

Taking the wheel as first president A.J. (After Joe)

After accepting the USBWA president's gavel from David Teel at the Final Four in Minneapolis, I paused for a second to look around the room at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Mingling among this year's honorees, including Katha Quinn Award winner Mike Sheridan and Most Courageous Award winner Ericka Downey, were a host of past presidents.

Pat Forde and Dana O'Neil joked with 2019 Hall of Famer Dan Wetzel. Bob Ryan was there along with the legendary Dick "Hoops" Weiss. So were Mike DeCourcy and Andy Katz.

As I held my gavel and the plaque, I suddenly felt like a brown suit in a roomful of tuxedos. Was I really up to the challenge of leading this organization through the upcoming 2019-20 season?

And then I thought of the first Final Four that I covered. It was back in 1990. Then, as now, I was working for the Syracuse Post-Standard. Our columnist had just left the sports department, so I applied for a Final Four credential. The NCAA rejected the request.

The USBWA, specifically John Feinstein, stepped

Mike Waters Syracuse Post-Standard President



in. I had met John a few years earlier when he was working on a book. I had let him know that I wouldn't be coming to the Final Four in Denver as planned. He was having none of it. Within a day, I had a credential.

That's what the USBWA did for a young reporter in just his second year on the beat.

And as I remembered that, I thought that maybe this job isn't too big for me. Because the USBWA is me. It's about me and for me; just as it's about and for each of its members.

The USBWA is at its best when it uses its strength as an organization to advance the game, honor those who

have served the game and, most importantly, support and serve its members.

Going back to past presidents, I have the unenviable task of following in the footsteps of David Teel, who merely guided the USBWA through its most important decision in the past 30 years. Teel led the search for a successor to Joe Mitch, who has served this organization as its executive director for longer than most of us have been USBWA members.

Teel ran a search that the folks at UCLA should study.

As horrified as I was to think of being president in the first year A.J. (After Joe), I'm relieved to have Malcolm Moran, past president and USBWA Hall of Famer, as our new executive director.

Malcolm and I have shared many conversations already and I'm hoping to tap into his small army of students at IUPUI to help make the USBWA website more relevant. I'd like to highlight the work of USBWA members and draw more people to the site with basketball news and industry updates.

Malcolm and I also want to address the issue of

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Our advocacy is greatest value we can bring

As the basketball season came to an end, there were two important reminders of your USBWA membership dues at work.

During that hectic conference tournament weekend, the Peoria (Ill.) Journal Star reported that longtime Bradley University beat reporter Dave Reynolds, a three-time Illinois Sportswriter of the Year, had been excluded from the media day of the men's basketball team between its Missouri Valley Conference championship and the departure for the NCAA tournament.

Within 24 hours of the initial posting of the report on the Journal Star website and the immediate social media firestorm, the USBWA, in coordination with Associated Press Sports Editors president John Bednarowski of the Marietta (Ga.) Daily Journal and past president Gerry Ahern, issued a joint statement of concern over the denial of access. The university, including coach Brian Wardle, extended public and personal apologies. Bradley president Gary Roberts and athletic director Chris Reynolds issued statements. Chris Reynolds returned to campus from the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Committee selection process to reinforce his commitment. And the access was quickly restored.

Then in the aftermath of Virginia's shocking, last-second victory over Auburn in a national semifinal, past USBWA president Dana O'Neil of The Athletic executed her role as the pool reporter. Reporters covering the game soon had access to a quote from J.D. Collins, the national coordinator of officiating, explaining official James

Malcolm Moran



Breeding's ruling that Samir Doughty of Auburn fouled Virginia's Kyle Guy on a 3-point attempt. Guy's three free throws with 0.6 seconds to play sent Virginia to the national championship game with a 63-62 victory. Collins' quote included the rule and section that was cited, adding clarity to what had been a chaotic situation for anyone reporting on deadline in the vastness of U.S. Bank Stadium.

It is important for you to know that the immediate responses to the Bradley access issue and one of the most high-profile officiating controversies in Final Four history were the result of years of negotiation and collaboration.

The APSE leadership has dramatically increased its awareness and involvement in our issues in recent years, and the collective effort to evaluate the Bradley situation and determine an appropriate, constructive intervention created a template.

Our efforts to discuss the decisive calls of officials were rejected when first voiced in the 1980s. Veteran

members will remember the confusion when Pete Pavia ejected Dean Smith near the end of North Carolina's 1991 semifinal loss to Kansas. Supervisor Hank Nichols met with reporters in an impromptu news conference that highlighted the absence of any formal structure and the importance of a flow of information after a controversial decision.

The organization's advocacy for you – official and unofficial – continues throughout the year. When officers met with members of the NCAA Division I

Men's Basketball Committee in Minneapolis, including 2019-20 chair Kevin White of Duke, the discussion included our appeal to restore courtside seats that were lost several years ago. I have been asked to represent the USBWA as part of the NCAA Media Advisory Group, which includes representation from the NCAA, APSE and CoSIDA.

The organization's most important role is to provide the maximum value to each member. I understand that the days of having membership dues reimbursed by the office are long gone, which adds to the importance of our advocacy. Please become involved as much as you can, even if that involvement is limited to careful, measured voting for the All-America teams and individual honors that define our collective credibility.

And please share your ideas. You can reach me at malcolm@usbwa.com. I have been given a new email address and the honor of serving you.

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Thankful and honored to have served for 39 years

As I write my final Tipoff column winding down on a 39-year career with the USBWA, it has been an honor and a privilege to serve this great organization for so long.

I was an assistant commissioner for media relations with the old Metro Conference, writing news releases and editing a weekly newspaper for the league, when the USBWA asked me in 1980 to edit The Tipoff. Three years later I was named executive director.

I feared that one day I'd get a call telling me they found a sportswriter to be executive director.

Fortunately, I never got the call.

I have so many people to thank who have helped me along the way. At the top of the list are the presidents who provided the leadership necessary for the organization to grow. Early on, presidents such as Dave Dorr, Bob Hammel, Bill Brill, Larry Donald, Frank Boggs, Gordon White and Steve Guback were there with advice and encouragement.

I want to thank two people I worked with the most – John Akers and Ted Gangi. John serves as editor of The Tipoff and has been a valuable adviser. Ted is our webmaster and provides a host of other services that often go unnoticed.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank Mel Greenberg for his good work as coordinator of the USBWA women's program. Mel is respected nationally for what he has done promoting women's basketball.

Another person to thank is Dave Worlock, the NCAA's director of media coordination for the men's tournament. Dave is a friend of the USBWA and

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



has helped us in so many ways through the years, especially serving as a liaison to the men's basketball committee.

And finally, I want to thank the past presidents, officers and board members for their generous gifts and emails congratulating me on my retirement. I cannot adequately express to you my sincere thanks and appreciation.

Very early in my career I learned the USBWA's first responsibility is to its members. The USBWA can be especially effective helping writers deal with such core issues as seating for the media at games and access to players and coaches.

This is the kind of service writers have come to expect from the USBWA. Members can count on the USBWA being an advocate for them.

Malcolm Moran will assume my duties as executive director on June 1. Malcolm's a perfect person for the job – a former sportswriter who's worked at several major newspapers such as the New York Times, Chicago Tribune and USA Today. He also knows the inner workings of the USBWA, having served as president in 1988-89.

I'll miss the USBWA. It has been a major part of my life for nearly four decades.

Thank you USBWA for 39 wonderful years.

Applications for scholarship accepted

The USBWA will award a four-year scholarship, at \$1,000 per year, to the son or daughter of a USBWA member who is entering college as a freshman for the 2019 fall semester or is currently enrolled in a junior college or four-year institution and plans to return to school in the fall.

The student will receive \$1,000 each year he or she remains in school (maximum of four years), takes a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester and maintains a minimum GPA of 3.0.

Applicants must demonstrate academic excellence and show achievement in citizenship and leadership in a community activity. Forms can be found at usbwa.com.

- Applicants must achieve a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 in high school or college.

- Applicants must enroll in a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester in college.

- Applicants may submit a maximum of three recommendations with their application.

Send completed application and letters of recommendation to: Malcolm Moran; Executive Director; USBWA; University Library 3100J; 755W Michigan St.; Indianapolis IN 46202. Phone: 317-278-5329.

The deadline to submit an application is July 1.

Best Writing contest deadline approaches

The deadline for submitting stories and columns published during the 2018-19 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.

Cash prizes and plaques will be awarded for first-place winners. Other winners get cash prizes. Winners will be announced in an issue of The Tipoff and posted on the USBWA website.

Send all entries by e-mail to contest@usbwa.com.

For entries submitted include the name of the category, the author of the story, the publication in which the article appeared and the date of the publication.

Williamson, Barnes claim USBWA's top honors

Duke forward Zion Williamson swept USBWA honors by winning the Oscar Robertson Trophy as the national player of the year and the Wayman Tisdale Award as the nation's top freshman.

Tennessee's Rick Barnes was named the winner of the Henry Iba Award as the nation's top coach.

Williamson, a 6-foot-7 forward from Spartanburg, S.C., was the nation's only player to average at least 20 points and shoot at least 65 percent from the field. He was selected to the first team of the USBWA's All-America team along with the award's three other finalists – teammate R.J. Barrett of Duke, Ja Morant of Murray State and Grant Williams of Tennessee – and Cassius Winston of Michigan State.

The trophy's namesake, "The Big O," was on hand at U.S. Bank Stadium, site of the Final Four, to announce

Williamson as the winner. A formal presentation of the three awards took place April 15 at the Missouri Athletic Club in St. Louis.

Iowa's Megan Gustafson received the Ann Meyers Drysdale Award as the women's national player of the year. Kim Mulkey of Baylor was named the women's coach of the year.

Williamson was the eighth Blue Devil to win the trophy (and the first since J.J. Redick shared the trophy with Gonzaga's Adam Morrison in 2006) and the third freshman (along with Kentucky's Anthony Davis and Texas' Kevin Durant) to claim the honor.

The USBWA first-team All-American electrified fans with his rim-rattling dunks and dramatic blocks on defense. He was the ACC player of the year and the first freshman to be named the ACC tournament's

Most Valuable Player. While tying for the ACC lead in scoring (22.6 points per game), Williamson was also second in steals (2.1), third in rebounding (8.9 rpg) and fifth in blocks (1.8 bpg). Williamson led Duke to a 21st ACC championship and a 22nd Elite Eight appearance. He averaged 26.4 points and 9.1 rebounds in seven postseason games.

Williamson won the Wayman Tisdale Award over fellow finalists Barrett, Coby White of North Carolina and Antoine Davis of Detroit Mercy.

Barnes led the Volunteers to arguably the greatest season in school history, which included a school-record 19-game win streak. His guidance helped keep Tennessee ranked among the top 10 in both national polls throughout the season, including a No. 1 ranking for four weeks during win streak.

Waters

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membership. The USBWA needs to grow. It also needs to get younger and more diverse.

We plan on reaching out to the leaders at both the NABJ and AWSM. We want their members to learn about the USBWA and we also want to offer our resources to their members as well. For instance, if a female reporter has a locker-room issue or a harassing situation going on, even if she's not a USBWA, we as an organization need to be there for that reporter.

We've got a few other plans for attracting new members in the works, too. More on those later.

I also ask each of you to reach out to young reporters, especially college students, and let them know about the USBWA and what we can do for them. I mean it. Recruit. