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Perry Wallace lends his name, courage to our award

The process began in 2014, when Andrew Maraniss' book, "Strong Inside: Perry Wallace and the Collision of Race and Sports in the South" described the experience of the first African-American basketball player in the Southeastern Conference. The description, frightening in its meticulous detail, captures the life of a college athlete as a focal point of the Civil Rights movement more than 50 years ago.

We look ahead at games and wonder what impact they will have on standings, on the direction of a season or the development of a team.

Wallace would anticipate road trips to SEC campuses and consider the possibility that he could be shot on a basketball court.

Maraniss wrote:

The words rained down on Wallace, but that wasn't all. He was spit on and pelted with Cokes, ice, and coins. At LSU, some Vanderbilt players claimed, a dagger was thrown on the court in Wallace's direction (an event he cannot recall). In Knoxville, teammates remember, fans dangled a noose near the Vanderbilt bench. Wallace understood that there was a fundamental irony pervading the "hellish dramas" unfolding at these southern gymnasiums. The same values his tormentors claimed to be at their core were the very ones that sustained him, even as the hecklers defaulted on their own claims.

When the USBWA board unanimously approved the naming of one of our oldest recognitions the Perry Wallace Most Courageous Award last month, the



Perry Wallace

decision created one of the most important moments in the 65-year history of the organization. Former board members can recall lengthy, intense debates about some of our awards in the past. This discussion achieved a consensus very quickly.

Each year since the Most Courageous Award was first presented in 1978, the acceptance remarks of the honorees have provided some of the most powerful memories of our annual awards celebrations. Next month, for the first time, the award will have an identity that will ensure that future generations will remember Wallace's experience.

The game was just one aspect of a life of achievement. Wallace earned a law degree from Columbia University, worked as an attorney for the Department of Justice, and became the first Black tenured law professor at the University of Baltimore. He was a law professor at American University's Washington College of Law. He directed the university's JD/MBA Joint Degree Program and was co-director of the Paris-Geneva Comparative Law summer program. He received the Silver Anniversary Award from the NCAA in 1995.

At the end of a season that has taken place with the continuing discussion of racial justice, the USBWA will begin to recognize the courage Wallace displayed from the time he chose to enroll at Vanderbilt, knowing what was ahead. The recognition came slowly. It was more than two decades after he graduated in 1970 before Wallace was invited to return to the Vanderbilt campus to be honored. Now that campus includes Perry Wallace Way. The university, led by Candice Storey Lee, Vice Chancellor for Athletics and University Affairs and Athletic Director, will make an annual contribution for future honorees and guests to attend the Final Four and become part of the awards celebration.

Perry Wallace died at the age of 69 in 2017. Each year at the Final Four, he will honor us with his presence and create a connection to a new generation of college athletes with stories to tell about obstacles they have confronted and overcome.

We are an organization of story tellers, and it is hard to imagine a story more compelling than this.

Malcolm Moran
Executive Director



Most Courageous Bluefield College's story matters

By David Hale

Stanley Christian was scrolling through Twitter in late February when he came across a direct message from a name he didn't recognize. This was dangerous territory for the senior leader of Bluefield College's basketball program. A few weeks earlier, the team earned national headlines for its decision to kneel during the national anthem in defiance of direct orders from the school's president, who ultimately suspended the players and forfeited a game.

Since then, Christian had gotten a mix of support and hate mail. This message, however, was different. It was from a man in Canada who previously had never heard of Bluefield College, but he'd been talking to his daughter about the importance of standing up for what's right, even when it's hard, and came across the story of Bluefield's protest. The pieces clicked. Here was a team without fame or pro prospects, willing to put its season on the line to speak up for what's right, he said.

"We were going to stand up for what we believed in," he said. "The (school) wanted us to do it their way so they didn't have to deal with media or people outside Bluefield. ... The suspension made it go across the country."

For speaking its truth to power, the USBWA named the Bluefield College basketball team this year's winners of the Perry Wallace Most Courageous Award.

Last summer, Christian and his teammates had talked about ways to shed light on racial injustice, but it was only after the Capitol riots on Jan. 6 that the team agreed the timing was right. At first, no one seemed to notice. Then came a local news report, and that's when the school's president, Dr. David Olive, got involved.

Olive told the team that he "did not think a number of our alumni, friends, and donors of the College would view the act of kneeling during the anthem in a positive way" and asked the team to find an alternative. For a few games, the players remained in the locker room for the anthem, but after another meeting with administration that Christian characterized as dismissive, the team again knelt before Bluefield's Feb. 8 game.

