

The

TIP



OFF



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Entering a period of uncertainty, we need each other

As editor of the Tipoff, I've been eavesdropping on USBWA conference calls for nearly a decade now.

I've learned a lot that I'm hoping to take from our most recent presidents – the class of Lenox Rawlings, the confidence of Bryan Burwell, the determination of Steve Carp.

Now it's time to put the experience and the lessons to use.

Writers once worried about losing their places on press row of NCAA tournaments to the influence of CBS executives who preferred that our seats be filled by fans. We worry still, though now whether our own employers will continue to spend the money to send us to Final Fours.

We fought for years for affordable wireless at these tournaments, only to be knocked offline at every tip-off by the invisible muscle of 10,000 cell phones. This tournament, writers were pleasantly surprised to find that every spot on press row was hardwired for Internet service, free of charge.

This Final Four, a number of us also were surprised to hear Xavier athletic director Mike Bobinski, incoming chairman of the NCAA tournament selection committee, say that the idea of allowing a pool reporter inside the tournament selection process is at least on the table.

I remember handing a similar proposal to former

tournament director Bill Hancock about 10 years ago. Hancock cheerfully told me that the committee would reject my shot like weak stuff offered up against Emeka Okafor. The very idea of entering the room with Bobinski and the rest of the committee is a million light years from a time not so long ago when the NCAA treated even the most mundane tournament principles like trade secrets.

Reporters at the New Orleans Final Four even got to stay in a media hotel where – unlike in Houston – the carpet was unfrayed and the showers poured hot water.

As I write this, we are learning that the man primarily responsible for this period of *glasnost* has been replaced. While it has been common knowledge for months that Greg Shaheen was in danger of losing his job as the director of the NCAA tournament, his departure makes no more sense now than it did then. Shaheen has been our true friend. He arrived at a time when the state of NCAA media relations was at such a low, his initial offers of openness were met by some in our business with skepticism. Shaheen was laying the NCAA's trap, some warned; if he was, sadly, he was the only one who fell through it.

We now enter into a new period of uncertainty, with a new tournament director, Mark Lewis, of whom little is known.

Shaheen has at least left us with a starting point that is well ahead of where it was a decade ago and with what might be the most open-minded selection committee in 75 seasons of NCAA tournaments.

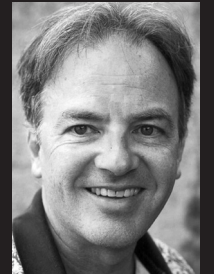
We believed Bobinski when he said the idea of allowing a reporter inside the selection process is open to discussion, understanding that the smart money might still be with those who say it will never happen. If the skeptics are right only because the NCAA can never bring itself to allow a fly on the wall on the 15th floor of Indianapolis' Westin Hotel, then so be it. If a reporter is never embedded with the committee during that week leading up to a Selection Sunday because this organization drops the ball, then shame on us.

Of course, there's more to the season – and to the issues the USBWA can and should pursue – than those that come up only during the tournament.

We have taken steps toward finding younger members by creating the Rising Star Award for the under-30 crowd. We will continue to reach out to the growing number of legitimate independent websites that are doing good work.

Access and information remain are our lifeblood. Yet we all know what has happened to media guides, and that the access to coaches and players being granted to beat

John Akers Basketball Times President



writers at many schools is eroding. As an organization, we need to at least urge coaches and sports information directors to become more like Shaheen. There are still a lot of great SIDs out there, such as recent Katha Quinn Award winner Kenny Klein of Louisville, but there seem also to be a rising number of obstructionists. Ironically, the greatest access that some writers have to their teams now comes during an NCAA tournament that used to be so media unfriendly.

One SID told me that he believes that even the online media guide soon will go the way of the print media guide.

No one, including SIDs, should hope that Wikipedia becomes our best source of historical information. Better, SIDs could use our ever-improving technology to create virtual online media guides that update statistics and honors in player bios, include the latest box scores and do all the things that a printed guide can do, only better.

Another SID told me that athletic departments have discovered they can deliver their intended message via their own websites. I told him that's like going to a government website to get our political information. It is up to us to show our readers the difference and keep giving schools, coaches and SIDs a reason to pay attention to us.

If you're reading this, we're preaching to the choir. But you know somebody who should be a member, if only for the goody bag that comes with each membership – our indispensable directory, Hertz and Hilton discount cards, seven issues of *Basketball Times* and much more. Urge them to join. If you're uncomfortable doing that, pass their name along to me at johna19081@gmail.com.

