

## Here to increase membership, watch over beat writers

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your president and the reality is still setting in.

But the true reality is that we as an organization are facing some serious challenges in the months ahead. I say “months,” not “years,” because our profession is going through rapid, dramatic changes.

Newspapers are folding. Many are downsizing. “Furlough” and “buyout” are now part of our lexicon. We cautiously peek at our e-mails from management, wondering what the next austerity measure brings.

Longtime members of our fraternity are suddenly ex-journalists. Or they’ve been moved off the college-basketball beat. At the recent Final Four, a lot of newspapers were not represented. A lot of writers who had covered the event for decades were not in attendance. Others who were fortunate to go left early because of costs.

It is in this environment that our organization has to function. Journalism is an ever-changing craft as it continues to evolve into something more instantaneous, leaving newspapers to figure out how to re-invent themselves.

Where many of us see despair for our profession, I see opportunity. Opportunity for us to grow our ranks with younger faces, fresher ideas and blend in more diverse facets of the business.

A few months ago in *Tipoff*, I advocated pursuing college journalists to join our organization. I pointed out that not only was this a way for us to grow our ranks, it

was a chance for us to get younger as an organization and usher in a new era of basketball journalists.

Come fall, when classes begin at campuses across the country, my hope is that we can convince these young student-journalists to join us and be part of the college-basketball experience. The membership fee is just \$15, and while that might seem like a lot for a college student, I’m sure those who want to be part of USBWA will find a way to join.

And while it’s important for us to become younger, I don’t want to forget our experienced hands, those who were once part of USBWA but for some reason either forgot to renew or simply moved on. We want you back. We want to make you feel part of this organization again. We value your expertise and your participation.

Under Dick Jerardi’s expert stewardship as USBWA president the past year, we were able to bring in over 100 new members. That puts us near 800.

We can be bigger, stronger. If each of us could convince just one person to join us, whether it’s a colleague at your own newspaper such as a columnist or basketball

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



feature writer, or the rival beat writer or the kid covering for the college paper, think of the growth we can experience. One. It’s such a small number. But when multiplied, it can represent hundreds.

My other hope for the coming year – besides continuing Dick’s work – is to be an advocate for the college-basketball beat writer who deals with the game on a daily basis and create a set of minimum standards for a positive working environment.

It should include a suitable place to work from with legitimate proximity to the court. A source for power with working wi-fi capabilities. Receiving statistical information in a timely fashion both during and after games and a fair policy for postgame access to players and coaches.

With 31 leagues come 31 different policies. And within those leagues come issues and problems unique to certain schools. Some universities have control over their own buildings. Others rent out facilities. Still others share the operation of their gym with another entity. I understand that. My hope is that by developing some minimum standards we can head off problems before they occur.

The wi-fi is going to go out from time to time. It happened courtside at the Final Four semifinals. The printer spitting out the final stats might go haywire.

Those things happen. I’m talking about making sure visiting writers know they can get to their coach outside the locker room without someone in a yellow jacket telling them they can’t go there when the policy clearly states they can. Or making more than a couple players available after games when the locker room is closed.

Having covered a college basketball beat for many years, I know the frustration that comes with the unexpected happening. If we can reduce the number of surprises by being proactive, perhaps we can reduce the amount of stress and disappointment.

I look forward to working with all of you this coming year. If you ever have an issue or a concern or a suggestion on how to make the USBWA a better place to be part of, call me or drop me an e-mail. Or, if you’re visiting Las Vegas, I’d love to meet up with you in person.

This is your organization. Together we can make it something we can all be proud to be part of. In the meantime, everyone hang in there and let’s hope we can all ride out this economic storm that is rocking our industry.

## Carp named USBWA president for 2009-10

Steve Carp of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* was elected president of the USBWA for 2009-10 at the annual business meeting held in conjunction with this year’s Final Four in Detroit.

Carp succeeds Dick Jerardi of the *Philadelphia Daily News*.

Other USBWA officers elected were Bryan Burwell, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, first vice president; Lenox Rawlings, *Winston-Salem Journal*, second vice president; and John Akers, *Basketball Times*, third vice president.

Elected to the USBWA Board of Directors for 2009-10 were Kevin McNamara, *Providence Journal*; David

Jones, *Harrisburg Patriot News*; Robbi Pickeral, *Raleigh News & Observer*; John Clay, *Lexington Herald-Leader*; Kirk Wessler, *Peoria Journal Star*; Dave Sittler, *Tulsa World*; Wally Hall, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*; John Henderson, *Denver Post*; Hank Wesch, *San Diego Union-Tribune*; Dana O’Neil, *espn.com*; Luke Winn, *SI.com*; and Scott Chipman, Big Ten Conference.

