

There are SIDs out there who still 'get it'

All we want is access, to get the story right, to be informed, and of course have a decent work station with power, wireless, and a chair.

So, maybe I'm naïve, but that doesn't seem to be too demanding.

But as thrust of conference season is upon the sport, I wanted to take the time to acknowledge some folks in the business that understand their jobs that maybe don't get the recognition they deserve.

I had a long conversation with Kyle Muncy of Connecticut recently and we were talking about understanding the role of a sports information director and how much he needed to assert him or herself. Muncy gets it. He knows that he works for the university, not just a head coach. As controlling as Jim Calhoun can be as a basketball coach, Calhoun doesn't dictate every move Muncy makes.

If a writer who covers the Huskies needs a player for a postgame interview, then Muncy will make the effort. Now, he can't make Stanley Robinson talk to a writer, but he's not being told that a player isn't going to be allowed to talk.

USBWA President
Andy Katz
espn.com



Yes, these are student-athletes, they are still young men in their teens in some cases, but this is still a multi-million dollar business. The seats aren't free. Fans are paying in many instances high-price seat-licensing fees just to buy the tickets. Tell me where else that happens in society? Can you imagine if we had to pay a licensing fee just to then purchase a movie ticket?

So, there is accountability, and many times the sports information directors are put in the middle of making a tough decision.

Now, I know I have a skewed view at times since I'm no longer a beat writer. I work for a national web site and network and, like it or not, we are treated differently since

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ESPN's Soltys, Krulewitz – always a team – share Katha Quinn Award

By **ANDY KATZ**
USBWA PRESIDENT

OK, I'm biased here. Yes, Josh Krulewitz and Mike Soltys are good friends of mine and colleagues here at ESPN.

But I want you to know a few things: I have covered college sports since 1986, and I can tell you unequivocally you would be hard-pressed to find two co-workers who are as genuine, warm, who are compassionate and deserve to be recognized with the USBWA's Katha Quinn Award. The award, a cherished honor within the organization named for the late St. John's sports information director, shouldn't be handed out lightly.

Managing ESPN's communications network is a 24/7 job, just like the network and all its media outlets.

Krulewitz's and Soltys' demeanor, their ability to handle a crisis and their desire to deal with the media in a thoughtful and helpful manner is unmatched.

Krulewitz and Soltys have been loyal to this organization, to men's and women's college basketball and are constantly promoting the game.

But there is more to them than their credentials and their history with the network (Krulewitz since 1992 and Soltys since 1980).

Josh has had a rough year. There's no easy way to say it. Josh lost his father to cancer in 2007. Josh was by his side through the final weeks of his father Jack's life. He tried to balance family, work and the emotional exhaustion of dealing with his father's terminal illness.

Throughout the ordeal, Mike was Josh's rock. I'm not sure I've ever seen two closer people work together. They



Mike Soltys



Josh Krulewitz

have a kindred spirit that would be hard to mimic in any line of work. Josh and his wife Tammy and Mike and his wife Teresa are the type of people that leave you walking away feeling good about life.

As Josh grieved the week after his father's death, he made sure to check in with me to make sure my father, who was going through a potentially life-saving triple-bypass surgery, was OK. That's Josh, always thinking of someone else.

And I will tell you that Josh's eulogy for his father was the most beautiful speech I have ever heard. Mike and Teresa were there, of course, as moved as I was on that November Sunday. Josh had lost his mother years before, and it was

hard to fathom that he had lost both his parents before he had turned 40.

Josh went out and played nine holes of golf on a crisp Sabbath morning the day before he would bury his father. His eulogy looked at each hole to illustrate what his father loved about life.

As I sat in the pew in the funeral home, my eyes spilling with tears and an apple busting through my throat, I couldn't help but think about how wonderful a person Josh had become and how proud Jack must have been of him.

And I can tell you that every time I see Mike with his children, whether it's sitting in the stands at Gampel Pavilion or at going down a water slide at Lake Compounce Amusement Park in Bristol at the ESPN annual family picnic, his passion for fatherhood is so crystal clear.

What I'm telling you is that these are two good men, wonderful husbands, fathers, sons and a credit to their profession.

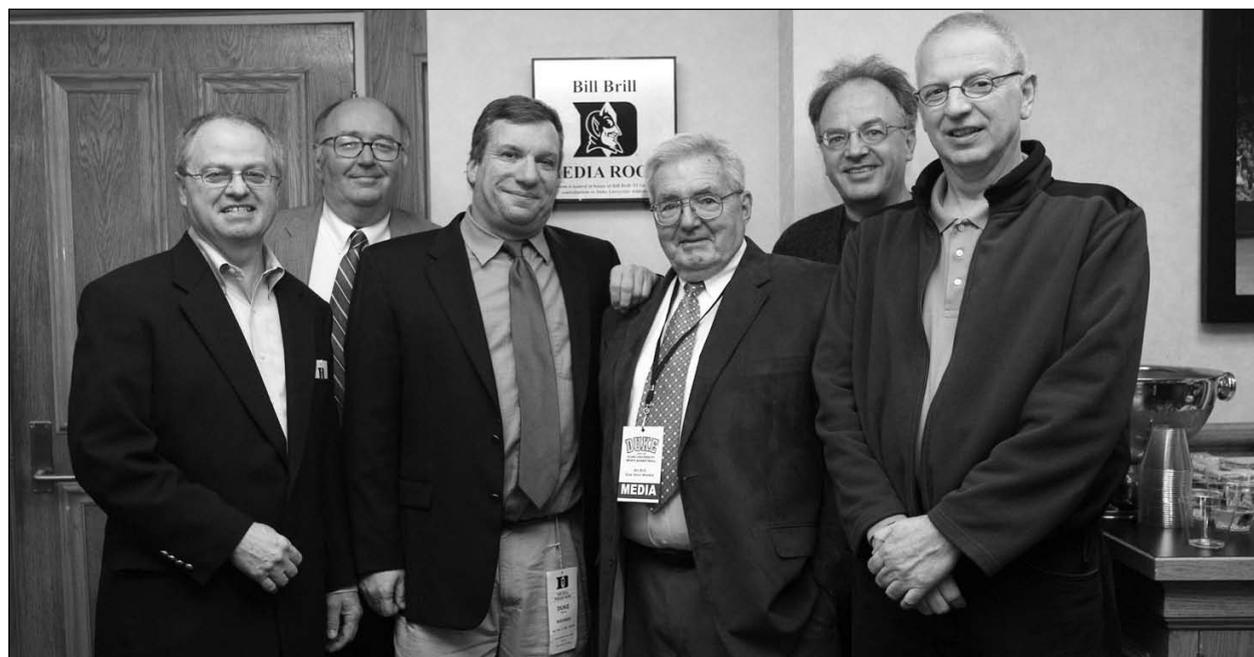
When Dick Vitale had surgery in Boston on his throat, Mike and Josh were the first ESPN employees to visit Dick in the hospital. If there is ever someone in duress, Mike and Josh are there to diffuse the situation, offer guidance and a calming tone that I'm sure is much needed.

ESPN is fortunate to have Mike and Josh in its stable of thousands of employees. I'm proud to call them good friends.

Mike and Josh have been fiercely loyal to the USBWA. I know that they will cherish this honor. And it is certainly a privilege for me as president to preside over them receiving the Katha Quinn Award. Trust me, they will be forever grateful.

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From left to right: Joe Mitch, Jim O'Connell, John Feinstein, Bill Brill, John Akers, Keith Drum.

Duke honors a legend with 'Bill Brill Media Room'

Bill Brill, one of the true legends in the sportswriting profession – and a charter member of the USBWA Hall of Fame – recently had a media room at his alma mater dedicated to him.

Brill, the first living member of the USBWA to be inducted into the USBWA Hall of Fame in 1990 and USBWA president in 1980-81, was honored in Decem-

ber at Duke University, where the press room at Cameron Indoor Stadium was named the "Bill Brill Media Room."

On hand for the dedication ceremonies were several USBWA members, including past presidents John Feinstein and Jim O'Connell, Tipoff Editor John Akers and yours truly.

Brill has pledged a major financial gift in the form of trust funds to Duke's athletics department.

"This gift to Duke is very important to me because college sports have been such an integral part of my entire adult life," said Brill, who was graduated from Duke in 1952 and is a member of the Duke Sports Hall of Fame.

"The way Duke blends athletics and academics together is unique and is the way I think it should be done. The men's basketball program has been a vital part of Duke's ascent to the national status it holds today and I want to support its continued success.

Much of Brill's career was spent at the Roanoke Times, where Brill worked for 35 years and served as sports editor from 1960-91 before retiring.

