

With few expectations, USBWA led to more than imagined

Where did the time go?

It seems like yesterday that we were in chilly Detroit at the Final Four and Dick Jerardi was handing the reins over to me to be president of the USBWA. He told me not to worry, that I would have a lot of fun and it would be a great experience.

He was right.

When I joined this organization many years ago, it was never with the intention of being on the board. Certainly, I never anticipated being president. I was a college basketball writer at the *Las Vegas Sun*, I had friends and colleagues who were in the USBWA and when they suggested I join, I figured, "Sure, why not?"

Over time, one thing led to another. My good friend Ed Graney, who was covering San Diego State at the time for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and is now my colleague at the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* as our lead columnist, suggested that I become a district representative. I had no idea what that entailed, but he assured me that it would be easy and not all that time consuming.

That would eventually lead to him prodding me to join the USBWA board. That happened four years ago. Fast forward to today and shortly, I'll be just another USBWA member, reading someone else's *Tipoff* column reminding me how important it is to vote for the all-district and All-America teams.

I had a couple of goals in mind when I took over for Dick. One was to try and get more people involved in the USBWA (isn't that every president's goal?), particularly college student newspapers. They are our future, and we need to include them in our organization and make them feel welcome. Otherwise, I fear we one day won't have an organization.

That's exaggerating things some. But you get the

point. New blood is critical, and as I leave the board, I once again ask you to encourage the young people you encounter on your beat who covers the team you do for their student newspaper to join the USBWA.

Did we get more people involved? Absolutely. We had over 920 members this year, a record. And I want to thank each and every one of you for your participation.

We all know the tough economic times we're going through and how the newspaper industry is suffering greatly. On behalf of the board, we appreciate your support.

I would be remiss without thanking Ted Gangi for his efforts to try and bring in new members. Ted worked tirelessly on broadening our base, and he did a heck of a job. He also constantly updated the Web site, something we also hoped to accomplish this year by providing fresh information. Not daily, but every week or so with our Oscar Robertson Award watch list and National Player of the Week honor.

My other hope was to improve our working conditions, whether it was courtside seating, access to players and coaches, having statistics provided in a timely fashion and just in general making the experience of covering a college basketball game better.

I know there were a couple of issues that cropped up over the course of the year that we tried to resolve or wound up getting resolved on their own. But we have a lot of SIDs who are members, and virtually all of them

President
Steve Carp
Las Vegas Review-Journal



understand the needs of those who cover their teams. I'd say the vast majority do a great job and try to work with their writers to resolve whatever conflicts might arise.

There might have been additional problems that I was not aware of, but my advice to all of you is that if a situation ever comes up and you need the USBWA's help, by all means, contact the board. I can't promise that the matter will be resolved to your satisfaction, but we'll certainly look into it for you and assist wherever we can.

In a perfect world, we'd all sit front row courtside, have 100 percent access to players and coaches whenever we wanted, have a printed media guide next to our computer and the wireless connection would be as strong as Hercules.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. So we have to learn to be flexible, learn to be patient, learn to deal with the big business that is today's college hoops world and make covering the game the best experience possible.

How do we get there? By working together, by being reasonable with our requests and keeping the lines of communications open with those we deal with, be it the individual school, a conference or the NCAA itself.

The USBWA continues to have strong working relationship with Greg Shaheen and David Worlock of the NCAA. They do listen when we speak and they understand what "compromise" means.

My hope is that spirit of cooperation will continue through the rest of 2010 and beyond and that others will continue to fight the good fight on your behalf.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the USBWA's president and when I look at the list of names that I am part of, I'm still stunned by it.

Thanks to all of you for this opportunity. Thanks to the USBWA board and district reps who did a great job this year.

Thanks to Helen Heugel of the Missouri Valley Conference, who made sure our record membership was accounted for and taken care of.

And to Joe Mitch, who is the glue guy of this organization and the heart and soul of the USBWA, special thanks for making this such a wonderful experience. If you're wondering why this thing works as smoothly as it does, look no further than Joe.

Enjoy March Madness. See you in Indianapolis!

Putting on a 'Full Court Press'

"Full Court Press," the annual USBWA sportswriting seminar, will take place for the first time in the Walter Byers Auditorium at the NCAA Conference Center and Hall of Champions in Indianapolis.

The session will begin at 9 a.m. on April 1, the Thursday morning of the Final Four weekend.

