

It's time for USBWA to become younger and more diverse

There are many thoughts running through my mind as I take on the responsibility of this organization's top office, not the least of which is why outgoing president Steve Carp was smiling so diabolically when he handed off the symbolic gavel of the USBWA presidency to me.

But with the first few weeks on the job behind me, I'm starting to understand what that smile was about.

Relief.

Now that Steve has passed the job off to me, I want to pick up where he left off with his stated goal of increasing membership, boosting diversity and encouraging more involvement from our younger members.

I've been covering college basketball since 1973, when I was the young kid on press row at my first CIAA tournament in Norfolk, Va. Now I am the old guy – I'm sorry, now I'm the "experienced" guy – on press row and I am surrounded by a lot of, ummm, "experienced" guys.

On championship Monday at the Final Four in Indianapolis, we held a USBWA meeting in the interview room. Perhaps 25 of our entire 900-person membership showed up, and the average age of those in the room was roughly 48 years old (and I think I'm being kind) and all male. The makeup of that room has to change to more reflect the makeup of our organization. While the experience of those voices in our organization is the primary reason why the USBWA has been such a strong advocacy group for our profession, the lack of younger voices (and perspectives) is something that needs to be corrected.

For the greater long-term good of our organization,

we must stress involvement of younger and more diverse members and blend in their perspectives with ours. We need to identify the younger membership's needs and help them do their jobs better and become advocates for the issues the entire membership cares about deeply.

I am not really sure where "new media" is going in our industry or which "new media" outlets are legitimate and which ones are operated by losers in their mother's basements. Sorting that out must be a vital part of the USBWA's agenda. We need to champion the rights and needs of our younger membership base and we need to let them know that is part of our mission.

But we need to hear from those younger voices. Don't sit on the sidelines and complain that we're too old and not representing you. If I don't know what you're passionate about, I can't fight for it. If you don't get involved, don't complain about it when your needs aren't being represented.

Twenty years ago, my more experienced contemporaries were the new kids on the block who were on the cutting edge of the industry. We were working on first-generation portable computers that were the size of ac-

cordions, but we were all smart enough to figure out that the computer age was something big, something important and something we needed to get in front of. Back then, our "experienced" colleagues sat next to us cursing the fates that conspired to take away their old reliable typewriters, and essentially grumbling about (and threatened by) the dawning computer age with the equivalent of "Get off my lawn!!"

So now I ask my more mature brethren to take a hard look at themselves and promise that you won't turn into those old guys we used to laugh at and considered dinosaurs. I'm not asking you to blindly embrace the changes that are overtaking our world, just don't fight them off with the same close-minded "Get off my lawn!!" mentality that we used to mock when we were leading the charge into the high-tech generation of sports journalism.

Bryan Burwell
St. Louis Post-Dispatch
President



Reporting from Women's Final Four, with thoughts on new media

When I first contacted the only sportswriter I had heard of who covered women's basketball, I didn't how important that phone call would become.

It was 20 years ago that I first talked to Mel Greenberg, who created the first women's poll for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and is simply known around the sport as "The Guru." He suggested that I join the U.S. Basketball Writers Association, which then as now included a subscription to *Basketball Times*.

Many of you know the rest of that story, but being part of the USBWA has been truly special, from the associations and friendships that have endured all these years to the numerous career opportunities it has provided.

I'm especially honored to be a part of the USBWA now as I reinvent my career.

Ironically, Mel is retiring from a 40-year career at the *Inquirer* in which he became the only USBWA Hall of Famer from the women's side. He will continue writing about the game as he joins the growing ranks of newspaper refugees. Welcome to the diaspora.

At the USBWA's women's awards breakfast in San Antonio, the severely dwindling media presence in women's basketball was the topic of a roundtable discussion with representatives from the NCAA and CoSIDA.

Only a handful of major newspapers sent reporters to the Women's Final Four, a trend that will continue. While a number of us who've left print are trying to recreate our work online, this also presents new issues and challenges.

Rick Nixon of the NCAA discussed how his organization is reviewing its credentialing process.

They understand revising their online criteria is necessary to boost women's coverage, and I am hopeful changes will be in place for next season. My thanks go to Barb Kowal, CoSIDA's external relations director, and Notre Dame women's hoops SID Chris Masters for their participation and ideas.

These interests have led to me being asked to serve as the USBWA's new media coordinator. I'll work with NCAA, CoSIDA and other organizations, informing our members about how their activities affect the work we do.

But it's important for members to let us know what

Wendy Parker
Blue Star Media
Media Liaison



they think the USBWA can and should be doing to meet the technological challenges that are transforming all media industries. I think this can be a truly exciting time if we're willing to embrace the future.

Please drop me a line at wendygparkergmail.com with your ideas, comments, concerns and suggestions.

My thanks go to Joe Mitch, John Akers, Ted Gangi and the rest of the USBWA board for the opportunity to serve the organization in a new way. A special thanks also goes out to ESPN, especially Josh Krulewitz and Carol Stiff, for their continued support.