Jerardi was presented with the Ray Marquette Memorial Award. The award is given to the outgoing president of the USBWA in memory of Ray Marquette, who was a sports writer for the *Indianapolis Star* and USBWA executive director when he died in a plane crash in 1977.

## Writing contest deadline set for June 15

The deadline for submitting stories and columns published during the 2008-09 basketball season for the USBWA Best Writing Contest is June 15.

Entries can be submitted in five categories: column writing, moderate-length features, magazine-length features, spot news/game coverage and enterprise/investigative stories.

Only dues-paying members of the USBWA are eligible to enter the writing contest. Members may enter more than one category but may submit only one entry per category.

Plaques and cash prizes will be awarded in each category.

Winners will be announced in an issue of *The Tipoff* and posted on the USBWA website.

Entries can be submitted by e-mail or regular mail. Please include the name of the category and the author of the story, the publication or website in which the article appeared and the date of publication with each entry.

Send entries to:

Joe Mitch  
USBWA Writing Contest  
1818 Chouteau Ave.  
St. Louis, Mo. 63103  
(314) 421-0339  
or e-mail entries to [mitch@mvc.org](mailto:mitch@mvc.org)

The United States Basketball Writers Association  
1818 Chouteau Avenue  
St. Louis, Mo. 63103  
Visit us at: [www.usbwa.com](http://www.usbwa.com)  
314-421-0339  
Fax: 314-421-3505, 314-421-6120

**PRESIDENT** – Steve Carp, Las Vegas Review-Journal; O: 702-387-2913; H: 702-243-9109; C: 702-528-2790; [scarp@reviewjournal.com](mailto:scarp@reviewjournal.com)  
**FIRST VICE PRESIDENT** – Bryan Burwell, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, O: 314-340-8185; H: 636-536-0332, C: 314-603-0463; [bburwell@post-dispatch.com](mailto:bburwell@post-dispatch.com)  
**SECOND VICE PRESIDENT** – Lenox Rawlings, Winston-Salem Journal; H: 336-272-2029; C: 336-580-5023; [len30@triad.rr.com](mailto:len30@triad.rr.com)  
**THIRD VICE PRESIDENT/TIPOFF EDITOR** – John Akers, Basketball Times, C: 612-718-4661; H: 704-849-8627; [johna19081@gmail.com](mailto:johna19081@gmail.com)  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** – Joe Mitch, Missouri Valley Conference, O: 314-421-0339; H: 314-227-9113; C: 314-795-6821; [mitch@mvc.org](mailto:mitch@mvc.org)  
**WEBMASTER** – Ted Gangi, C: 214-909-9314; [ted.gangi@sportswriters.net](mailto:ted.gangi@sportswriters.net)  
**BOARD MEMBERS**  
**DISTRICT I** – Kevin McNamara, Providence Journal; O: 401-277-7340; C: 401-434-7229; [kvmc3333@aol.com](mailto:kvmc3333@aol.com)  
**DISTRICT II** – David Jones, Harrisburg Patriot-News; O: 717-255-8187; C: 717-319-1837; [djones8681@comcast.net](mailto:djones8681@comcast.net)  
**DISTRICT III** – Robbi Pickeral, Raleigh News & Observer, O: 716-372-3121, ext. 278; C: 716-244-0427; [rpickeral@aol.com](mailto:rpickeral@aol.com)  
**DISTRICT IV** – John Clay, Lexington Herald-Leader; O: 859-231-3226; C: 859-321-5362; [johnclay@alltel.net](mailto:johnclay@alltel.net)  
**DISTRICT V** – Kirk Wessler, Peoria Journal Star; O: 309-686-3216; C: 309-256-9093; [kwessler@pjstar.com](mailto:kwessler@pjstar.com)  
**DISTRICT VI** – Dave Sittler, Tulsa World; O: 918-581-8312; C: 918-629-3851; [dave.sittler@tulsaworld.com](mailto:dave.sittler@tulsaworld.com)  
**DISTRICT VII** – Wally Hall, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette; O/C: 501-831-4647; [whall@arkansasonline.com](mailto:whall@arkansasonline.com)  
**DISTRICT VIII** – John Henderson, Denver Post; 303-282-4937; [jhenderson@denverpost.com](mailto:jhenderson@denverpost.com)  
**DISTRICT IX** – Hank Wesch, San Diego Union-Tribune; O: 619-293-1853; C: 619-987-3904; [hank.wesch@uniontrib.com](mailto:hank.wesch@uniontrib.com)  
**WOMEN** – Mel Greenberg, Philadelphia Daily Inquirer; C: 215-313-3542; [mgreenberg@phillynews.com](mailto:mgreenberg@phillynews.com)  
**AT-LARGE** – Dana O'Neil, [espn.com](http://espn.com); C: 215-313-3425; [dgoneil@msn.com](mailto:dgoneil@msn.com)  
**AT-LARGE** – Luke Winn, [sl.com](http://sl.com); O: 212-522-9835; C: 847-477-5507.  
**SID** – Scott Chipman, Big Ten Conference; C: 630-936-6005; [schipman@bigten.org](mailto:schipman@bigten.org)  
**MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR** – Helen Huegel; 314-421-0331; [helen@mvc.org](mailto:helen@mvc.org)

# Detroit was place to be for annual awards breakfast

Detroit might not have been the most popular choice for the men's Final Four for fans and maybe even the media, but it turned out to be a good one for this year's U. S. Basketball Writers Association college basketball awards breakfast.

The annual event attracted a sold-out crowd of more than 300 people to see presentation of the USBWA's player and coach of the year awards at the downtown Detroit Athletic Club.

It was one of the USBWA's most successful and entertaining Final Four breakfasts, where fans have a chance to see up close and personal some of the top names in college basketball.

Oscar Robertson was there to help present the player of the year trophy named after him to Oklahoma's Blake Griffin.

"You raised a great young man," Oscar told Griffin's parents who were in attendance at the breakfast.

Robertson even went so far as to comment on the NCAA's new seating configuration for a Final Four where the court was placed in the center of the football field at Ford Field.

"I see why they're doing it for financial reasons," Robertson said. "But when I played in a big building like this, I didn't like it. The shooting background was not good. All I can say to fans coming to the games is: Bring your binoculars."

Bill Self, whose Kansas Jayhawks won the NCAA championship last season, was present to receive the Henry Iba Award from Blair Kerkhoff of the *Kansas City Star*.

Self charmed the crowd with his down-home humor and Oklahoma drawl. He talked about how much the award meant to him, being that he is a graduate of Oklahoma State (formerly Oklahoma A&M) and is a huge fan the school's most famous coach, Henry Iba.

Andy Katz, past president of the USBWA and ESPN's top college-basketball reporter, was at his best as emcee for the breakfast, providing quips and insight on each of the award recipients and keeping the program moving along at a fairly quick pace.

The morning, however, belonged to Michigan State coach Tom Izzo and the many Spartans fans who helped fill the room to capacity. They were there to see the man who had led MSU to the Final Four for the fifth time in the last 10 years.

A standing ovation greeted Izzo when he first came into the room. Several times, the crowd broke out in chants of "Go, Green!"

Izzo received the Good Guy Award from the USBWA because of his honesty and willingness to work with the media.

"He's a guy who's great for college basketball," said Rick Bozich of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* who pre-

sented Izzo with the award.

The breakfast began with the introduction of several members from MSU's 1979 national championship team. They received plaques commemorating the 30th anniversary of their NCAA title.

Seth Davis of CBS and *Sports Illustrated* set the stage for the occasion with a look back at the championship game with Indian State and the match up between Magic Johnson and Larry Bird.

"It was a game that transformed basketball," said Davis, who has written a new book on the subject called *"When March Went Mad."*

*It was one of the USBWA's most successful and entertaining Final Four breakfasts, where fans have a chance to see up close and personal some of the top names in college basketball.*

The USBWA hopes to continue these breakfasts at future Final Fours, thanks in large part to the help of the NCAA in securing a site to host the event.

The breakfast helps raise awareness of the organization's player and coach of the year awards and generates funds for the USBWA's scholarship program. The USBWA also makes a contribution to the National Kidney Foundation on behalf of Oscar Robertson, who donated a kidney to his daughter, Tia.

Next year, plans call to honor the 1980 Louisville national championship team on the 30th anniversary of the Cardinals' NCAA title at the first Final Four ever held in Indianapolis.

\*\*\*\*\*

The USBWA's sportswriting seminars for college and high school students wanting to pursue careers in sports journalism went off without a hitch at both the men's and women's Final Fours.