We need them. They need what we have to offer. We need each other – maybe now as much as ever.

Frank Burlison, a member of the USBWA's Hall of Fame, has joined the rotation of vice presidents, along with First Vice President Kirk Wessler of the *Peoria Journal-Star* and Second Vice President Dana O'Neil of *espn.com*. Chris Dufresne of the *Los Angeles Times* replaces Burlison as the District X representative. Other new reps include District I's Matt Vautour of the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and at-large Chris Dortch of the *Blue Ribbon College Yearbook*.

Best Writing Contest deadline approaches

The deadline for submitting stories and columns published during the 2011-12 college basketball season for the USBWA Best Writing Contest is June 13. The contest is sponsored by the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

Entries can be submitted in five categories: column writing, moderate-length features, magazine-length features, spot news/game coverage and enterprising/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: Writing Contest, 1818 Chouteau Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63103, (314) 444-4325. 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.

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Basketball gala to feature USBWA awards

The USBWA is moving the presentation of its annual men’s college basketball awards to a new venue beginning next year.

Having presented the Oscar Robertson Trophy to the national player of the year and the Henry Iba Award to the coach of the year at a breakfast at the NCAA Final Four since 2005, the USBWA will now present both awards at a college basketball gala in Oklahoma City one week after the Final Four.

The USBWA’s freshman of the year award, named in honor of former Oklahoma great Wayman Tisdale, was part of the first two galas this year and last but now will be combined with the USBWA’s player and coach of the year awards in the future to showcase the best in college basketball every year at one event.

The USBWA is partnering with Access Sports, an Oklahoma City-based not-for-profit foundation, on the awards dinner. USBWA members will select the award winners and Access Sports will serve as host of the gala. Access Sports will also present a Humanitarian Award to someone in college basketball.

Funds raised through the gala are used to support the USBWA’s scholarship program and a number of charitable activities, including the National Kidney Foundation and youth basketball programs in Oklahoma for disadvantaged youth, and to fund prosthetic devices for needy individuals through the Wayman Tisdale Foundation.

Tisdale’s leg was amputated and he died of cancer following a brilliant career at Oklahoma and in the NBA. He was the first freshman ever to receive first team All-America accolades from the USBWA in 1983.

The USBWA is hopeful that a partnership with Access Sports will lead to a television show on a sports cable network that will feature the association’s player, coach and freshman of the year.

MEN’S FINAL FOUR. Nearly 300 people attended this USBWA awards breakfast in New Orleans honoring the USBWA’s player and coach of the year winners.

USBWA President Lenox Rawlings of the *Winston-Salem Journal* and the legendary Oscar Robertson presented the trophy named in honor of the Big O to this year’s national player of the year, Anthony Davis of Kentucky.

ESPN’s Andy Katz, also a past president of the USBWA, presented Missouri’s first-year coach, Frank Haith, with the Henry Iba Award for leading the Tigers to the Big 12 tournament championship, a 30-4 record and a No. 3 national ranking going into the NCAA tournament.

The USBWA also honored former LSU coach Dale Brown and his 1981 and 1986 LSU teams that went to the NCAA Final Four. Brown was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by CBS Sports announcer Tim Brando while past board member and current Baton Rouge TV host Lee Feinswog recognized the two LSU teams.

The USBWA had a second breakfast for the association’s annual business meeting and awards function held on the morning of the NCAA championship game.

John Doleva, president of the Naismith Basketball

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



Hall of Fame, greeted the crowd as a sponsor of the breakfast and announced that the Hall of Fame was returning as sponsor of the USBWA’s writing contest.

Craig Miller of USA Basketball gave details about the media application process for this year’s Olympic Games.

A trailer for an upcoming ESPN documentary on the sale of the original document of basketball rules written by James Naismith was shown by the ESPN media relations department. ESPN also serves as a breakfast sponsor.

The USBWA honored past president and Hall of Fame member Bob Ryan for his years of service to the organization and his announced retirement from the Boston Globe for which he had covered 29 NCAA Final Fours.

Special recognition was also given to former Big East commissioner Dave Gavitt, who passed away last fall and was remembered for being media-friendly. Gavitt’s son, Dan, an associate commissioner of the Big East, accepted a plaque from the USBWA honoring his father on behalf of the Gavitt family.

The USBWA’s Katha Quinn Award, recognizing individuals for their service to the media covering college basketball, was presented to longtime Louisville SID (and now Senior Associate Athletics Director for Media Relations) Kenny Klein by board member Pat Forde, of YahooSports.com. Forde saw Klein’s professionalism and dedication to the job when he wrote for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* in the 1990s.

Florida State’s Bernard James was presented with the Most Courageous Award. James delayed starting his college playing career until the age of 26 after serving overseas in the Air Force in Iraq and the Middle East and experiencing the dangers of war first hand.

Three new members of the USBWA Hall of Fame were enshrined at the Monday breakfast – Tom Cushman, now retired from the *San Diego Union-Tribune*; Mike DeCourcy of *The Sporting News*; and Peter Finney, who at 84 still writes columns for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

Rawlings received the Ray Marquette Award for his leadership this past year as president of the USBWA.

WOMEN’S FINAL FOUR: Mel Greenberg and Wendy Parker handled a similar USBWA awards breakfast in Denver at the NCAA women’s Final Four. They presented plaques to Kim Mulkey of Baylor as coach of the year and Brittney Griner of Baylor as player of the year. Greenberg announced that the player of the year award will now be named after former UCLA great Ann Meyers-Drysdale. Tennessee coach Pat Summitt was also recognized as recipient of the USBWA’s women’s Most Courageous Award. Summitt recently announced she is suffering from early stage Alzheimer’s disease.

‘We honor Bob Ryan because he honors all of us’

(Outgoing USBWA President Lenox Rawlings provided the following introductory speech in special recognition of longtime Boston Globe columnist Bob Ryan at the organization’s annual Monday morning breakfast at the Final Four.)

My greatest pleasure in doing this job is coming here today to pay tribute to Bob Ryan, who will stop working fulltime for the *Boston Globe* after the summer Olympics. This is his 29th Final Four. The first was in College Park, 1970, UCLA over Jacksonville with Artis Gilmore, Pembroke Burroughs, Vaughn Wedeking and Rex Morgan. Bob will fill in the rest of the guys later, because he can.

We honor Bob because he honors all of us. He honors all of us by bringing it every day, in every sport and arena you could name – 180 college venues so far, and there will be more.

This is the rhythm of his daily life, going to the ball game and running it through his incredible mind and telling us what he thinks.

He started going to the ballpark regularly in 1950, to see his hometown Trenton Giants, farm club of the New York Giants. His father had season tickets, and Ryan had a perfect view of Willie Mays, probably the best ballplayer in our lifetimes. We were at dinner the other night and Dick Weiss asked him if Mays was the greatest minor league ballplayer he had ever seen. Ryan kind of shrugged and let the question slide. “He hit .353,” Ryan says. “You can look it up.” But Hoops wasn’t taking maybe for an answer, so he pressed on a little harder. Ryan says: “In the considered judgment of my 4-year-old eyes, yes.”

Bob eventually went to BC and fell in love with Boston and never left. He got his dream job at the *Globe* on June 10, 1968.

He and Peter Gammons started the same day, which has to be the greatest bonus baby double-signing in the history of sportswriting.

He wrote great stuff. Two years ago, he wrote a column in the *Globe* about how Al Skinner got fired at BC because he was perceived as a rather casual pro coach who came in a little late and stayed a little while and avoided grinding it out on the recruiting trail. Bob figured Skinner wasn’t going to change for the simple reason that “Al is Al is Al is Al.”

Well, the column comes out and Bob goes to the airport with Elaine, headed to the Final Four in Indy. They’re sitting at the Dunkin’ Donuts stand, 6:20 in the morning, and here comes Al Skinner. Bob thinks, “Good, let’s get this over with.” They talk about 20 minutes and it’s done. That’s the way he works.

Ryan brings it in all sorts of places. In 1972, he used his vacation time to research a book on minor league baseball,

traveling from Quebec to Montana to Kinston, N.C., then the home of the very young Cornbread Maxwell.

He got to know the Kinston GM, Hyman Bizzell. Bob says that “Hyman’s idea of promotion consisted of printing the schedule.”

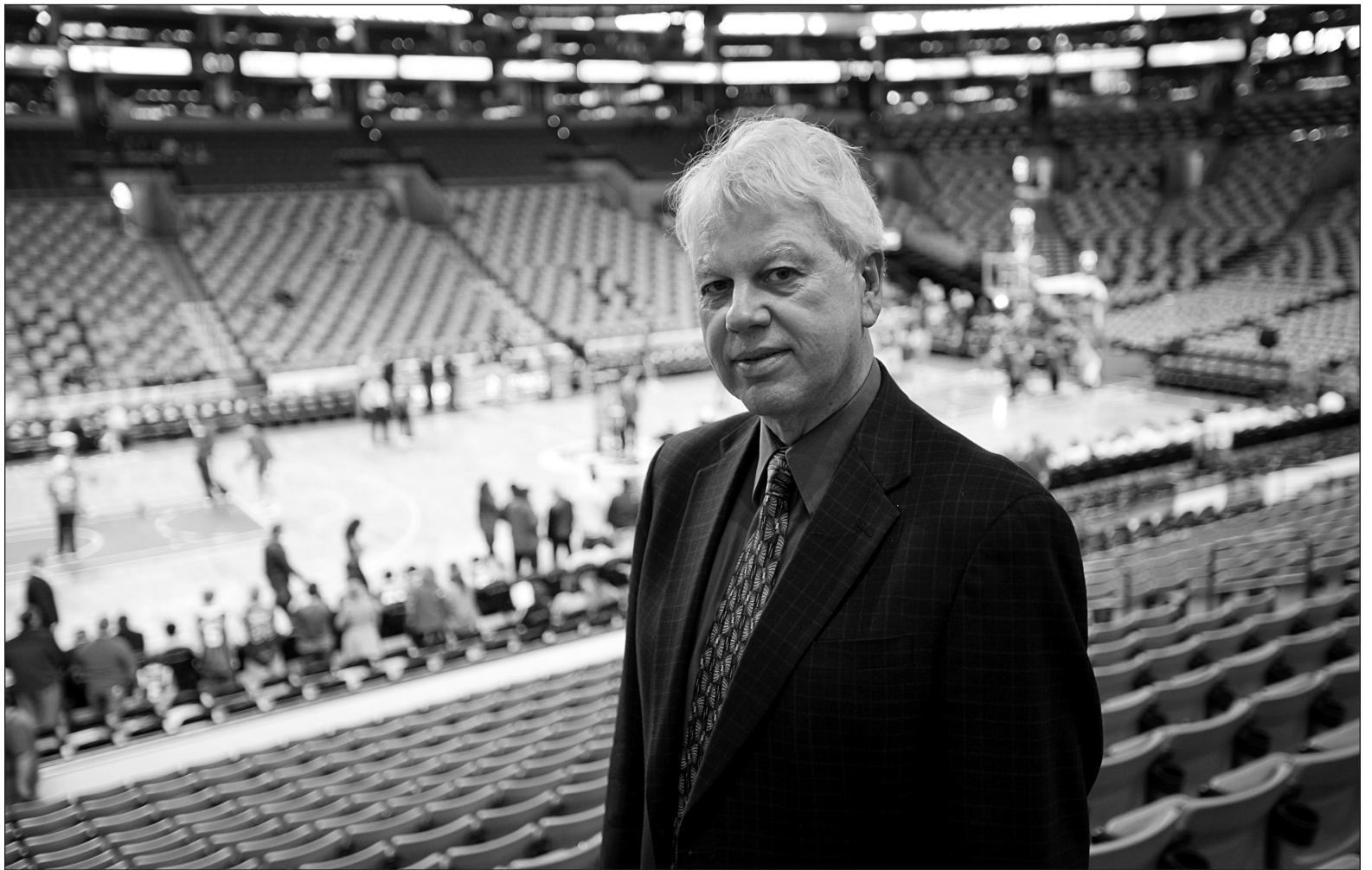
Bob has been in my backyard and he has probably been in yours, and unless you’ve done the legwork, he probably knows more about your backyard than you do.

He made his name covering the Celtics, and even today he keeps running on these long scoresheets with Boston Celtics Basketball Club printed at the top.

He pays attention to detail. The research comes naturally. He is intellectually curious. He wants to know, and by knowing, he has the facts to support his beautifully written opinions.

a book or buddy up to somebody or get on TV, although he managed to do all those things effortlessly, but because he truly is curious. He’s never jaded, bored, world-weary or above it all. It is fashionable these days for certain members of our profession to take pride in how little they know about sports they aren’t covering. Ryan would be ashamed if he didn’t know the name of every coach in every sport.

“He was a natural columnist, even before he became one. He wrote from the heart, and he did it fast and always with emphasis. He championed the NBA when it was quite unfashionable to do so. I realized the NBA had lost its moorings when, at a writers’ meeting, Ryan told David Stern that it was wrong to move the writers into the rafters. ‘David, the problem is, I can’t see the game,’ he said. Stern made it known in so many words that he didn’t care. David



Bob Ryan. at one of the 180 basketball venues he has visited as a columnist for the *Boston Globe* and as a fan and friend of basketball.