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USBWA can guide the way for online sites’ place on press row

The day after the NCAA championship game, I returned to my office and opened an e-mail from a Big Ten university. The e-mail contained a simple survey, requesting information about our newspaper’s Web site and the traffic it generates. The school is trying to figure out new credentialing guidelines.



Kirk Wessler
 Peoria Journal-Star
 Third Vice-President

Once upon a time, this was easy. Local and state newspapers assigned beat reporters to cover a team, and those reporters received credentials. Everybody knew these outfits and the people who worked for them were legit. But the Webscape is muddy turf. Who’s legit, who’s not, and what criteria determine legitimacy?

It’s not as easy as we’d like to think. At the Illinois state high school tournament this spring, some of the most pointed and probing questions in postgame pressers were posed by a 14-year-old high school freshman with his own Web site. His behavior and his reports, which included video clips of players in action, were more professional than some of the jokers who’ve been freeloading off IHSA passes for years. His audience might be small, but it’s going to grow because he’s offering information people want. He represents a future that’s already here.

The NCAA and its member institutions face this dilemma with increasing frequency. Who’s for real, and who’s the pretender? And do traffic numbers alone provide the best answers? Currently, the NCAA requires one million unique viewers per month for an online publication to receive one credential for the Final Four. Big organizations like AOL and Yahoo are even specified as eligible for a credential. But what about the smaller specialists, who are not unlike the credentialed regional and local newspapers whose readers seek a different perspective on big events? What about a site like midmajority.com, which was denied a Final Four

credential this year despite being light years ahead of the traditional national print media on “the Butler Way”?

Tournament director David Worlock acknowledged the need for better criteria. Worlock said he would welcome USBWA input, and we should jump that opportunity.

The USBWA is perfectly positioned to participate in this task. We are 900 strong, and a membership of 1,000 is within our reach. Since our founding, we’ve been advocates for traditional print reporters and their needs. But as we know, the business is changing. Every one of us who writes for a newspaper or magazine is published online, too. More of us every year are found exclusively online, and that number will only increase. If our organization is to continue to grow, we need to recruit legitimate online journalists and represent their needs as well.

The Baseball Writers Association of America is a much more exclusive club than ours, and its members receive special preference when it comes to credentialing. I don’t advocate such exclusivity, but perhaps we can provide a screening process, through which we help the NCAA determine whom to credential. I don’t pretend to know what the criteria for credentialing online journalists should be – and that goes for every level, from the Web site devoted to cover a local team on up to the NCAA Tournament.

But I know we can, and should, help figure it out.

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 \$50 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 \$50 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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A huge year for the USBWA figures to only get better

The year ended in resounding fashion for the U. S. Basketball Writers Association.

Membership finished at an all-time high, climbing to 901 members, a 50 percent increase over the previous year.

The organization was able to save the popular Marriott Athletic VIP card program offering up to 40 percent discount off room rates at Marriott properties for USBWA members.

New features were added to the USBWA Web site under Ted Gangi's direction that included a national player of the week honor. Ted even has the USBWA on Facebook, working with the organization's new media liaison, Wendy Parker.

Finally, the year was capped off at both the men's and women's NCAA

Final Fours with special functions honoring USBWA members, players and coaches for their achievements during the past season.

At the men's Final Four, the USBWA's annual college basketball awards breakfast was held before a sellout crowd of 250 at The Columbia Club in Indianapolis. Past president Bill Benner served as emcee for the breakfast.

The event has become a tradition at the men's Final Four since it was first held in 2005 and continues to grow in popularity each year.

It is where the general public can see some of the nation's top coaches and players in person, talk to them, get signatures and have pictures taken with them.

This year's breakfast in Indianapolis did not disappoint.

Evan Turner of Ohio State received the Oscar Robertson Trophy as the nation's top college player from the Big O himself. John Wall of Kentucky took home National Freshman of the Year honors. ESPN's Andy Katz introduced both Wall and UK Coach John Calipari for comments.

Syracuse's Jim Boeheim stole the show after receiving the Henry Iba Coach of the Year Award from Hall of Famer and past president John Feinstein.

"My wife asked me this morning before I came here if I was going to dress up," said Boeheim. "I said, 'Why should I?' It's a breakfast with a bunch of sportswriters."

Another highlight of the morning was presentation of the association's "Good Guy" Award to IU-PUI's Ron Hunter, whose work with the Good Samaritan's Feet charity has helped provide thousands of shoes for needy children around the world.

"You and I sitting here this morning think nothing of getting up every day and putting on a pair of shoes," Hunter told the crowd. "Millions of children around the world don't know what life is like with shoes. We're trying to change that."

At a women's Final Four breakfast in San Antonio, Nebraska's Connie Yori received the USBWA's Coach of the Year award and Tina Charles of Connecticut won player of the year honors.

For the first time, the USBWA selected male and female Most Courageous Award recipients. Tiffara Steward of Farmingdale (N.Y.) State College received her award in San Antonio with family members present. Tiffara, who at 4-foot-6 is believed to be the smallest player in college basketball history, has been a starter and team captain for two seasons at Farmingdale despite battling various physical ailments in her life (she's blind in one eye and has a 50 percent hearing loss.)