Plans are underway for this year's USBWA sportswriting seminars to be held in conjunction with the NCAA men's and women's Final Fours respectively.

Trinity University in San Antonio will serve as site for the seminar at the men's Final Four on Thursday, April 3, and will be co-hosted by the San Antonio Express-News.

The University of South Florida will host the seminar at the women's Final Four in Tampa on Friday, April 4.

The seminars are intended to provide college and high

Joe Mitch
Executive Director
USBWA



school students interested in pursuing a career in sports journalism to hear from writers and columnists about their experiences and lessons learned while covering sports for a living.

Students who participate in the seminars will be given assignments to cover specific events at each Final Four and then write stories and submit them in a writing contest for a chance to win a \$1,000 college scholarship.

Since the USBWA initiated these seminars in 2000, the USBWA has awarded \$14,000 in college scholarships.

The USBWA's men's player and coach of the year breakfast held annually at the NCAA Final Four as a fundraiser for the association will be co-hosted this year by the San Antonio Local Organizing Committee on Friday morning, April 4, in downtown San Antonio at a site to be determined.

In addition to presenting awards for the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year and the Henry Iba Coach of the Year, as voted on by USBWA members, the USBWA will honor the organization's Most Courageous Award winner at the Friday breakfast.

The Most Courageous Award has been one of the highlights at the association's other awards breakfast that is held on the morning of the national championship game.

But the Most Courageous Award is being moved to the Friday breakfast to separate and distinguish between the association's two breakfasts – the Friday one to honor players and coaches in basketball and the other on Monday to recognize achievements by USBWA members such as the USBWA Hall of Fame and Katha Quinn Award.

College beat coverage must go on, despite repeated roadblocks

Here's a news flash—it is becoming increasingly difficult for college basketball beat writers to do their job.

Every year, we hear of the horror stories. Seating issues. Locker room access issues. Practice access issues. Postgame interview issues. And we get more and more frustrated.

So when USBWA president Andy Katz informed the membership of the situation at Indiana with reporters being threatened with revocation of their working credentials if they dared interview Hoosier players on the Assembly Hall floor after games, my first question was: "When did Bob Knight return to Bloomington?" I thought maybe I had missed the news.

Perhaps the Indiana job brings out the worst in coaches when it comes to media relations.

Maybe the scrutiny that Kelvin Sampson has found himself under since he took over for Mike Davis has changed him. In any event, it's not good for anyone when players are restricted from the press.

The seating issue around the country has been ongoing.

Athletic directors are under increased pressure to develop additional revenue streams as they swim upstream against a current of red ink.

Most of us understand that.

We know the economic situation, and it's a battle we likely will not win.

Same with the locker-room access. More and more programs are closing their doors following games. Some use the lame excuse that with women covering the games, the players feel uncomfortable having them in the locker room.

VP Steve Carp Las Vegas Review Journal



When it comes to being able to talk to any player, that's where we need to dig in our heels and hold our ground. This idea of two student-athletes and the head coach in an anteroom doesn't cut it. If you're not among the chosen, that doesn't mean no one wants to talk to you. That's especially true where competing newspapers exist and the beat writers are looking for different angles to the same game story.

Perhaps those schools have never heard of a bathrobe. Other programs don't even come up with an excuse. They just say no and that's it.

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the same game story.

I'm not suggesting schools keep their players around for 45 minutes, as is the case in the NCAA Tournament, where, by the way, the locker rooms are open. But how hard is it for the sports information director to canvass his media in the second half and ask, "Who do you need after the game?" Assuming there's, say, five players who have been requested, let the two main requestees attend the postgame news conference with the head coach. And when they're done, let the other three, who had showered and changed, swing by for a few minutes before getting with their family and friends.

That doesn't seem unreasonable, does it?

Many schools do comply in that regard. The fact is, all of them should, if for no other reason than for the good of the game. The more exposure college basketball receives, the better it will be for it.

High time for bloggers, mainstream media to find common ground

By CHRIS BYRNE
GUEST COLUMNIST

A few years ago, when reading the news site of a global network, I was stunned to find out that a family member had not been killed in a Middle East bomb blast, "as had been reported earlier." If I had indeed seen the earlier article, you can bet your britches that phone calls would have been flying fast and furious to family members. Of course, one of those members would have ended up to him, sitting in his Washington D.C. office, at the time of the blast.