Over 150 students combined attended the two workshops, with one student at each seminar receiving a \$1,000 scholarship from the USBWA in a writing contest about stories on Final Four events.

Tom Stanton, assistant professor at the University of Detroit-Mercy and author of several books on baseball, coordinated the men's Final Four workshop. The women's seminar was handled by Jason Young, production coordinator for the Saint Louis University student newspaper, and Dave Dorr, a past USBWA president and Hall of Fame member and a former *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* sports writer who is now retired.

Joe Mitch  
USBWA  
Executive Director





# Next season, USBWA plans to catch a ‘Rising Star’

Like all of us, the USBWA isn’t getting younger.

Without going all Benjamin Button here, there is a way to reverse the aging process.

While wireless access and courtside seating remain the issues of the day, connecting with that Next Generation of college basketball writers who are doing great things is vital to the future of the organization.

We haven’t given younger writers much reason to be interested. If you go to the Monday morning breakfast, nearly all of the folks who are running the meetings or being honored have their AARP cards. For anyone on the south side of 30, the USBWA must feel very old.

Which sparked an idea.

We’ve created the Rising Star Award.

USBWA board member Nicole Vargas of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* was instrumental in drawing up the guidelines for this new award, which will be presented to a member who is under 30 and shows the most promise in our profession.

It could go to someone already entrenched as a national writer or on a coveted beat at a major newspaper, website or newspaper. We might honor a young writer who has produced an exceptional body of work at a medium-sized or smaller newspaper. It could go to the student writer for a college paper who is breaking news and out-

writing the veteran writers on his or her beat. Our honoree might be someone who, in these difficult financial times, has creatively built a reputation, perhaps on a self-created website or as a freelancer.

In other words, we’ll be flexible and keep an eye out for the under-recognized young stars as well as the obvious.

We would place an emphasis on writers who have displayed journalistic excellence, an interest in the USBWA and a desire to cover college basketball for the foreseeable future.

Any USBWA member who is under 30 on Jan. 1, 2010 will be eligible. The award is a one-time honor.

The winner will be awarded a plaque at the annual USBWA awards breakfast. Five other finalists will receive certificates and be recognized through a news release.

Candidates can enter their own names for consideration, be nominated by another member or solicited by the award’s selection committee, which will initially be

## John Akers Basketball Times Vice President



headed by Nicole Vargas and myself and include members whose ages are closer to 30 than 50. The Rising Star Award winner also will be asked to help select the next year’s winner, until a committee comprised entirely of Rising Star alums is available to judge their peers.

The winner gets a nice addition to the resume and a reason to become more involved. The USBWA begins to identify its next wave of leadership and gives younger writers a reason to both join and become involved.

Most important, the USBWA grows younger.

Everybody wins.

# Women’s Final Four offers a full plate of topics to explore

Unlike the perfect finish to Connecticut’s drive for a sixth national title in St. Louis, the USBWA women’s contingent had a mix bag of wins and losses during the five-day span of activities in the Gateway City.

The most significant loss, mostly caused by the current economic state of newspapers, involved the few major markets represented at the event.

The Connecticut crowd probably would not have been in the house if the Huskies had lost along the way. St. Louis and area organizations might not have been, either, if the Final Four had been in another city.

A glance at the media seating chart showed representation from New York and Washington D.C. But missing from the list were such longtime market reps from Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Miami, Houston, Dallas and Richmond, to name a few.

The Bay Area papers departed after the semifinals in the wake of Stanford’s loss to Connecticut.

Although many veteran women’s basketball reporters in those cities have either retired, taken buyouts or been furloughed, there has been an expression of interest from them to find ways to stay involved with the beat and involvement with USBWA.

However, despite the gloomy beginning of this report, there were events producing positive feelings and the future may not be totally bleak.

The five-day event got off to an exciting start with the third annual women’s panel for young writers.

The seminar, moderated by the *St. Louis Post Dispatch’s* Dave Dorr, included yours truly, AP national women’s writer Doug Feinberg and local writer R.B. Fallstrom, *USA Today’s* Dick Patrick, Joe Ostermeier, who’s in charge of St. Louis’ Belleville online edition; and Steve Tucker of the *Chicago Sun Times*.

Unlike previous seminars in Cleveland and Tampa, which focused on coverage of the sport, the St. Louis attendees, who came from area colleges and high school, heard discussion of the sportswriting business in general.

ESPN again sponsored the brunch, whose format

might change. More about that in a bit.