The 10th anniversary workshop provides opportunities for college and high school students interested in a career in sports journalism to meet leaders in the industry and compete for a \$1,000 scholarship. The students will have the chance to enter a writing competition for a scholarship in honor of the late Larry Donald, a former two-time USBWA President and founder and long-time editor of *Basketball Times* who passed away suddenly in 2000.

At the center of the workshop is a 90-minute panel discussion featuring USBWA president Steve Carp of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, past president and USBWA Hall-of-Fame member Jim O'Connell of the Associated

Press and at-large board member Dana O'Neil of espn.com. The discussion, which will include a question-and-answer session, is expected to include topics such as the state of the job market, navigational skills in a 24/7 digital era and survival tactics to deal with increasingly difficult deadlines.

The seminar is being organized for the first time by the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism at Penn State University. The Center, which was founded in 2003, is directed by past USBWA president Malcolm Moran, the school's inaugural Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society. Moran will be the moderator of the panel discussion.

Students will receive assignments to cover events surrounding the men's championship, including press conferences and practices. One student will receive a credential to cover the national championship game at Lucas Oil Stadium on Monday, April 5. Students interested in attending should contact Moran at mum24@psu.edu.

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USBWA breakfasts figure to be a Final Four highlight

The USBWA will once again honor its national men’s player and coach of the year with an awards breakfast at the Final Four.

This year’s breakfast will be held at 8 a.m. Friday, April 2, at the Columbia Club in downtown Indianapolis. The breakfast has become an annual tradition for USBWA events during the Final Four since the first awards breakfast was held in St. Louis in 2005.

The event has drawn sellout crowds to see presentation of the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year Trophy and the Henry Iba Coach of the Year Award.

USBWA members make introductory remarks about the recipients and serve as presenters of the awards, and one member serves as emcee for the breakfast.

Proceeds from the breakfast benefit the USBWA’s scholarship program for students pursuing careers in sports journalism and provide funding for various member services, including the annual membership directory.

The USBWA also uses funds from the breakfast to make a charitable contribution to the National Kidney Foundation on behalf of Oscar Robertson, who donated a kidney to his daughter Tia several years ago.

Helping the USBWA market the event locally in Indianapolis and sell tickets to the breakfast is the marketing agency Compton Strategies, whose owner, Ray Compton, is a former sportswriter for the *Indianapolis News*.

Tickets for the breakfast are \$75 each for the general public and \$60 for USBWA members and can be purchased by calling Compton Strategies at 317-826-1175.

Annual Business Meeting and Awards Breakfast. This is traditionally held on the morning of the championship game and will be held at 9 a.m. on Monday, April 5, at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown, Ballrooms 7-9.

The USBWA will present the Katha Quinn Award to Chris Fallon of the NIT and honor this year’s Hall of Fame class, comprised of Skip Myslenski and Bud With-

ers and former NCAA Executive Director, Walter Byers, whose idea led to the formation of the USBWA in 1956.

The breakfast is free to members. USBWA’s annual business meeting follows the awards’ presentations.

Women’s Final Four Breakfast. This event has struggled to attract as many writers as at the men’s Final Four. Josh Krulewitz of ESPN, which sponsors both breakfasts, and Big East Conference women’s media director Rachel Margolis have offered their help to increase attendance for this year’s April 6 breakfast at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in San Antonio. Besides presentation of the association’s player and coach of the year awards, there are plans to feature speakers who can talk about issues dealing with the media and women’s basketball.

USBWA Sportswriting Seminar. This year’s seminar will be held Thursday morning, April 1, at the NCAA’s headquarters in Indianapolis. Students from journalism programs at Indiana University and other surrounding universities are invited to attend a session featuring a panel of USBWA members and then are assigned events to cover at the men’s NCAA Final Four, including one student whose assignment is the national championship game. Students can submit their stories in a writing contest, with the winner receiving a \$1,000 scholarship from the USBWA. Malcolm Moran, former USBWA president and now head of the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism at Penn State, is handling the seminar for the USBWA. Students can register for the seminar by contacting Malcolm via email at mum24@psu.edu.



Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director

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.

Name _____

Newspaper/Publication/Website/College _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Office Telephone _____ Cell Phone _____

Fax _____ Email Address _____

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Mock brackets present an informative, head-spinning two days

INDIANAPOLIS — I tried listening to the radio on the way home, but the numbers and names were swirling through my head.

