general practitioner. But there was never a doubt about what in the wide world of sports made his own creative pulse quicken. Just read anything he wrote about college basketball.

His muse spoke in the slightly wise-guy dialect of a 1980s Big East coach preaching the backdoor cut. His inner self always wanted to get out and sit courtside. Some people may go to a Final Four, but with Jack, this trip was his Hajj.

Today, living in Atlanta with his wife Janet, near his two daughters and a cadre of old coot friends who know enough to defer to him on all things college hoops, he no longer writes on the game (our loss). But he'll still light up like a shot clock when talk turns to March and its manic tournament. And don't get him started on prima donnas, cheaters, showboats or any of the other old-school taboos.

Growing up on Long Island gave Wilkinson a home-court advantage when dealing with certain of college basketball's great character coaches, the kind that seemed drawn to him. It has

been said he was among those few in the profession who could speak fluent Carnesecca and Cremins, among the most difficult to master of romance languages.

When reading Wilkinson, you came for the word play. To wit:

Wake Forest's Chris Paul was "one deking demon of a Demon Deacon."

Gifted shooters from long range were "3-point arc angels."

When Duke's Mike Krzyzewski deployed Grant Hill in a 1994 game against Arkansas, it went something like this: "Krzyzewski may have the antidote to the



Jack Wilkinson sits on press row, just to the left of No. 23.

Hogs' signature 40 minutes of hell: 40 minutes of Hill."

But you stayed for the love of the game.

He went public with his printed shows of affection in Chicago and New York and Miami. But some of his best work happened during 24 years (1983-2007) in Atlanta at the Journal-Constitution. This also represented one of Jack's greatest professional achievements, creating a wide-ranging basketball body of work in the great southern outpost of college football, where all sporting goods are supposed to be more oblong than round.

If not for Jack, think of the deprived Atlanta reader who might never know the intimacy of an evening spent

at Hinkle Field House in Indiana or the Palestra in Philly.

In 2002, he took us into the bedroom of college basketball's greatest coaching legend, long retired: "John Wooden continues to sleep on the left side of the bed, as he did when Nell was alive. On the right side lies Nell's robe, along with two framed photos of her, some flowers and a figurine. At the foot of the bed is a gold-and-blue UCLA blanket, inscribed with 'John' and 'Nell.'"

In 1990, he painted the scene of a fleeting sensation at Georgia Tech: "But as darkness fell last Feb. 1, even the worst seat in the house was a perfect perch from which to watch Kenny Anderson weave his magic down on the floor ... You could see everything unfolding – the fast breaks, the passing lanes, the seams, the infinitesimal cracks in the North Carolina defense that Anderson carved into canyons."

Why this sport among the lavish menu of options? Basketball always mattered around his house, starting with Jack's dad. The old man drove a newspaper delivery truck, but there was always the suspicion that in his day he drove the lane, too, and better than anybody else around the kitchen table.

Before he played football and lacrosse at Hofstra, Jack dabbled in basketball at Lynbrook (N.Y.) High. There, in a testament to his coach's acumen, someone else always tried to guard Julius Erving whenever Roosevelt High came calling.

It was Jack's younger brother who was the college basketball player in the family, and it was in Tommy Wilkinson, who died in 2008, that Jack found his most personal connection to the game. Of all the athletes Jack would encounter on every field and court, Tommy was his hands-down favorite. Thus, Tommy's sport had to be his favorite, too.

When summing up why Jack wrote college basketball so exceptionally well, the capper to his story about the Palestra comes to mind. Jack wrote of the lovely plaque marking that sporting cathedral. Fitting that we borrow it now and attach it to the writer's induction as well.

It reads:

To Win The Game Is Great ...

To Play The Game Is Greater ...

But To Love The Game Is The Greatest Of All.

Quick typing, quicker wit

By Robyn Norwood

Mark Whicker, a Southern California sports columnist for more than three decades, began his career at the Chapel Hill Newspaper in North Carolina in 1973. On hand for the 200th of Dean Smith's 879 victories, Whicker presented the North Carolina coach with 200 of Smith's beloved Kent cigarettes.

Already a sports columnist for the Winston-Salem Journal by his early 20s, Whicker was chosen North Carolina Sportswriter of the Year twice before he was 25.

"Mark was a natural, right from the start," said Lenox Rawlings, a contemporary of Whicker's at the University of North Carolina and later the longtime sports columnist at the Winston-Salem Journal. "He already knew what was going on in college basketball, and once he had a seat at the table, he sat down and started asking questions, always looking for a fresher story, for something different, for something funnier or more meaningful. He usually got it. He also got the part about working for the answer, before and after the event."

Whicker went on to work for the Dallas Times-Herald, Philadelphia Bulletin and Philadelphia Daily News before joining the Orange County Register in 1987. His column has been a fixture in Southern California for more than 30 years, and he remains a columnist for the Southern California News Group. He has been honored twice by the Associated Press Sports Editors as one of the top 10 columnists in the nation.

Among the events Whicker has covered were the 1974 Final Four when David Thompson and N.C. State ended UCLA's seven-year national championship run, Villanova's 1985 title season, UCLA's 1995 title and Magic Johnson's 1991 announcement that he had tested

positive for HIV. Whicker also witnessed N.C. State's upset of Houston in the 1983 title game and Loyola Marymount guard Bo Kimble's first left-handed free throw in tribute to fallen teammate Hank Gathers in the NCAA tournament in 1990.

Despite his decades in Southern California, some of his fondest memories are of the ACC of the 1970s.

"Those were great days, with great players, and coaches who were real characters," Whicker remembered. "Those of us who covered the ACC enjoyed each other's company and took the work seriously but not ourselves. It was pre-ESPN and few games were televised, and pro sports hadn't yet arrived. We got to tell the stories and learned to do it objectively and with passion."