The USBWA was no different than other organizations handing out women’s postseason awards. Connecticut grabbed both the coach of the year honor – with Geno Auriemma, who also won last season – and the player of the year award, with Maya Moore.

Neither could receive their honors personally, with the event falling on the morning of the championship game.

We met with Rick Nixon, the NCAA’s media coordinator of the Division I women’s tournament.

One of the discussion points involved tweaking tournament procedures in the early rounds. For example, it was noted by our side that with usually only one writer per paper at an event, it is quite difficult in the postgame sessions to be in the media interview room and in the locker rooms at the same time because of the overlap.

There were no such conflicts at the Final Four, with enough time allotted to be in both places.

Nixon and ESPN’s Tilea Coleman discussed ways to make the brunch better. An idea was proposed to move it to a late-afternoon session in the arena prior to the title game, to attract more writers at the event.

To add meat to the gathering, the NCAA’s session with the committee chair involving the state of the tournament could be moved from its current Monday place on the schedule. It is now held between the interview times with the participating times in the championship.

Another thought is to change the national awards announcement for the women to in advance of the Final Four. In recent years, the winners have come from title participants who were unable to attend personally because of their commitments on the day of the title game.

## Mel Greenberg Philadelphia Inquirer Women’s Representative



The honors could get more attention with the trophies sent to the school and then having a USBWA local or national representative make the presentation at the school’s postseason dinner.

Two additional awards are being explored, which could become centerpiece honors at the Final Four. One would cite a coach who is media-friendly, in terms of cooperation involving availability and interviews.

The other is not new, but a transformation of the Pioneer Award that has been presented in the past to someone whose efforts gained media attention to the sport.

The new award would be named the Maggie Dixon Award, after the young Army coach who died suddenly in 2006 soon after leading the Cadets to their first NCAA Tournament in her first season as a head coach.

The new qualification would be to give it to someone who has impacted young lives in a positive manner that results in media attention to the sport.

Ideally, it would be nice to have a title sponsor. That search will continue.

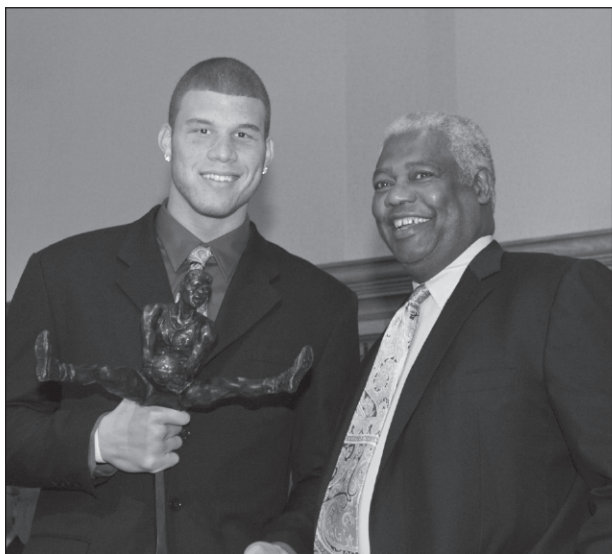
Finally, our fearless leader Joe Mitch thinks we need to create a board on our side similar to the men’s, consisting of a board member from each of the six regions.

I agree. Nicole Vargas of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* is willing to help. If any of you have interest or know of anyone at your organizations, feel free to contact me.



# Scenes from the USBWA's Final Four breakfasts

Photos by Aaron Eckels



*National player of the year Blake Griffin of Oklahoma, with the USBWA's trophy namesake – Oscar Robertson.*



*Kansas coach Bill Self leaves a dais including Andy Katz, Tom Izzo and Oscar Robertson laughing after being given the Henry Iba Award.*



*Michigan State coach Tom Izzo receives the Good Guy Award.*



*Katha Quinn Award winner John Paquette (center), with Jim O'Connell and Mike Tranghese.*



*Most Courageous winner Kelvin Davis (center), with San Diego State coach Steve Fisher and Steve Carp.*



*Outgoing USBWA president Dick Jerardi (left) and executive director Joe Mitch.*



*Hall of Famer Gary McCann (right) and USBWA president Dick Jerardi.*



*Nancy Axthelm and her grandchildren, with Malcolm Moran, represented the late Hall of Famer Pete Axthelm.*



*Hall of Famer Rick Bozich (right) of the Louisville Courier-Journal, with Pat Forde.*