Road record. Top 50 wins. RPI. Record vs. tournament teams. I couldn't listen to any music on or any sports talk. My head was hurting and there was still too much to process after the United States Basketball Writers Association mock selection seminar with the NCAA.

The 10 two-person teams — each team representing a member of the NCAA Division I men's basketball selection committee — put together a 65-team bracket in about 12 hours' worth of work. That's considerably less time than what the committee gets on selection week in March, so we crammed in a lot of information, debate and voting in a short amount of time.

Which was why my head was still overloaded with information as I headed west on Interstate 74 for my drive home.

I'm not sure I can tell you Illinois' strength of schedule at the moment, or Northern Iowa's record against the top 25 teams in the RPI, but I know I saw it at some point during the process. It should come spilling out at some point.

During my weekly work on The Associated Press poll, it's been tough in the last few weeks to fill in those last three or four spots, because every team I looked at had some sort of bad mark that had me thinking this school or that school shouldn't be in the Top 25. So I had a good idea that what we would go through in the NCAA conference room would be about 20 times worse.

I was wrong. It was 50 times more complicated.

Once we filled in the first 31 teams as at-large selections, coming up with the final few to fill open spots was extremely difficult. You would look at a team's RPI (California, 25) and think that team was worthy. Then you'd look at the teams played, and where the wins and losses came, and suddenly that team was no longer attractive.

You would look at a team's overall record (Virginia Tech, 19-4) and think that it was worthy of consideration, and then you would look at the strength of the non-con-

I had a good idea that the mock bracket would be about 20 times harder than filling out those last three lines of my weekly AP poll. I was wrong. It was 50 times more complicated.

ference schedule (dead last among all Division I teams) and you moved on to someone else.

What we did in one long afternoon and evening, followed by a long morning and early afternoon, was scan resumés, vote, rank, scan resumés, vote, rank, and on and

John Bohnenkamp
Burlington Hawk-Eye
USBWA Member



on. It was called *Groundhog Day*, after the Bill Murray movie where the same day keeps repeating. This was a little different — unlike the movie, this was fun.

We "peeled the onion," (another term used), slicing away at teams before putting together a bracket in a short amount of time. It wasn't perfect — when you listen to everyone complain in March, it never is — but it was our bracket.

I left with plenty of information jammed into my head, and the overload swirled the entire 4½-hour drive home. I gained an appreciation for the process and realized all of the myths and speculation were just that. It was a great experience.

Oh, UNI's record against the top 50 was 2-1, and Illinois' strength of schedule ranked 83rd. I knew it was in there somewhere.

Got a beef? Calm down and make the call or send the e-mail

As sure as a game-winning shot by Scottie Reynolds (or Sherron Collins or John Wall, for that matter), every season serves as an example of the challenges that we college basketball writers routinely face. Now and then, we are also reminded how easily such issues can be resolved when two parties listen to one other.

Basketball Times recently experienced a couple of examples like those over the span of a week or two. We won't name names or schools, because those details really don't matter here. What's more important, a couple of potentially ugly situations ended as well as possible.

In one case, a student-journalist was denied a media credential to write for our online site for reasons other than a lack of space on press row. The student was accused of being unprofessional. The school was accused of carrying a grudge.

In another, we read a story that one of our writers had pursued for us a year ago — but couldn't, because access was denied to the subject of the story. The story appeared on one of those Web sites that could eat Basketball Times for breakfast. Naturally, favoritism was suspected.

An exchange of e-mails and a phone call cured both problems.

The student-journalist had worked for mainstream news agencies and, as far as we knew, was legit. There also were alleged issues that we didn't know about, most involving social networking and the school's sports-information department. He was either unprofessional, as the school's SID suggested, or a guy who whose greatest offense was reporting news that the school would rather that he didn't. (In other words, our kind of reporter.) There was no way for us to know for sure.

We told the school that while we didn't want anyone

who might be unprofessional representing us, we pondered some of the rascals and rogues we've met on press row and wondered what it took to get barred from such a club. Perhaps that put a smile on someone's face; probably, it had nothing to do with their decision to grant the student a credential after all.

No relationships were ruined in the process. We're happy to report that the student filed his story without incident.

Then there was the story that was denied to BT, then granted to the Web megapower. Honk if something like that has happened to you. , but it's never fun to be on the wrong end of the deal.

Our story would have been about a successful player with a troubled past, but it was one that he no longer wanted to discuss. The topic was delicate, and without the player's cooperation, there was no point in pursuing it any further.

