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## Presidency caps off a great 24 years with USBWA

Some writers have a nose for news. I have a nose for bacon.

The year was 1983. The city was Albuquerque, N.M. It was the Monday morning of the 1983 NCAA championship game – that little game won by Jim Valvano and North Carolina State. I was in my first year of covering college sports at the Kansas City Star.

So I'm wandering around the media hotel, looking for something to do. I come across an open door into a ball room. There's that aroma. I'd know it anywhere.

Bacon.

There, inside the door, was a most tantalizing breakfast buffet, toward the back of the room. I walked in to "nose" around, looking like a stray dog searching for scraps. I saw a bunch of people sitting at tables eating. I asked them what this was all about.

"This is the USBWA breakfast," a guy said. "Are you a member?"

"No," I replied. "But if I join, can I eat?"

The rest, as they say, is history.

That was the day I joined USBWA. It has been a blast. The USBWA is where I wanted to be. The membership was young, full of great writers and lots of folks not afraid to voice their opinions to the NCAA. These people loved their jobs and the game of basketball. Most importantly, they respected the game. And they only ask that they get that same respect in return.

Mostly, I loved that Monday breakfast. The USBWA is like a fraternity, a very tight knit frat, with Joe Mitch as our house dad. Once you join, you have friends for life. That breakfast is like a reunion every year of friends who are like family. I've sat there through the years, listened to and admired people such as Larry Donald, Malcolm Moran, John Feinstein, "Hoops" Weiss, Mike DeCourcy, Steve Wieberg, Jim O'Connell, on and on. There's a lot of passion for the game in this group, in that breakfast ball room.

I look forward to that breakfast every year. I would always look forward to the day I could stand up and lead as president. That day came last year.

It has been an honor and a privilege.

We've had a good year. A busy year. A historic year.

Off the court, it has been relatively quiet. Not a lot of issues. A writer in California emailed me a photo of a small town writer standing and cheering during a time out of a college basketball game that he was covering. The writer wanted to know if we had a written policy or code of conduct in place for this (we do not, but we will). Lenn Robbins of the *New York Post* had a complaint about Syracuse moving the media behind the base line. That's a topic that I'm afraid we will hear more and more of in the near future.

The main crux of our work has been to build a new bridge, a better relationship, with the NCAA. Not just with the Final Four. In everything.

That was a priority of mine. Through my years in Kansas City (1980-90), I got to know the folks at the NCAA very

### Tom Shatel President, Omaha World Herald



well. I liked Dave Cawood, Jim Marchiony, Bill Hancock. These are top-notch people and media coordinators. They've treated us well over the years, lent an ear at times.

And yet, I felt the NCAA and USBWA didn't really talk enough. So I sent a feeler out to Greg Shaheen, who has a long title with the NCAA. Here's what he does. He makes sure the Final Four is a success. That includes being in charge of what we do at the Final Four.

I wanted the USBWA officers, board and several past presidents to meet with Shaheen and David Worlock, the NCAA's Final Four media coordinator. I wanted face-to-face discussions on everything, including and especially future media seating at the Final Four. Is it an issue? It's always an issue. The minute we stop asking is the minute we're in trouble.

Here's the thing: I'm not a yell and scream guy. I'm a sit-down-and-talk-about-it guy. I think you make things happen by building a relationship, a trust. Maybe that's my "too-trusting" Midwest roots. Call me naive. Call me Ishmael. That's how I am. And that was my approach.

Fortunately for me, I had Shaheen and Worlock to work with. They could not be more helpful and more willing to talk and listen, to build a relationship. Thanks to Greg and David, the NCAA-USBWA relationship has transformed to an unprecedented level. Look what we've done:

1. Had a meeting in St. Louis with Greg, David and several past presidents. There, we got assurances that seating would remain the same through the 2011 Final Four in Houston. We were told the scoop on wireless. And we were invited to attend a "Mock Bracket" camp to experience selecting the NCAA tournament.

2. We had that Mock Bracket in Indy. It was off-the-charts eye-opening, educational and flat-out cool.

3. We have been invited to send 15 USBWA reps to the NCAA's spring meeting with the Basketball Committee in May in San Antonio. And will continue to get invited every year to this event as long as we show up.