This man shares an emotional feeling that many sportswriters have: he hates blogs. The reason he hates them are the same that I hear and read in different forms. Bloggers are not trained. They have no contacts. There is no accountability. Once an incorrect story is out there in the blogosphere, there is no way to correct it or pull it back. And the list goes on. Of course, it was not blogs reporting that he had been killed. It was the mainstream, trained media that did not even bother to find out if he was indeed out of country.

For many people who write blogs and do not fit the working media view that they are miscreants sitting in their underwear and eating Doritos while they write their thoughts, this type of gross error is of course very aggravating. It is even worse when the mainstream media totally misconstrues what a blogger has written or said for its own purposes. A

perfect example of this is the October 2005 *Forbes Magazine* article, "Attack of the Blogs." While I should have been flattered to be mentioned in the article, I knew what the agenda of the author was. So when he had "interviewed" me under duress the previous spring, I demanded he do it by email. I did this because suspicion and mistrust cuts both ways, and I needed to protect myself by posting the entire, unedited interview online.

Instead of looking at blogs and bloggers as the enemy and spitting at them with venom, perhaps it is time to sit down with them and talk.

Yes, it is all about trust and people wanting what they consider to be unbiased, unfiltered information. They do not feel they can get it from the mainstream media, whether it is because the media outlet is owned by some corporate monster or the outlet is perceived as too close to an organization or person. There is also the feeling that the mainstream media cannot get basic information right. A perfect example is that for over a week, the college basketball standings on the ESPN web site listed Louisiana-Monroe as a member of the SEC West. It would be easy for you to say that it was a just a technical error and you should not be worried about it. It is time for a reality check. How about at the beginning of the

current NCAA basketball season, when Georgia suspended three players for violation of academic policy? Instead of reporting that, the print and over-the-air media reported that they were suspended for missing classes. Guess where the correct reason was written?

Instead of looking at blogs and bloggers as the enemy and spitting at them with venom, perhaps it is time to sit down with them and talk.

Why not reach out in your community and have an open workshop or forum? Find out where there is actually some common ground and find out where the differences are. Instead of sending them emails, as one well-known sportswriter did, saying that "The only positive thing I can think of about Hitler's time on earth—I'm sure he would have eliminated all bloggers." When you stoop to this level, you are the one who is going to lose. The bloggers have nothing to lose, and you have everything. They will look for your mistakes and missteps. In the process, they will rip your reputation to shreds, reducing your credibility in their eyes, and the eyes of anybody who reads their writing and passes it on, even more.

The times are changing, and you are being forced to do much more with a lot less resources. You can choose to resist the changes and give yourself an ulcer. Or you can get on board and accept that the rules of the game are changing, like it or not.

Best-Writing Contest Results

The Boston Globe's Marty Dobrow won magazine-length features with a story about Massachusetts forward Rashaun Freeman.

Malcolm Moran of USA Today won the moderate-length features category for a piece on Emily Nkosi's decision to walk away from the Baylor basketball team.

Jay Bilas of espn.com won for a column about Billy Donovan's unprofessional behavior in returning to Florida after accepting a job with the Orlando Magic.

John Feinstein of the Washington Post won for game story/spot news for a story on Tennessee's NCAA Tournament win over Virginia, and Steve Wieberg of USA Today won for investigative reporting for a story on coaching salaries.



Marty Dobrow



Malcolm Moran



John Feinstein



Steve Wieberg



Jay Bilas

Magazine Length Feature
1. Marty Dobrow, Boston Globe
2. Grant Wahl, Sports Illustrated
3. Blair Kerkhoff, Kansas City Star

Moderate Length Feature
1. Malcolm Moran, USA Today
2. Mike Waters, espn.com
3. Vahe Gregorian, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Game Story/Spot News
1. John Feinstein, Washington Post
2. Dick Jerardi, Philadelphia Daily News
3. Ken Davis, msnbc.com

Investigative Reporting
1. Steve Wieberg, USA Today
2. Curtis Eichelberger, Bloomberg News
3. Dustin Dopriak, Harrisonburg Daily News-Record

Columns
1. Jay Bilas, espn.com
2. Jack Bogaczyk, Charleston Daily Mail
3. Tom Shatel, Omaha World-Herald

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we just pop in rather than are there for the daily grind. I know. I've seen it from the other side when I was a beat writer for 10 years.

I don't want this list to be a who's-not-on-it forum. I simply want to single out some people that I come across who are doing their job modestly and make our profession a better place to work. We're all essentially working with each other, and there is no need for adversarial relationships.