We wondered what had changed when, one year later, we saw the story elsewhere. We suspected that we already knew the answer: The player and the school had been given a pitch by a giant Web site they couldn't refuse.

Nevertheless, we gave the school's SID a call. A year ago, we were told, the player had turned down all interview requests about his past, with his coaches' blessing. This year, the SID said he had convinced the player that

John Akers
Basketball Times
Vice President



he could benefit from telling his story. The coaches remained skeptical, however, and there were no new media requests to press the issue. Then the giant Web site called. Coaches were convinced. The story was written.

Could they have gone back to the reporters who had showed an interest in the story a year ago? Maybe, but the SID, just happy to get any go-ahead, said things happened in a hurry.

If we had been the ones to call this season, he assured, we would have been given the story this time around. Maybe, maybe not. But the SID was apologetic, and he was believable. We both came away happy that we talked it out.

There are two lessons here — no doubt learned before, then forgotten, only to tap us on the shoulder yet again:

1.) Don't be afraid to call a second or a third time. A door closed one season might be opened the next.

2.) Pick up the phone. Write the e-mail. Don't go looking for a fight, but stand your ground. When two sides are reasonable, solutions will be found.

Byers, Myslenski, Withers enter USBWA's Hall of Fame

The U.S. Basketball Writers Association will induct into its Hall of Fame two writers who covered the NCAA for most of their lives and a former sports writer who was the NCAA for more than 30 years.

Longtime *Chicago Tribune* writer Skip Myslenski, Bud Withers of the *Seattle Times* and former NCAA executive director Walter Byers are members of the USBWA's Hall of Fame Class of 2010.

Myslenski worked for the Tribune from 1978-2008, after a total of 11 years with the *Rochester Times-Union*, *Sports Illustrated* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He was named the Tribune's national college basketball writer in 1988. After a two-year retirement, Myslenski returned to sportswriting last fall as a contributor to Northwestern's nusports.com.

Myslenski has covered nine Olympic Games, multiple Final Fours and Super Bowls, the original 1992 Dream Team, the NBA Finals during the Michael Jordan era of the Chicago Bulls, the Ali-Foreman "Rumble in the Jungle" on Oct. 30, 1974, the Ali-Frazier III "Thrilla in Manila" on Sept. 30, 1975, and Northwestern football and basketball on-and-off for the last decade.

Withers has been a sports writer for three Northwest newspapers since 1970 and has covered college basketball in Oregon and Washington for 39 years, including 20 NCAA Final Fours and three Olympic Games. He worked at the *Eugene Register-Guard* from 1970-87 and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* from 1987-99 and has been at the *Seattle Times* since 1999.

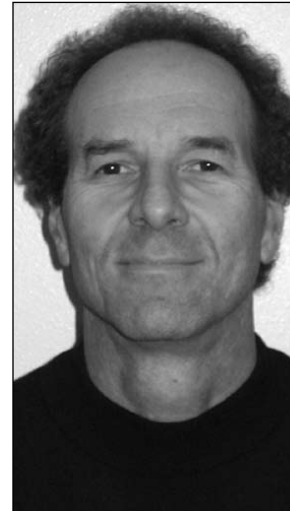
He was USBWA president in 1992-93. The thrust of the organization then was greater access to both the Division I men's basketball committee and to game officials, who hadn't been subject to reporter questions after controversial situations in the NCAA Tournament.



Walter Byers



Skip Myslenski



Bud Withers

Withers co-authored a biography of Ralph Miller ("Spanning the Game") in 1991. He also authored "Bravehearts ... The Against-All-Odds Rise of Gonzaga Basketball" in 2002. A regular contributor to *Basketball Times*, Withers has been named 11 times in the annual USBWA writing contest, including five first-place finishes. He was honored by APSE for a 1989 story detailing Princeton's epic near-upset of Georgetown in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. He has been named "Sportswriter of the Year" in both Oregon and Washington.

Byers, the first executive director of the NCAA, served in that role from 1951-88. He was instrumental in the formation of the USBWA in 1956 and in the development of the NCAA Tournament.

Byers also was a former sports writer.

According to a *Sports Illustrated* profile on Byers in 1986: "Two interesting facts about Byers. He is no admirer of the press, even though he started out as a journalist. And, although he's been the No. 1 man in intercol-

legiate sports for almost four decades, he doesn't have a college diploma—not that he needed one.