4. Shaheen and Worlock offered to promote our events at the Final Four.

5. Remember when it was hard to get anyone from the NCAA to come talk to us at our Final Four board meeting? Not any more. In fact, Shaheen suggested we move the

meeting/breakfast to Saturday so that everyone can attend the Oscar Robertson breakfast on Friday. Yes, the NCAA will show up on Saturday. Their idea.

This is great stuff. I can already tell some of the walls of cynicism have dropped. That's the Shaheen effect. The NCAA has a new face, and it's the friendly face of Shaheen, complete with a dry and sharp sense of humor.

Speaking of relationships, we are trying to build one, also, with the new College Basketball Hall of Fame in Kansas City, which is run by Jim Haney and the NABC. The NABC wants the USBWA president to vote on the college hall class every year. In return, we want Haney to attend our Monday breakfast and fill us in on a great idea that is long overdue. Also, I would like to approach the NABC, when the time is right, about putting our Hall of Fame in the College Basketball Hall of Fame. Give us a wall, a plaque, anything.

I also want to create a code of conduct, something on paper, such as "The USBWA reminds you that press row and the press room are working areas. Cheering of any kind will not be tolerated and you will be subject to removal." We can't announce that over a PA, like a football press box, but we can have that posted in every work area.

This is a rare, unique time for our organization. It's a time when we get lost in the "media" shuffle of bloggers and radio talk-show snipers, people who don't ever talk to coaches or players. It's a time when athletic directors are turning our courtside seats into Jack Nicholson seats to donors for a big check. We are still fighting for that respect.

And yet, I feel we have it, more than ever, with the NCAA. Will we always get what we want? No. Never. But we'll get some things. Best of all, we'll get heard. That's the least we can ask for.

Now, it's up to us to be heard. I leave this office on April 2, pass the gavel to Andy Katz. I leave you with this request: join in the fight and the conversation. Get on board, or on the board. Get in on that trip to San Antonio. The spirit of this organization is that we always have something to say if someone will listen. Well, the NCAA is listening. Let's not miss this opportunity.

Hope to see you at the breakfast on April 2 at the Hyatt Regency. The bacon's on me. Literally.

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## Joe Mitch is honored with long overdue Katha Quinn Award

Joe Mitch, the USBWA's executive director since 1983, is the 2007 recipient of the Katha Quinn Award, given to those who have serviced the media or provided a service to those in the sports journalism profession.

Mitch, an associate commissioner of the Missouri Valley Conference, qualifies on both counts.

Under Mitch's watch, the USBWA has:

- Grown from 200 members to over 800.
- Started a Hall of Fame for the organization in 1988.
- Began a sports-writing seminar that became a fixture of the men's Final Four and will expand to this year's Women's Final Four.

- Oversaw an increase in membership benefits such as an

improved directory, a website, Hertz and Marriott cards and complementary subscriptions of *Basketball Times*.

- Doubled the attendance of its Monday business meeting and breakfast.

- Added the USBWA Player of Year and Coach of Year events at the men's Final Four.

- Developed a new and improved relationship with the NCAA, including the recent mock bracket and last summer's meeting between the two organizations, that Mitch said "I've never experienced in my 27 years with the USBWA."

Mitch began his association with the USBWA as editor of the Tipoff in 1980 and was named executive director when Steve Guback retired in 1983.

## Annual sportswriting seminar expanding to Women's Final Four

Beginning this year, the USBWA will co-sponsor two sports-writing seminars annually for high school and college students. Through a partnership with the NCAA, the USBWA will conduct separate Full Court Press seminars each year at the NCAA men's and women's Final Fours.

The first seminar, scheduled in conjunction with the men's Final Four in Atlanta, will be held on the University of Georgia campus in Athens on Thursday, March 29.

A second seminar will be at Cleveland State University, host for this year's Women's Final Four on March 30.

The Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Georgia and the Georgia Scholastic Press Association are co-hosting the seminar in Athens. The School of Communications at Cleveland State is hosting the Women's Final Four seminar. Both seminars are expected to attract over 100 students.

This is the first time the USBWA has conducted a seminar in conjunction with the women's Final Four.

Previously, the USBWA had held similar seminars at four of the last five men's Final Four sites.

Due to the success of the men's Final Four seminars, the USBWA worked an arrangement with the NCAA to expand the program to include the women's national championship tournament.

NCAA media coordinators David Worlock and Rick Nixon are working with the USBWA to coordinate the men's and women's Final Four seminars respectively.

Both seminars are geared toward students looking to pursue a career in sports journalism. Students are given the opportunity to ask questions and mingle with panel members following the seminar.

The USBWA provides member sportswriters for each seminar. USBWA President Tom Shatel and Dick "Hoops" Weiss of the *New York Daily News* are among writers who will participate in panel discussions in Athens while Mel Greenberg of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* is heading up the women's Final Four panel in Cleveland.

Malcolm Moran, a past USBWA president and member of our Hall of Fame who is now the Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society in the College of Communication at Penn State, is also assisting with each seminar. Malcolm

is providing moderators at the women's seminar and will serve as a co-moderator in Athens.

Upon completion of each seminar, students will receive press credentials to cover various events during Final Four weekend. They include:

- Open practices and press conferences for the four competing teams the day before the semifinals
- NCAA "Yes" Clinics at various sites in Atlanta and Cleveland.

- NCAA "Hoops City" interactive fan festivals.

- Press conference of NCAA President Myles Brand in Atlanta.

- NABC College All-State game in Atlanta, featuring the Harlem Globetrotters vs. a college all-star team.

**Joe Mitch**  
**Executive Director**  
**USBWA**



- USBWA Player and Coach of the Year Awards breakfast in Atlanta and Cleveland

Students will also be chosen at random to cover the NCAA Final Four championship for the men and both the championship and semifinal games for the women.

Students can also submit a story about the events they cover in a writing contest for a chance to win a \$1,000 scholarship provided by the USBWA for each seminar.

### USBWA Men's Final Four Schedule of Events

**Thursday, March 29** – 9 a.m., Full Court Press Sports-writing Seminar, University of Georgia campus, Athens, Ga.

8:30 p.m., Past Presidents Dinner, (site TBD)

**Friday, March 30** – 8 a.m., USBWA Player and Coach of the Year Breakfast, Phillips Arena.

**Saturday, March 31** – 7:30 a.m., USBWA Breakfast with the NCAA Basketball Committee, Hyatt Regency Hotel.

**Sunday, April 1** – 7 p.m., NABC Awards Presentation to Tom Shatel, USBWA President, Hilton Hotel.

**Monday, April 2** – 9:30 a.m., USBWA Awards Breakfast, Hyatt Regency.

# Duquesne is a worthy Most Courageous Award winner

No matter what is going down on the court, at practice, in recruiting, every coach will tell you that he is one phone call away from disaster. It could be a player getting arrested. It could be a player getting in an accident. It could be a player becoming ineligible. It could be almost anything.

What it could never be, until the early morning hours of Sept. 17, was the call Duquesne coach Ron Everhart got. He was told five of his players had been shot outside a college dance event. Within minutes, he was out the door on his way to Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh.

“When I was driving to that hospital, the feeling that I had getting out of that car, I just remember kind of looking up before I went in that emergency room and saying ‘God, please don’t let this be as bad as it looks like it is,’” Everhart said.

Each year, the United States Basketball Writers Association “recognizes a player, coach, official or administrator who has demonstrated extraordinary courage reflecting honor on the sport of amateur basketball.”

Through the years, there have been so many memorable winners, but nothing quite like this. Which is why the USBWA is honoring all of the Duquesne players and its coaching staff with the 2007 Most Courageous Award.

When he was told of the honor, Everhart, in his first season at Duquesne, said: “You don’t think of yourself or your basketball team as ever being involved in a situation or being a position to get an award like this that you see every year at the Final Four ... I’ve never envisioned myself or our basketball as being that.”

But they were that, the very definition of courageous. Sam Ashaolu was shot twice in the head. His life was in danger. He is on a fast track to a miracle.

“When you use the word courageous, there’s nothing that can describe him more than brave, courageous, those types of things,” Everhart said. “I think Dr. Goldberg, the guy who treated him, said it the best, ‘quiet fighter.’ No end zone dances, nothing fancy, just hard work every day. That one part of it has just been an embodiment of the fight, the courage, the determination not just to live, but to get back and become healthy and have a chance to play basketball.”

Ashaolu is “back on his feet, talking, interacting, out of the hospital and in the treatment process,” Everhart said. “I don’t know in my life that I’ve ever seen anything like

## Dick Jerardi Vice President Phila. Daily News



it. There’s probably no other way to describe other than a miracle.”

Ashaolu remains in rehabilitation to improve his speech and memory. He was released from the hospital at Christmas time.

“There really has been no talk about where he goes from here because nobody expected him to get here,” Everhart said. “Every day, he is breaking new ground with this thing in terms of what the doctors think. One of the physical therapists said it the best: ‘When he came here, there was no way anybody would have thought that he would ever move beyond having to have 24-hour supervision.’ Well, in however many weeks it’s been, he doesn’t even have to have that now. He’s surpassed all the best case scenarios.”

Stuard Maldonado had very significant injuries to his spinal area. He is back practicing a little, but had to miss the season.

“He’s in the gym after practice, shooting the ball,” Everhart said. “He’s got some things to overcome. The bullet passed through the bottom of the third vertebrae, misses his spinal cord by a centimeter.”

That was after the bullet went through an artery that eventually had to be replaced by a vein. He was having trouble with his left arm but is nearing full strength in the arm’s extremities.

“His biggest obstacle is that when he bangs around and runs, he’s just going to be sore for a while,” Everhart said. “His body just has to continue to heal and overcome that. He’s been amazing also. His recovery was so quick. He was out of the hospital in five days.”

Aaron Jackson, recovered from relatively minor wounds and is playing this season. Two players, Kojo Mensah and Shawn James, have recovered, but, as transfers, were not going to play this season.

Two 18-year-old men were charged in the shootings that apparently happened because one of the players was speaking with a female Duquesne student, apparently the girlfriend of one of the shooters. How that led to 12 shots being fired is a commentary of our society. What happened next is a commentary on the human spirit.

“You look at it now and realize how much worse it could have been, how tragic it could have been,” Everhart said. “It’s just been one success story after another. You almost feel like someone is looking out for you when it works out this way.”

Five months after the shooting, life is back to what passes for normal.

“It’s been such a blur and been such a day-to-day thing, sometimes you don’t really see the big picture out there and everything that everybody’s been through,” Everhart said.

A season after going 3-24, Duquesne somehow fielded a team. The team is not getting this award for its on-court performance, but for simply finding a way to persevere. But if there were an award for team of the year, the Dukes would get that too.

They were 5-10, averaging 68.6 ppg when Everhart took conventional wisdom and threw it into all three of Pittsburgh’s rivers. He decided his team, down to 10 players, would press, run and shoot threes for 40 minutes. The Dukes miraculously won five straight while averaging nearly 100 ppg.

The coaches showed the way. The players did it.

“They’ve been very mature about the way they’ve gone about handling the adversity, but they’ve also been very resilient and determined not to allow that to let them drop their chin or not have their chest out and feel good about representing Duquesne and doing what we all came here to do,” Everhart said.

From the moment he got that phone call, Everhart has been singularly focused.

“At the time obviously, you’re feeling very responsible for all this because you’re the guy who convinced these guys to come here,” he said. “My thought process was always make sure these young men and these families that are going through this, that you are there for them all the time and that they are treated like you would want to be treated if this was something happening to you or your family.”

There is no way, the coach said, to prepare for “a kid to walk in, he’s teared up, he’s emotional, he’s talking about he can’t sleep and he can’t eat. Those are the types of things you never think about, you don’t talk about.”

The bonds that have been formed between players and coaches, players and players, Everhart said “has created relationships on a human level that I don’t know they exist at a lot of basketball programs or in a lot of basketball environments.” Or anywhere.

Which is why the Duquesne players and coaches have won the USBWA Most Courageous Award.



Sam Ashaolu (left), his brother and Duquesne coach Ron Everhart share a laugh during a Duquesne news conference.

# Boggs to be inducted into USBWA Hall of Fame

One of the true giants in sports writing and a past president of the USBWA, Frank Boggs is the newest member of the USBWA Hall of Fame.

Boggs wrote sports for the *Daily Oklahoma*, *Topeka Capital-Journal* and *Dallas Times-Herald* in the 1970s and '80s and later was sports editor and columnist for the *Daily Oklahoma* and *Colorado Springs Sun*. He is now retired, living in Edmond, Okla.

He will be inducted into the Hall at the annual USBWA awards breakfast on Monday, April 2, during this year's NCAA Final Four in Atlanta.

Boggs was selected Oklahoma Sportswriter of the Year 10 times and is a member of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. He was a recipient of the Jake Wade Award in 1981, given annually by CoSIDA to a national sports journalist.

CoSIDA also recognized Boggs in 1977 by presenting him with the Backbone Award for displaying good judgment and unusual courage for taking a stand on intercollegiate athletics during the Oklahoma football scandal.

Considered to be a man of principle and dedication to his craft, Boggs also showed leadership and became embroiled in controversy when, as president of the USBWA

in 1981, he advocated removing former San Francisco star Quentin Daily from the USBA All-America team for his off-the-court antics.

Boggs was also known for his dry sense of humor.

*Sports Illustrated* picked up his quote after the CoSIDA convention one year in Philadelphia: "I've had the privilege to cover four professional sports," Boggs said. "The Dallas Cowboys, the San Diego Chargers, the Denver Broncos and the Oklahoma Sooners."

Boggs becomes the 49th member of the USBWA Hall of Fame since its inception in 1988.

## It's time for USBWA members to accept a more open NCAA

I had one former president tell me that he was suspect of going to the NCAA offices for an invitation-only access to the selection process. The theory was that we, as an organization, would be compromised.

I couldn't disagree more.

Credit to USBWA president Tom Shatel and, as always, executive director Joe Mitch, for ensuring our first-ever USBWA NCAA Tournament mock selection day. I'm sure I speak for most of us when I say it was a rousing success. We all have written countless times about the selection process without fully understanding the process. Getting a glimpse really opened my eyes to the entire process.

What we should all appreciate is the professional way and the time and effort put forth by the NCAA's Greg Shaheen and David Worlock and the rest of the staff. They took this seriously and didn't cheat the process. The advance material and then the on-site prep work provided by the staff was incredibly helpful and really more than expected.

What we have to get away from is this us-against-them mentality. There is a new openness to the NCAA men's basketball staff. This perestroika-like approach should be met with open arms by our organization. At a time when

athletic directors are selling media row on a regular basis, we should be thrilled that the NCAA wants to extend a welcome hand and offer up opportunities for access. Now, I know not everyone was invited. But getting the door open for the organization was a major first step.

The key will be to continue this open-door policy. Through access during the selection process, the open discussions about media seating and other work-related needs, we can forge ahead in covering the game. If we don't talk,

and build trust, then we can't complain if we get frozen out. I didn't feel like any journalistic ethics were compromised. I didn't get the feeling that anyone else felt that, either.

So, in the year to come, I want to continue this open-line of communication and look for other opportunities. Seating on the day-to-day level at arenas around the country is also a priority. I'd also like to explore a few other ideas. I'd like to toss it out to Ted Gangi to see if it's possible to have a daily in-season (or out-of-season if possible) daily newspaper links for college-basketball stories only for all USBWA members. We have access to something like that at ESPN but if it's technologically feasible, I'd like to see our organization do one as well. Also, we still need to get sports information directors to see if we could have a global college hoop email exchange for all hoop news.

The more we can streamline our information, out to all members in this information age, the better served we are in covering the sport.



### USBWA Membership Application Form

If you have not yet renewed your membership to the U.S. Basketball Writers Association now is the time to act.

For your \$40 membership fee you will receive:

- the most complete directory in college basketball
- seven issues of *Basketball Times*;
- Marriott Athletic VIP Card
- access to USBWA website (usbwa.com)
- voting for All-America team and player and coach of year
- eligibility for Best Writing Contest, with cash prizes

Send a check for \$40 and let the USBWA make your job of covering college basketball easier.

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### Freshman pair among USBWA's five POY finalists

A pair of freshmen are among the USBWA's five finalists for the Oscar Robertson Trophy, given to the nation's player of the year.

Freshmen Kevin Durant of Texas and Greg Oden of Ohio State are among a group that includes Wisconsin senior forward Alando Tucker, Florida junior forward Joakim Noah and North Carolina sophomore forward Tyler Hansbrough.

Durant, a 6-foot-9 swingman, has averaged about 25 points and 11 rebounds. Among his highlights were a 37-point performances in a double-overtime loss to Oklahoma State and a 37-point, 23-rebound game against Texas Tech.

The 7-foot Oden, who averages 15 points and 9 rebounds, has led the freshman-dominated Buckeyes to a No. 2 ranking despite wrist surgery that delayed his debut until Dec. 12.

Tucker, who averages about 20 ppg, also has been the best player on one of the nation's best teams. The Badgers have also ranked as high as No. 2 this season.

Noah averages about 12 ppg and 8 rpg for the defending national champion Gators, who have been No. 1 for much