That was the final straw for Olive, who suspended the entire team, forcing Bluefield to forfeit its Feb. 11 contest, a dagger in its hopes for a postseason berth.

On campus, a football player staged a solitary walk-out during practice in support of the basketball team, while another, military veteran Collin O'Donnell, issued a

statement approving of the protests. At the team's football game that Saturday, several students knelt for the national anthem, too, and in the days that followed, students and alumni signed a letter to the president chastising his decision. The campus even held a protest last month.

"People are saying they're with us, and they want to be more involved," Christian said. "It's been good to get this type of love and support."

Christian got calls and texts from family members that he hadn't heard from in years, thanking him for standing his ground. On social media, players from different sports at all levels chimed in with their own words of encouragement.

Since the suspension, Bluefield has remained in the locker room during the anthem, but it has forced additional discussions with the president and is set to meet with the college's Board of Trustees in March. More importantly, Christian said, thousands of people have witnessed the team's courage and heard their message of racial justice.

"(The school) told us our rights are limited when we put Bluefield across our chests," Christian said. "That's not right. When that jersey comes off us, we're still Black in America, and I have to face that reality."

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A pandemic navigated, a mentorship program launched

When Joe Mitch asked me four years ago if I would join the leadership pipeline at the USBWA, I was honored and thrilled.

I could never have imagined, of course, the unprecedented circumstances the game would be facing when my turn came.

Being president during a pandemic demanded a lot of time, adjustments, creativity and plenty of unique challenges.

But as LBJ once said, “What the hell is the presidency for?”

The good news is, we had a college basketball season, which was very much in doubt for most of the summer and fall.

Most of the games were played without fans or with limited attendance, but almost all of them were played with a significant media presence in the arenas, and we were still able to do our jobs through Zoom press conferences and other access opportunities.

That was a direct result of the many conversations between the USBWA, NCAA and CoSIDA, not to mention the informal communications that happen throughout the country.

There was already a spirit of cooperation between those parties, but it was significantly strengthened as we navigated our way through the pandemic.

I wish those conversations weren’t necessary, but the appreciation and trust they yielded will benefit us well into the future.

The season also featured two significant initiatives for the USBWA.

The first was the naming of our Most Courageous Award for Perry Wallace, who as a player at Vanderbilt in 1967 integrated SEC basketball.

The second was a mentorship program that paired 50 college students with USWBA members.

This project was two years in the making and is very near and dear to my heart.

My presidency is ending in April, but I will continue to develop this program in the years ahead.

As always, the USBWA Board of Directors and other contributors guided us through our award season,

Seth Davis CBS Sports / The Athletic President



from granting George Raveling our Dean Smith Award, to tapping Mirin Fader as our Rising Star, and bestowing the Bluefield College basketball team our Perry Wallace Most Courageous Award, CoSIDA’s Doug Vance the Katha Quinn Award, and Mike Waters the Jim O’Connell Award for Excellence in Beat Writing.

We sent a luminous quintet of outstanding writers into our Hall of Fame.

By far the highlight of my tenure as president was making those congratulatory phone calls with executive director Malcolm Moran.

It’s not often one gets to deliver such good news.

Speaking of Malcolm, I want to thank him for all of his contributions to the USBWA. What a blessing he is! Following Joe Mitch as executive director is like following John Wooden at UCLA, but I am hopeful that unlike Gene Bartow, Malcolm will last a lot longer than two years.

I am also gratified to pass the president’s gavel to Shannon Ryan.

I have known Shannon for a long time and have been on quite a few Zoom calls with her this past winter.

The USBWA will be in very capable hands for 2021-22.

I always believed that I would enjoy being president when my turn came, but I honestly did not anticipate loving it as much as I did, pandemic and all.

It has been one of the great honors of my life.

I hope to be able to continue serving the USBWA in whatever capacity the leaders see fit.

Thank you all for your support of the USBWA and for allowing me to lead it this past season.

See ya on press row!

Sincerely,
Seth Davis

Doughty, O’Toole retire after 40-plus years

Doug Doughty, the dean of University of Virginia beat writers, retired after a 47-year career at The Roanoke Times, 43 of them covering Cavaliers basketball teams.

According to the Times, he covered everything from the ACC title won by the Cavs in 1976, to the Ralph Sampson era, to their national championship in 2019.

“Anybody who can last in a profession, especially in ... (the newspaper) profession, which is challenging, I think speaks volumes to the quality of their work, the quality of the person,” UVA coach Tony Bennett told the Times.