When I was preparing this tribute, I asked our friend Mark Whicker (of the *Orange County Register*) for some of his thoughts because he has covered lots of events with Ryan. This is some of what he wrote back:

“We were at the Vancouver Olympics, and when I showed up at men’s speed skating, Ryan was there. He looked up from his computer and said, ‘Butler beat Siena by 21. They’ve won 19 in a row now.’ A couple of months later Butler was playing for the national championship.

“That was the same Olympics in which Ryan got fired up because the U.S. won some Nordic Combined medals for the first time since Sonja Henie, or thereabouts. He knew nothing about Nordic Combined but, by God, he was going to learn something about it because he instinctively knew what it meant. That is what makes him special. He has context. You can’t blog or tweet it, but it’s there.

“He’s an enthusiast, not because he’s looking to write

forgot how well Ryan saw the game, and how he made his readers see it, too.

“Beyond all that, Ryan is generous with his knowledge, his opinions and his time, and it doesn’t matter if you’re from the *New York Times* or the *Winston-Salem Journal*. He’s The Commissioner. Very few writers get that honor.”

Those insights are from Whicker, and I agree with every one of them.

So here we come to the end of the last Final Four on Ryan’s Hyman Bizzell schedule card. He tells me that, and I react like he did yesterday when he was questioning John Calipari: “I don’t believe a word you’re saying.”

But whether it’s the last Final Four or not, Bob considers this a great day. “Two heavyweights going at it,” he says, with that twinkle of ageless wonderment in his eyes. We can feel his energy, still. That’s why honoring Bob Ryan gives us special joy, because Bob is Bob is Bob is Bob.

Breakfast(s) with the U.S. Basketball Writers Association



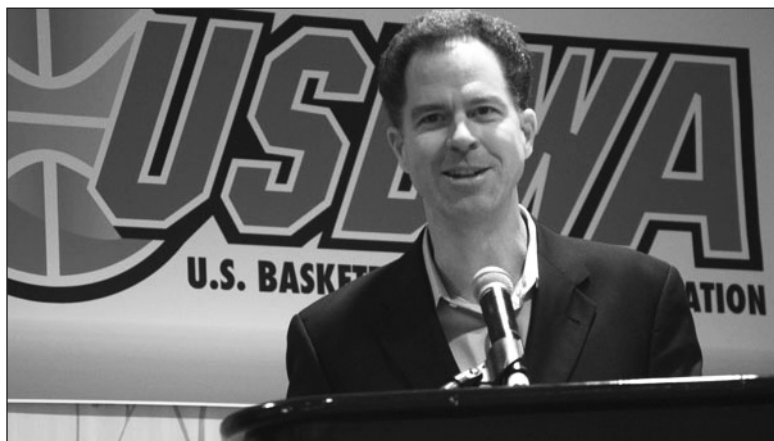
Dale Brown thanks Joe Mitch for his Lifetime Achievement Award, Oscar Robertson chats with Player of the Year Anthony Davis and Coach of the Year Frank Haith signs a basketball.



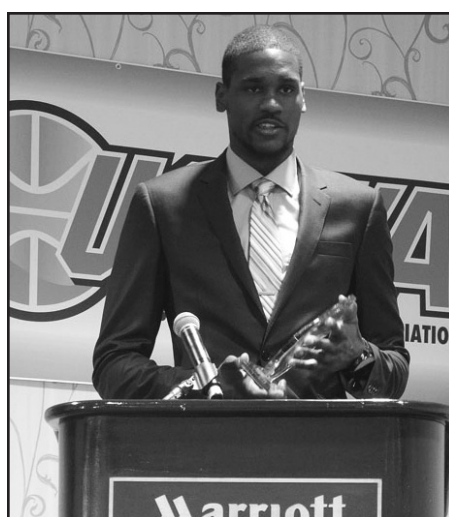
Bob Ryan received Special Recognition at the Monday morning breakfast.



The three most recent Hall of Famers: Mike DeCourcy, Tom Cushman and Peter Finney.



Dan Gavitt accepted Special Recognition for his late father, Dave Gavitt.



Kenny Klein accepts the Katha Quinn Award; Bernard James of Florida State won the Most Courageous Award; President Lenox Rawlings accepts the Ray Marquette Award from Joe Mitch.
Photos by Casey Kelley