Known for prodigious productivity, quick typing and quicker wit, Whicker also is widely admired by his peers.

Frank Burlison, the longtime Southern California reporter and basketball talent scout, recalls seeing Whicker finish columns, "fingers flying," and leave long before his press box colleagues.

"And, in reading the next day what he had cranked out, it was once again confirmed to all of us *none of us wrote better or with more insight* than Mark," he said.

"That was true then and it remains true 20 years later – regardless of the sport, setting or circumstances: He remains the best there is."



Mark Whicker

Wendy Parker: A pioneer for women's coverage

By Mel Greenberg

Early in the 1989-90 season, yours truly received a phone call from Malcolm Moran. He had been elected USBWA president and thought the time was right for our organization to have a women's division. He said he knew the perfect person to oversee its operation.

No problem. Great idea. Glad to serve.

A few days later, the phone rang again – "Hi. My name is Wendy Parker. I work at the Atlanta Journal Constitution and I'm starting a women's beat for them and was told by people that you could help me with people to contact and I have a few story ideas."

And so began a wonderful three-decades personal working friendship, and in the process, a blessing to help the USBWA grow Malcolm's ambition to give women's basketball its due.

With great pride, we welcome Wendy to join yours truly as the second person to earn USBWA Hall of Fame recognition primarily for their work in women's basketball.

It was a wonderful idea to choose Wendy in this particular year, when she can be honored in her own town of Atlanta, where the Final Four and the annual USBWA awards program will be held.

And since it is possible, we are working on the logistics of also having her presented at our annual women's award news conference in New Orleans, this year's site of the Women's Final Four.

In launching a women's beat to offer local coverage on such schools as Georgia and Georgia Tech, as well as the national scene, her hire led to a 26-year run writing a women's hoops column for Basketball Times, where she offered great storytelling as well as opinionated columns.

She volunteered to help and did most of the heavy lifting to set up the early days of the USBWA women's awards luncheons at the Women's Final Four and also help with the vote count on the USBWA women's All-America team and individual national honors.

Like many of us who got involved with women's coverage, she was initially considered a part-time correspondent on the AJC beat. Eventually, she moved full-time into sports from 1996-2004, covering not only women's basketball but football and other collegiate sports as well as the 1999 and 2003 women's soccer world cup, and the 1996 and 2000 Olympics.

"Wendy Parker is the pro's pro," said New London Day columnist Mike DiMauro, who spent much time working alongside her while covering the Connecticut Huskies women's team. "She was a journalistic giant covering all collegiate sports, not just women's basketball."

"I always loved the respect and reverence (Georgia women's coach) Andy Landers had for her. Nobody deserves this honor more."

After her stint working on the print side of things at the AJC, she moved for a while into the paper's budding internet operation, acquiring new skills, and became a special USBWA board member as a new media liaison.

When job cuts began hitting the AJC, she left to steer her own operation in community news.

In this year at the start of a new decade, it is with great pride that we now call her a USBWA Hall of Famer.



Wendy Parker

Reynolds a Rhode Island institution

By Kevin McNamara

The call usually came at an ungodly early hour and always with the same question.

"Meet you at the usual place? Ten minutes?"

Ugh. It was time for breakfast in New York City with Bill Reynolds. Big East tournament time. The usual place? Howard Johnson's, just off Times Square.

For years that was the spot Reynolds and myself would dine while covering Big John, Boeheim, Calhoun and oh so many great players. HoJo's was typical Reynolds, laid back, no frills.

When it came time to write, however, Bill Reynolds was more like the 21 Club and Peter Luger's. A stylist, a wordsmith who could turn a phrase like a dream. Anyone who read Reynolds instantly noticed the talent dripping off the pages of the Providence Journal and out of the nearly dozen books he authored in a nearly 40-year career in Rhode Island.

Reynolds lived a different journalistic life. He never really covered a team, didn't worry about recruiting or the coaching carousel. A few years after he was hired, he shot right into a columnist role and never left. He criss-crossed the country following the Larry Bird Celtics and saw the ball go through Buckner's legs in Shea Stadium but rarely missed a Providence, Brown or Rhode Island college basketball game.

While the games were great, Reynolds' best work came when focused on the human side of sports. "Losing locker rooms were better stories than winning locker rooms," Reynolds said.



Bill Reynolds

Reynolds' reputation grew national in 1989 when he wrote "Born to Coach," a biography on the rise of Rick Pitino at Providence and with the New York Knicks. That platform took him to "Fall River Dreams," a season inside a local high school power. Other books included a season inside the Big East, a remembrance of the 1967 Red Sox and a book with Bob Cousy, Mr. Basketball himself.

As the years writing columns on Tom Brady, Pedro Martinez and his "For What It's Worth" Saturday roundup of one-liners and shots at politicians and society in general, Reynolds became a

Rhode Island institution. Two of his most gripping books centered on local basketball. There was "Hope," a look at a dysfunctional Providence inner-city high school team. Then "Basketball Junkie," a remarkably frank, frightening look at Chris Herren's battle with addiction through his NBA and European pro career. It was so good, ESPN adapted it into an award-winning 30-for-30 film.

"He covered me in my teen years as I was growing up in basketball," Herren said, "but he was with me in my worst years."

Reynolds is joining an illustrious group of USBWA Hall of Famers, but he likely has everyone beat in one category. He could actually play the game, to the point that anyone who really knows the 6-foot-4 Bill calls him "Shooter." Reynolds was a star at Brown University in the 1960s, matching up against some of Pete Carril's earliest Princeton teams.

Look it up, right there in the Brown record books. William W. Reynolds. Hall of Famer.