Brigham Young Coach Dave Rose, who overcame

pancreatic cancer to guide the Cougars to an NCAA tournament berth this season, accepted the men's Most Courageous Award in Indianapolis during a second USBWA breakfast held the morning of the men's national championship game.

"This award should really go to my wife," said an emotional Rose. "She has been a rock through this."

The Most Courageous Award to Rose was one of several given that morning by the USBWA.

Past presidents Jim O'Connell of the AP and Malcolm Moran, Knight chair of the Sports Journalism program at Penn State, presented long-time NIT media relations director Chris Fallon with the Katha Quinn Award for services to the media in honor of the former St. John's University SID who passed away of cancer in 1989.

Three new members were inducted into the organization's Hall of Fame: Walter Byers, who as executive director of the NCAA originated the idea to form the USBWA in 1956; Bud Withers of the *Seattle Times*; and Skip Myslenski, formerly of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Myslenski was especially touched by the honor. "I'm dedicating this to my 96-year-old father," he said choking back tears. "When I told him about this, he told me how proud he was of me."

For the first time, the USBWA presented a Rising Star Award to recognize achievements of members who are under 30. This year's award went to Dan Wolken of the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*.

Finally, Steve Carp of the *Las Vegas Review Journal* was presented with the Ray Marquette Award for his outstanding leadership as president this past year.

SHAHEEN SALUTE. The USBWA presented NCAA Senior Vice President Greg Shaheen with a special award at the annual meeting of the USBWA board and the NCAA Division I Basketball Committee, thanking Shaheen for his efforts to keep the lines of communication open between the USBWA and the NCAA.

Probably no one at the NCAA in my 30 years with the USBWA has played a greater role than Shaheen in understanding the needs of writers at NCAA tournaments and working hard to make changes

for the betterment of the media. "I am a firm believer in the importance of our relationship with the USBWA," said Shaheen. "I view our work with the USBWA as central to what we're trying to do."

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



Best Writing Contest deadline approaches

The deadline for submitting stories and columns published during the 2009-10 college basketball season for the USBWA Best Writing Contest is June 14.

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, with \$150 given for first place, \$125 for second, \$100 for third, \$75 for fourth and \$50 for fifth. Winners will be announced in the *The Tipoff* and posted on the USBWA Web site.

Send all entries to: Joe Mitch; USBWA Writing Contest' 1818 Chouteau Ave.; St. Louis, Mo. 63103; (314) 421-0339. Entries also can be sent by e-mail to mitch@mvc.org

For entries submitted by mail, print the name of the category, author of the story, publication in which the article appeared and date of the publication on a 3x5 card and staple it to the article.

SEC's media guide proposal approved by NCAA's legislative council

The NCAA's legislative council recently rejected a proposal that would have banned all published media guides, adopting instead a proposal by the Southeastern Conference that essentially forbids media guides from being used a recruiting tool.

The new proposal becomes effective on Aug. 1.

Schools can still determine whether or not they want to publish media guides.

USBWA Recommendations to the NCAA

1. Wireless at NCAA Tournaments. Reliability and cost of the service are the biggest concerns. The wireless went down at several NCAA sites this year, although the NCAA did refund moneys to writers at sites that lost service. The USBWA is asking that the NCAA come in line with other major sporting events (Super Bowl, World Series, NBA and NHL playoffs) where wireless is provided at no cost.

2. Hotels. The USBWA is asking the NCAA for relief on the minimum four-night stay policy at tournament media hotels, especially for writers whose teams lose their semifinal game at the Final Four and would not be staying around for the championship game. Costs are also a concern.

3. Credentialing. The USBWA requests the NCAA review its policies to grant credentials to freelance writers for legitimate Web sites and other media outlets.

4. Interview Policies. The USBWA recommends that the losing team's players and coaches at NCAA tournaments come to the interview room before the winning team for all games, not just the national championship game. Currently, the winning team goes first at preliminary round games and national semifinals, but that is often delayed significantly due to CBS-mandated post-game interviews on the court. It is the opinion of the USBWA that the time wasted waiting for the winning team is better served with the losing team going first in the interview room.

Sights and scenes from the USBWA breakfasts



Oscar Robertson and Evan Turner, winner of the Oscar Robertson Trophy.



USBWA Freshman of the Year John Wall signs autographs for fans.



John Feinstein lends his tie to USBWA Coach of the Year Jim Boheim.



IUPUI Coach Run Hunter receives the USBWA's Good Guy Award.



Executive Director Joe Mitch and outgoing President Steve Carp.



Most Courageous Award winner Dave Rose, coach of Brigham Young, and Steve Carp, president of the USBWA.



Jim O'Connell and Chris Fallon, winner of the Katha Quinn Award.



Steve Carp and incoming USBWA President Bryan Burwell.



Dan Wolken (center), winner of the inaugural Rising Star Award, with John Akers and Steve Carp.



Hall of Famer Bud Withers (right) of the Seattle Times is inducted by John Akers.



Skip Myslenski, formerly of the Chicago Tribune, gave an impassioned speech during his induction into the Hall of Fame.



Bob Hammel represented Hall of Fame inductee Walter Byers.