"Byers spent one year at Rice in 1940 before transferring to the University of Iowa, where he majored in English and minored in journalism. He worked for the student newspaper, the *Daily Iowan*, and it was there that he met his first wife, Marilyn McCurdy. Byers needed only nine hours to graduate when he quit school in 1943 and enlisted in the Army; he was eventually discharged because of an affliction known as "wandering eye." It is not particularly noticeable today but, upon close inspection, his left eye appears crossed and his eyes do not "track" correctly; he has worn glasses since he was 18 months old. Those close to him say he

doesn't like to talk about his eye condition, but back in 1958 he joked to the *Kansas City Star*. "The Army was afraid I'd shoot the wrong person. When I went to the Navy and Marines after that, they just laughed at me." After his discharge he went to work for United Press (as it was then called) in St. Louis.

"United Press moved him to Madison, Wis., Chicago and, finally, to New York City, where he was editor of the foreign sports desk. Byers' journalistic background is evident in his careful use of language. He rarely stumbles. "We have an *intraoffice* file on that," he'll say. If he doesn't exactly have the soul of an old newspaperman — once he left the profession, he never looked back — he at least has the heart. He does his work on a vintage black Royal typewriter. "I wouldn't think of using an electric," he says."

The three will be inducted into the Hall of Fame during the USBWA's annual Monday morning breakfast during the Final Four, April 5 in Indianapolis.

NIT's Chris Fallon wins prestigious Katha Quinn Award

By JIM O'CONNELL

Go to any college basketball game at Madison Square Garden, and in addition to "Down in front" and "Hey, hot dog guy," the one thing you'll hear over and over again is, "Chris, can you help me?"

Chris would be Chris Fallon, this year's winner of the Katha Quinn Award and for the past three decades the person who has done more for media covering games there than the guy who installed the wireless in the building.

Chris is the media coordinator for the National Invitation Tournament, for the last 30 postseason events and every one of the 25 preseason editions. She has run the press room for the Garden for its college basketball games during that time.

That means she has seen the best of teams in November as the NIT Season Tip-Off has become one of the best early season tournaments, the gamut of college teams from the top of the polls to Division III matchups during the regular season, the always sold-out and power-packed Big East Conference tournament and the best of the rest in the NIT.

"This has been a continual highlight for me," she said when asked for a special moment in her career. "If



Chris Fallon

it wasn't, I wouldn't have been able to do it all these years. The people have been great, and there have only been a handful I wouldn't want to see again."

When Steve Kirschner, North Carolina's outstanding SID, received the Katha Quinn Award in 2005, he said his only regret was that he never met Katha, the SID at St. John's who died in 1989 after a long, courageous fight with cancer.

Chris, who started her career serving the media as the SID at St. Francis, N.Y. in 1979 for a year-and-half, met her and got to know and respect her.

"I met her for the first time at a St. Francis-St. John's baseball game and we chatted a little bit, and I was in awe because she was so good and I was so green," Chris said. "She told me not to put

up with any bull (anybody who knew Katha knows what she really said here, but Tipoff is a family newspaper). Then I saw her at the Garden a lot, and even if you didn't know her well, you felt like you knew her well because she didn't hold back and she wasn't a fake."

Chris left St. Francis for a quick stint in marketing before Jack Powers, the longtime coach and athletic director at Manhattan College — Chris' alma mater — called

and suggested she apply for the position at the NIT.

"The night before my interview with (NIT director) Pete Carlesimo, I saw him in a Ragu commercial," she said. "He was the only person always later than me, so when he walked in I told him I saw him in a Ragu commercial and he said, 'Make sure you add olive oil.' Then he told me I had the job."

Chris was able to handle her jobs while raising a family. She and her husband Gerry, a partner in a construction law firm, have four children: Michael, a Fordham graduate who works in the merchandising arm of the NBA; Mariel, a Maryland alum who is a graduate assistant SID at St. John's; Sinead, a student at Boston College; and Kiera, a high school senior.

"My job has been great for my kids, to be around all this they have met some great people," she said. They also got tickets to see some pretty good games, but Chris is quick to add, "They have all worked at games if I was shorthanded."

They have all learned from one of the best in the business and the 2010 Katha Quinn Award winner.

"I have a great deal of respect for what the media does and anything I can do to help them, I'll do," she said, including that a rule or two might have been broken along the way so a local television station would be treated the same as a major network. "People have a right to do their job, and my job is to make sure they have that chance."