Tom O’Toole, retired after 43 years as a sports journalist. He spent the past 20 years at USA Today,

where he was an assistant managing editor for sports and a regular figure at 18 Final Fours, overseeing the publication’s coverage.

O’Toole also covered Tennessee for the Knoxville News-Sentinel, Georgia for the Atlanta Constitution-Journal and national sports for Scripps Howard News Service.

Gordon S. White Jr. of The New York Times, USBWA president in 1969-70 and a 1992 Hall of Fame inductee, passed away last August, according to his son, Gordon III.

Bill Potter left his role as assistant commissioner of communications at the Colonial Athletic Association to become the director of marketing at the First Tee of Richmond.

Lodge Notes

After 33 years, Waters still owns Syracuse beat

By Donna Ditota

Mike Waters was 25 when he migrated from Tennessee to New York. Newly hired to cover Syracuse, he showed up at Jim Boeheim's office for a still-vivid introductory encounter with a man he knew next to nothing about.

That was 33 Januarys and various journalism awards ago – including his latest, the USBWA's Jim O'Connell Award for Excellence in Beat Reporting. Waters met his wife, Robin, and helped raise their children Christopher and Anna Kate in the Syracuse suburbs. In the process, he became synonymous with Orange basketball coverage.

He has reported about Syracuse basketball through all those years. That doesn't mean he has settled into a numbing routine or that there is no drama in the familiar.

"I never cover the same team from one year to the next," he said. "The team always changes. The players change. Some players graduate, new players arrive. And even players who are back from one year to the next, the freshmen are a year older. The junior has turned into a starter as a senior. The teams are always changing and so are the players and that keeps me interested."

Syracuse and the Big East back then represented the pinnacle of college basketball coverage. Fans who filled the Carrier Dome with record-setting frequency devoured every word that Waters wrote. It was a step up on a journalism ladder that started in Nashville, where revered coaches Rick Byrd (Belmont) and Don Meyer (Lipscomb) provided a basketball-coverage proving ground. In that homey embrace of NAIA hoops, Waters played pickup games with Byrd, his coaching staff, the occasional professor and a long-haired musician named



Mike Waters

Vince Gill. ("Oh, Vince was good. Vince was very good.")

He also covered Trevecca Nazarene.

"I can name you at least three or four of the starters on the Trevecca team that went to the national tournament in '88," Waters said. "Sandy McClain. Charles Brooks. Avery Patton was their unbelievable point guard, a little kid out of Nashville. They were amazing."

This kind of unprompted memory grab has come to characterize Waters. He has a "Rain Man" grasp of ancient statistics and historical trivia that borders on savant. He can summon an obscure player's name, an odd 1980's game incident with

the ease of reciting the alphabet. And a word of warning: Never challenge him to a "name the state capitol" contest.

"I'm in total amazement at what he does remember," said Dennis Nett, a Syracuse.com photographer and longtime colleague on the beat.

Waters likes to joke that those are the *only* things he remembers. He can recall Derrick Coleman's 1990 rebounding average, but Robin's request for a Diet Coke while picking up a takeout order fails to register.

Waters traces his memory for basketball trivia to "an unhealthy amount of time with media guides." When The Post-Standard moved its offices a few years ago, supervisors warned reporters that there would be no room for their filing cabinets of stuff.

A prick of panic was subdued by Waters' simple solution: He would bring the media guides home. The collection, mind you, reaches to the early 1970s, when media guides were "itty-bitty pamphlets."

He flips through those guides "more often than you might think." He understands that all of this information

resides online, but his familiarity with the guides seems a speedier and more comfortable process.

Beat writing becomes Waters, and not just for the games, the stats, the personalities, the intrigue of each new season. He uncovers tales of forgotten players lost to the dusty remnants of time and the lack of social media. He appreciates the players who rise from limited box-score personas to become politicians or business owners.

There are the stories of the process, too. Real-time annoyances become hilarious go-to recollections. There was the time an airline lost every piece of luggage in The Post-Standard's reporting/photography traveling contingent to West Virginia, forcing the trio to shop at Target. Waters, a strict shirt-and-tie guy, wore a long-sleeved T-shirt to cover the game and "was breaking out in hives" because he built his reputation on dressing as a professional to do a professional's job.

The canceled flight that required a drive from Boston to Raleigh to cover an ACC game. The "Tiny House" Chevy suburban that transported the crew from the First Four in Dayton and beyond. The furious typing in moving vehicles when stories broke at inconvenient times.

The conversations on those trips segue from basketball banter to every imaginable topic. Waters revels in them.

You know Mike Waters, and not just because he served as USBWA president. He recalled your name and engaged you in conversation each time you saw him. That ability to connect, to remember, to write from his place of basketball passion makes him a deserving recipient of all the awards he has collected over the course of a career well-lived.

Even in Syracuse. Even with a sometimes-cranky Boeheim as the head coach of the team Waters covers.

"As Jim Boeheim often says – when the weather is bad out, it's basketball season," Waters said. "I've got my blinders on, my head down and I just focus on basketball."

How the USBWA's Rising Star found her voice

By Jeff Pearlman

On Oct. 1, 2014, I read an article in the Orange County Register by an unknown writer with a strange name.

Then, because I follow everyone on Twitter, I followed her on Twitter.

Within 24 hours, Mirin Fader DMed me this:

I KNOW YOU'RE PROBABLY REALLY BUSY BUT IT WOULD BE AWESOME IF YOU MIGHT BE FREE TO MEET UP ONE OF THESE DAYS. I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT WRITING BOOKS AND IT WOULD BE GREAT IF I COULD ASK YOU QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR BOOK-WRITING PROCESS AND THE ORGANIZATION THAT COMES WITH IT. I GRADUATED COLLEGE A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AND A HALF AGO, WOULD JUST APPRECIATE ANY ADVICE!

Two days later, I found myself shaking hands with a short, curly-haired kid holding a Bic and a notepad. She called me "Mr. Pearlman" – which was irritating, then, as we sat – and asked whether she could take notes.

"You're taking notes?" I said.

"The thing is," she replied, "I wanna learn ..."

"I get it," I replied. "But notes? Really?"

Some six years later (and after, oh, 150 insinuations that she stop referring to me as "my mentor"), I consider Mirin Fader a close friend and trusted colleague. More important (for these purposes, at least), I consider her as the blueprint



Mirin Fader

of what – exactly – an up-and-coming journalist and the USBWA's Rising Star award winner needs to do and needs to be.

Having been in this field for (oy) two-and-a-half decades, I've encountered dozens upon dozens of aspiring scribes who say they want to be professional writers, but conditions inevitably apply. All they want to do is be a journalist – *buuuuuuuuuut*, they only see themselves covering sports. They've dreamed of chronicling Major League Baseball's Spring Training – *soooooooo*, no, they'd rather not take a job handling the local police beat. They'll go anywhere to write,

as long as anywhere means within the state of Florida (Specifically Miami). Put simply, it's the difference between wanting it and freaking wanting it.

Mirin Fader, from the day we first met, has *freaking* wanted it.

During her time at the Register, Mirin would go anywhere in pursuit of a story. The sport didn't matter, the subject didn't matter – she simply wanted to write a quality piece. And, to be honest: The stuff was a little ... erratic. Mirin wasn't one to pass up a hackneyed cliché; didn't mind telling us the Orange Lutheran High quarterback was "the baby of the family." But she kept working at it; working at it; digging, scratching, clawing. When she'd sit down to read a piece by Wright Thompson or Sally Jenkins, she'd do so with pen in hand, taking (wait for it) notes. Studying ledes. Noting transitions.

Before long, her stuff was leaping off the page, and when Bleacher Report came calling in 2017, the site found itself with a dynamic and insatiably curious staff writer. For my money, Mirin's introduction to the world (or at least *this* world) came in 2018, when she traveled to Lithuania to chronicle the weird, unsettling journey of a young basketball player named LaMelo Ball. At that point, Mirin had never left the United States. Hell, she had never rented a car. And suddenly, she found herself in a distant land, absorbing a distant language, tracking an athlete who (truth be told) didn't wish to be tracked. It was a recipe for disaster and – if I'm being honest – I thought B/R had asked Mirin to swim the Atlantic when she had yet to remove the floaties.

I was wrong. The resulting story – THE LAMELO SHOW – is a thing of absolute beauty. Wrote Mirin: "The doors swing open. The boy with the floppy blond curls rushes into Prienai Arena. A group of Lithuanian teens, who arrived 60 minutes before tipoff, scurry over to get a closer look, but the boy ignores them. He's locked in his own world as he spots two stone-faced security guards looking on from just outside the locker room. The boy, sporting a pair of black headphones and a Big Baller Brand sweatsuit, grins while Bruno Mars and Cardi B's 'Finesse (Remix)' blasts in the background. It's his time."

Yes, it's the saga of a basketball player scaling new heights.

But, really, it's the saga of a young writer finding her voice.

Of pursuing her passion.