Tact, tone and a common understanding are a must for us all to get along. Remember, this is college basketball, so the issues aren't as complex as affordable health care, or health care at all for all Americans.

In the Atlantic 10, the passion that Rhode Island's **Mike Laprey**, UMass's **Jason Yellin**, Saint Joseph's **Marie Wozniak** and Xavier's **Tom Eiser** show for their jobs is worth noting. Their personalities come through in trying to assist, rather than block, when something is needed.

Duke's **Matt Plizga** is at one of the franchises in the sport. He has to tread lightly since there is a way to do things at Duke. But his ability to ensure accessibility as best as he can within the structure at Duke is all that can be asked.

The Big East, with 16 schools, has its share of quality personnel but I wanted to single out **Muncy**, **Greg Hotchkiss** of Pitt, **Kenny Klein** of Louisville and **Mark Fratto** of St. John's who, and I'll quote Muncy here, "get it."

There might not be an SID who loves his job more than Michigan State's **Matt Larson**. Tom Izzo should be thankful he has an SID who is as loyal yet challenging. Larson and Izzo came up with their reporters' practice day that looked like it was as all-access a day could be for a reporter. Larson is always pushing back, trying to get stories into the paper, onto the web and on television.

Not too far behind is Wisconsin's **Brian Lucas**. Lucas

has the perfect demeanor to play off of the dry wit of Bo Ryan. Lucas seems to bleed Badger red, but his helpfulness shines through, regardless of the situation or crisis.

The Big 12, led by the conference SID **Rob Carolla**, might have the deepest bench. It's hard to find an SID in this conference that doesn't go beyond the job description. The effort by **Scott McConnell** of Texas, **Chris Theisen** of Kansas, **David Reiter** of Missouri, **Mike Houck** of Oklahoma and **Tom Gilbert** of Kansas State just to name a few should be praised. Gilbert was put in a tough spot when Frank Martin didn't allow the freshmen to speak during the fall semester, which is about as ridiculous a controlling move as a coach can make with his players. It's one thing to wait until they play in a game, but to ban them speaking

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for the semester doesn't make sense in today's era when they could be gone in six months and they'll be under the NBA's mandatory press-access rules.

The SEC has plenty that could be mentioned as well. But I'm trying to think of someone who works harder than the SEC's own **DeWayne Peevy**. I can't. He is as thorough as a conference sports information director could be in this profession. The SIDs in this conference, led by Kentucky's **Scott Stricklin** and Florida's **Fred Demarest**, should be proud that Peevy is leading them on a yearly basis.

Arizona's **Richard Paige**, Arizona State's **Doug Tammaro** and newcomer to the biz Washington State's **Jessica Schmick** get what they must do and handle their jobs with class out West. So, too, does **Rich Davi** at Saint Mary's, who is constantly striving to get more publicity for the upstart

Gaels but doing it in a tasteful, not shilling manner.

But if there is one sports information director that I would be remiss not to mention, it is Wyoming's **Kevin McKinney**. McKinney just plows ahead doing his gig in Laramie. He doesn't seek publicity, but he might be one of the best in the biz and has a rock of a personality that is as inviting and welcoming as you'll find. Not dealing with McKinney as much anymore since I stopped covering the WAC/MWC is something I miss.

Since I joined ESPN in 1999, I have traversed the country countless times and run across so many colleagues that are fine examples of our profession.

I wanted to single out a few in our profession that are members of the organization that when you see them in a press room, a locker room or check them out on their respective web sites, you know they understand their subject:

Jerry Tipton, Lexington Herald-Leader
Marty Dobrow, Boston Globe
Terry Hutchens, Indianapolis Star
Kevin McNamara, Providence Journal
Robbi Pickeral and Luciana Chavez, Raleigh News & Observer

Mike Waters, Syracuse Post Standard

And one final nugget: I hope some day we could get to a point where officials can be held accountable in the same light as coaches and players. I know it's not the case in any sport. But I'd like to see where within reason officials can be queried without their being an affront to their integrity. Obviously, judgment calls are hard to pick apart in a split second. But as the bench decorum rules are being enforced, I'd like to see the officials officially give a reason why a coach was given a technical. What did he say? Did he cross the coaches' line? What set him off? When I've seen at least one official fail to use restraint himself to calm a situation down, I'd like to know from him why he was so agitated. Officials in some circles are as known as some of the coaches. It's about time some of them answered a question.