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Big or small, the USBWA's willing to address your needs

A couple of months ago, Bud Withers of the *Seattle Times* e-mailed me with a simple request. He wanted to know if the USBWA could make his job a little easier.

Bud's wish? Could we provide a list of coaches' conference calls on our web site?

Not all that unreasonable, right?

I replied that we'd give it a shot. Lo and behold, after some cooperation from the conferences and getting the info to Ted Gangi, our Webmaster, I'm happy to report that we have that list on-line at USBWA.com. For those of you who do a national college basketball notebook every week and might want to jump on the different conferences' calls each week, you can go to the USBWA site, click on the link and get the phone number to call in, the schedule of which coaches appear when, and, in some cases, the passcode.

For the conferences that need you to call them directly, that number is provided as well.

What was nice about this was we were able to help all our members after one of our own made a simple suggestion. We don't get asked too often for help, but when

we do, we try our best to come through.

In this case, we had a happy ending. Or at least I hope it's a happy ending.

Sometimes, we aren't as lucky. Once in a while, a member runs into a roadblock in an attempt to do their job and we try to intercede on their behalf, but to little or no avail. Usually, it's a misunderstanding or a lack of clear communication. But sometimes, it's contentious or just plain pettiness.

If we can do a better job of explaining our role, perhaps things wouldn't be as adversarial. I think most coaches understand the media's role. Sometimes, they don't like what we write and don't want to hear our explanation for why we wrote what we did. But usually, things get worked out.

**President
Steve Carp
Las Vegas Review-Journal**



That's why I'm glad we have sports information directors as members of the USBWA. They are our first line – and sometimes even our last line – of defense in putting out fires with players, coaches and administrators. They can perhaps get the ear of the affronted party and try and sort things out. They can mediate disputes and prevent them from escalating into full-blown wars where nobody wins.

If you're having problems on your beat, whether it's access to players, seating at games, watching practice, whatever, we'll try and help. But may I suggest that before you come to us, go to your SID first. Usually, he or she can get the matter resolved. If not, by all means, call the USBWA board and we'll do what we can to help.

Whether we can resolve your problem or not, you need to know that we support your attempts to do your job and the hope is you never need to call upon us to assist. But should that need arise. Let us know and we'll do whatever we can.

In the meantime, we're trying to make your USBWA membership worthwhile. We're trying to provide fresh content on the website and our Oscar Robertson Trophy weekly watch and National Player of the Week is a new feature that has been well received early on.

We tinkered with the idea of having a service link us up to all things college basketball, including features, game stories, blogs and hard news stories. But frankly, the cost didn't justify the expenditure, so we passed.

But we're always open to suggestions on how we can make the site better for our members. If you have an idea, feel free to contact Ted, myself or anyone on the board.

Things are going to heat up in the next few weeks. March Madness is just around the corner and with it, the USBWA's awards will be announced and presented at the Final Four in Indianapolis. Don't forget to please vote for your all-district team and your national All-America team. It only takes a few minutes, and the more people who participate, the better it is for the process. You'll be getting an e-mail from us shortly and just forward your ballot to your district rep. It's that simple.

And please check out what's going on at USBWA.com.

We think you'll like what you see.

Dave Rose, Tiffara Steward win Most Courageous honors

The U.S. Basketball Writers Association named both men's and women's winners of the Most Courageous Award for the first time this season, with the men's honor going to Brigham Young coach Dave Rose and the women's to Farmingdale State point guard Tiffara Steward.

Rose nearly lost his life last June to pancreatic cancer – a form of cancer that few beat – but was back on the recruiting circuit the following month and is back coaching a BYU team that had won all but one of its games through mid-January.

The 4-foot-6 Steward is believed to be the smallest player in college-basketball history. She was born three months premature, weighing just 2½ pounds and measuring eight inches, and she underwent three surgeries by the time she was 3 years old. She has been a starter and team captain the past two seasons at Farmingdale State, a Division III school on Long Island, N.Y., though she is blind



Dave Rose



Tiffara Steward

in her right eye, has over a 50-percent hearing loss, has one leg that is shorter than the other and battles severe scoliosis.

After becoming severely ill while on a flight to Las Vegas for a family reunion, according to a story by Andy Katz on espn.com, Rose was diagnosed with a pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor, one of the deadliest forms of cancer.

When the plane landed, Rose was removed from by emergency medical personnel.

Rose was vomiting blood by the time he reached a Spring Valley area hospital.

The tumor and lower part of his pancreas were removed during emergency surgery.

Rose met with his team a few days after being released from his six-day stay in the hospital, much skinnier and his hair turned gray.

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USBWA lends hand to NABC in publicizing Hall of Fame

The USBWA and the National Association of College Basketball Coaches have had a relationship that goes back over 50 years ago of working together to promote the college game.

Now the USBWA has made plans to help the NABC launch a new media campaign to publicize the association's National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame.

The college basketball Hall of Fame, unveiled in 2005, is housed adjacent to Kansas City's Sprint Center as part of the NABC's College Basketball Experience.

The NABC has typically announced its fall class at the NCAA Final Four each year in April.

"But the announcement seems to get lost at the Final Four," said Rick Leddy, public-relations director for the NABC. "There's so much going on that the inductees don't get the recognition they deserve."

So the NABC has decided to announce its class during the college-basketball season and has picked Feb. 24 as the date to do it this season.

The USBWA plans to help by sending the press release electronically to members of the organization and to post the announcement on the USBWA website.

There will be a news conference in Kansas City and a media teleconference that USBWA members will be invited to participate on.

A Hall of Fame honoring college-basketball greats was a long-time in the making and was embraced by the basketball community when it was first announced to the public.

The NABC's Hall of Fame serves as a complement to the Naismith Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass., by enshrining not only coaches but players and teams who deserve recognition but may be omitted from the Naismith Hall.

A key player in the development of the college Hall of Fame was *Kansas City Star* sportswriter Blair Kerkhoff, a past president of the USBWA and a member of the Blue Ribbon Committee that selects the Hall of Fame induction class each year.

"The real credit for the Hall belongs to Jim Haney (NABC executive director), Reggie Minton (associate director) and the NABC board," said Kerkhoff. "I suppose if I had a role, it would have been encouragement early on, in print and in conversations with Jim and others in Kansas City, helping to develop the selection criteria and contributing some of the copy that's displayed on the walls at the Hall."

Since its inception, the college basketball Hall of Fame has drawn huge crowds for its induction ceremonies. The first class was special with James Naismith, Bill Russell, Dean Smith, Oscar Robertson and John Wooden, but the highlight might have come last fall when Larry Bird and Magic Johnson were enshrined together.

Joe Mitch USBWA Executive Director



The coaches' association and the USBWA have had a relationship that dates back to the founding of the USBWA in 1956. For years, the board of directors of the two groups would meet at the Final Four to find ways to work together better and improve communication.

That practice ended several years ago because of time constraints at the Final Four, especially for writers.

But the bond between the two associations remains strong. The NABC honors the current USBWA president each year with presentation of the Ray Marquette Award for leadership at the annual NABC awards event at the Final Four.

And now the USBWA is stepping forward to offer its hand to publicize the college Hall of Fame and pay tribute to those who have made college basketball the great game that it is today.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the USBWA's sportswriting seminar held annually at the NCAA Final Four for college and high school students interested in pursuing a career in sports journalism.

"The announcement seems to get lost at the Final Four. There's so much going on that the inductees don't get the recognition they deserve."

– Rick Leddy, NABC public-relations director

Called "Full Court Press," the workshop provides students with an opportunity to hear from USBWA members and learn from their experiences as sportswriters.

Students are assigned various events to cover at the Final Four, with one student receiving a credential for the national championship game. Students can write stories about the events their assigned and submit them in a writing contest. The USBWA provides a \$1,000 scholarship to the student whose story is rated best by a panel of judges. The scholarships are presented in honor of Larry Donald, a former USBWA president who passed away unexpectedly in 2000.

Since the first workshop was held in St. Louis in 2000, the USBWA has awarded \$20,000 in college scholarships for seminars held at the men's and women's Final Fours.

Malcolm Moran, a past USBWA president and current Knight Chair of the sports journalism program at Penn State, is heading up this year's sportswriting workshop for the USBWA. Malcolm can be contacted via email at mum24@psu.edu.

It's time to embrace this wonderful, historical era of change

We are in the very midst of the most exciting and profound transformation that our industry has ever seen. So many doors have been opened to those who have something to say and the expertise to say it.

And all some of us can do is carp about blogging or Tweeting or the phasing out of the traditional printed media guide.

I'm not certain whether to laugh or shake my head. I think I'll laugh *and* shake my head.

I am old enough to have covered my first major college football and basketball games exactly a quarter-century ago.

So, I can't be labeled a snot-nosed kid. And I am sometimes amazed at the foot-dragging I see from those my age around me.

Really, I don't want to sound preachy and condescending on this topic, but I guess I will anyway. I'm elevating my volume and slowing my delivery with this next message:

Embrace technology! It is your friend!

It can allow you to reach more readers and do your job more efficiently.

And it can bring you closer to the people who buy your product.

That would be *you*.

Even if you're a beat reporter, not a columnist, you can no longer get by with being unseen and unheard. *You* are now your most compelling product.

None of us has enough time.

But here are a few things I think all of us should take time to do at this point, to further our industry and further ourselves.

- Learn video and use it. Get a personal vid cam for your laptop. If your paper won't swing for a tripod and portable cam for post-game reports, buy it yourself or learn to patch the one you have to your computer and upload files. If you have a TV show who'd like to have you on, do it.

Nothing is more powerful than the recognition your readers gain from not just reading your voice but hearing it, all the while seeing your facial inflections and hand gestures.

That's what makes you *you*.

When people see it, they gain a connection to you.

Television consultants have known this for decades.

And don't worry about what you look like.

Worry about what you want to say.

Hygiene is always a good idea. But you don't need to be Ron Burgundy.

If you're schlumpy, be your schlumpy self. Just have something to say, prepare it and say it quickly and succinctly.

The rest, people don't really care about.

Where some lacquerhead Ken doll TV anchor is obsessing about his hair or his cadence, you can come off as "colorful," a regular guy. Because you will be. Viewers like that.

- Get to know your blogger as an ally and love what he or she does.

Only you know if you see your blogger as some sort of rival and/or pain in the butt.

Maybe that's an extension of a lack of respect for the craft. But it *is* a craft, a really useful one when done well.

Look, when I see headlines on national news webpages that say stuff like "The Year's Hot Celebritweets," I laugh, too.

Superficial nonsense.

But that's not about the technology, only that specific dopey employment of it.

Maybe *you've* been assigned to also be the blogger or maybe you could take some initiative and make yourself one.

If so, just realize Tweets and/or Facebook posts can be the quickest way to get real hard breaking news to your constituents and build your cred.

Why would you *not* use these tools now that they're

David Jones Harrisburg Patriot-News USBWA Board Member



available?

Remember when we had a hot story and had to watch the 5:30 and 6 p.m. local news and hope that TV hadn't gotten wind of it, too?

How funny does that seem now?

- Explore links that your readers might think are fun and informative, be they other blogs or just quirky sites. These sites are not competition. They are relatives, branches of your community tree. Remember, every time you reference another site that's interesting and funny, readers will come back to you as a source, just as they would if you told them about a great, little known club or a fun niche restaurant. It doesn't drain your hit total, it builds it.

To some of you, this stuff is old news and I apologize for stating the obvious. But to others, I think we're letting the irritants of this age – a few nasty, snarky comments on the ends of our columns; the superficiality of some fringe types who use the new tools; the initial inconvenience of learning new tech – obscure what is a wondrous time to be in this business.

Sort it all out on your own.

But dive in.

The water's only getting deeper.

The sooner you begin swimming, the stronger you'll be for the long haul.

David Jones is columnist for The Harrisburg Patriot-News and a regular contributor to Comcast SportsNet's csnphilly.com.

Last call for nominations for new Rising Star Award

The time has come.

Maybe there is a young college-basketball beat writer with some talent covering a team in your conference.

Or sitting down press row is a college student or free-lancer showing real promise.

Perhaps there a blog you frequent with fresh voices deserving of recognition.

Or you are relatively new to the business yourself, but in a short time have found your passion is covering the college game.

The USBWA is ready to unveil its newest honor, the Rising Star Award.

Debuting this spring, the award celebrates the future of our profession by honoring a member under the age of 30 who has displayed excellence in our craft and a desire to cover college basketball on a long-term basis.

Our hope is this award will not only increase the number of young members joining our organization, but throw open the door for the next generation of USBWA leaders to get involved.

That will start with the first winner, who will be asked to be a part of the committee selecting future honorees. The goal is to field a committee comprised entirely of past Rising Stars judging their peers.

We will honor the Rising Star Award winner at the annual USBWA awards breakfast.

Five finalists will receive certificates and be recognized through a news release.

Something like this can be a real boost to a young writer's resume.

But more importantly, we hope it will also be a boost to the USBWA.

Nominations are currently being accepted (self-nom-

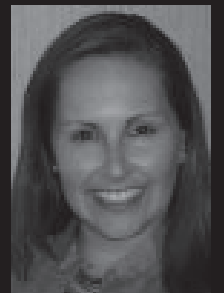
inations are welcome).

Candidates for this one-time honor must be under 30 on Jan. 1, 2010 and a current USBWA member.

The deadline to submit names is March 1. A committee is being formed.

Members interested in being a part of the process are invited to contact John Akers (johna19081@gmail.com).

Nicole Vargas USBWA Member San Diego Union



SI.com's Luke Winn dominates best-writing contest

Luke Winn of *SI.com* took first place in one category and finished third in two others in the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's best-writing contest.

Winn took first in moderate-length features for a story on Connecticut big man Hasheem Thabeet. Winn also finished third in enterprise/investigative reporting for "The Hoops Ideology Report" and in spot news for a story on Stephen Curry.

John Feinstein of the *Washington Post* also placed in three categories, finishing fourth in spot news ("Magic Lives on at the Palestra") and moderate-length features ("Obama's Brother-In-Law is Court Authority") and fifth in column writing ("A Void That Can't Be Filled").

John Akers of *Basketball Times* took first place in enterprise/investigative reporting for a story that explored how two programs went in opposite directions following an nondescript NCAA Tournament game between Minnesota and Gonzaga 10 years ago. Akers also finished fourth in magazine-length features for a piece on Tennessee-Martin's Lester Hudson.

Tom Archdeacon of the *Dayton Daily News* also placed in two categories – fourth in column writing ("Majerus Credits Donohoe For Success") and second in moderate-length features ("Hall of Fame Reunites Former Star With Happier Times").

Other first-place winners" Marty Dobrow of the *Boston Globe* in magazine-length features, Lew Freedman of *Basketball Times* for column writing and Phil Chardis of the *Manchester Journal Inquirer* for spot news.

Dobrow won for a story on Memphis freshman Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir, believed to be the first woman to play in the NCAA in full Muslim dress.

Freedman won for a column on the late Kay Yow.

Chardis won for his story on Syracuse's six-overtime victory in the Big East Conference tournament.

In enterprise/investigate reporting, other place-winners included second-place Steve Wieberg of *USA Today*, fourth-place Bud Withers of the *Seattle Times* and fifth-place John Bohnenkamp of the *Burlington Hawk Eye*.

In magazine-length features, other place-winners included second-place Jerry Bembry of *ESPN the Magazine*, third-place Kevin Armstrong of *SI.com* and fifth-place David Jones of the *Harrisburg Patriot-News*.

In column writing, other place-winners were second-

Enterprise/Investigative

1. John Akers: *Basketball Times*: Minnesota's Shocking Basketball Scandal And Giddy Gonzaga
2. Steve Wieberg: *USA Today*: Has College Sports Marketing Gone Too Far?
3. Luke Winn: *SI.com*: The Hoops Ideology Report
4. Bud Withers: *Seattle Times*: Rise Of The Zags
5. John Bohnenkamp: *Burlington Hawk Eye*: Building A Foundation Takes Time, Energy, Patience



Akers

Magazine Length

1. Marty Dobrow: *Boston Globe*: 5-3 Point Guard A Whirl In Full Muslim Dress: Covered In Glory
2. Jerry Bembry: *ESPN The Magazine*: Tyrone Hanson: Could've Been Worse
3. Kevin Armstrong: *SI.com*: Villanova's Slick Coach Proves He Has The Wright Stuff
4. John Akers: *Basketball Times*: Lester Hudson: Damndest Thing – He Chose School
5. David Jones: *Harrisburg Patriot-News*: Penn State's Talor Battle



Dobrow

Column Writing

1. Lew Freedman: *Basketball Times*: Kay Yow Did It Her Way To The Very End
2. Gary Parrish: *CBS Sports.com*: Secret Agent Man? Guess We'll Know Once Wall Turns Pro
3. David Teel: *Newport News Daily Press*: A Bird Could Flip Hokies' Tourney Bid
4. Tom Archdeacon: *Dayton Daily News*: Majerus Credits Donohoe For Success
5. John Feinstein: *Washington Post*: A Void That Can't Be Filled



Freedman

Spot News

1. Phil Chardis: *Manchester Journal Inquirer*: Syracuse's Six-Overtime Win In Big East Tournament
2. Pete DiPrimo: *Ft. Wayne News Sentinel*: Loss To Connecticut Is A Hard Hit For Purdue
3. Luke Winn: *SI.com*: Stephen Curry Creates Another Moment
4. John Feinstein: *Washington Post*: Magic Lives On At The Palestra
5. Tom Kensler: *Denver Post*: Michigan State Can Carpool To The Final Four



Chardis

Moderate Length Feature

1. Luke Winn: *SI.com*: Hasheem The Dream: Hasheem Thabeet: Odyssey Of UConn's Shot-Blocker
2. Tom Archdeacon: *Dayton Daily News*: Hall Of Fame Reunites Former Star With Happier Times
3. Ken Davis: *Freelance*: Cancer Slows Jim Calhoun But Doesn't Stop Him
4. John Feinstein: *Washington Post*: Obama's Brother-In-Law Is Court Authority
5. Bill Rabinowitz: *Columbus Dispatch*: B.J. Mullens Grew Up A Huge Ohio State Fan



Winn

place Gary Parrish of *CBS Sports.com* and third-place David Teel of the *Newport News Daily Press*.

In spot news, place-winners included second-place Pete DiPrimo of the *Fort Wayne News Sentinel* and fifth-

place Tom Kensler of the *Denver Post*.

In moderate-length features, other place-winners included third-place Ken Davis and fifth-place Bill Rabinowitz of the *Columbus Dispatch*.

Steward, Rose win USBWA's Most Courageous honors



At 4-foot-6, Tiffara Steward is always the smallest player on the court.

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His players fasted for one day, praying for their coach.

By July 22, Rose was even allowed to recruit in Las Vegas.

Rose was declared cancer free last September, making him of the few to beat the deadly disease. He must continue to receive scans every six months for the next two years and, if he clears those, every year after that.

Through mid-January, Rose's Cougars were 16-1 and had risen to No. 19 in the AP poll.

Steward's teammates didn't know she suffered from any disabilities until after she joined the team.

One of her corneas had never developed, leaving her blind in one eye.

Her left leg is shorter than her right. Some vertebrae didn't develop.

She is missing a rib.

Steward also figured she was too short to play college basketball, according to a report by ABC News. She planned to study business at Syracuse. Then she got a call from the coaches at Farmingdale.

"The decision was kind of easy," she told ABC. "I get to go to school and basketball? And it was cheaper too. I was like, 'Yeah, jackpot!'"

Steward also is the recipient of the V Foundation Comeback Award and the Women's Sports Foundation's Wilma Rudolph Courage Award.

"A disability shouldn't be able to stop you from doing what you like or you love or you just want to do," she said. "Either you can try it and hopefully succeed in it. I mean, if you don't, then try again."

The winners will be honored at the men's and women's Final Fours in April.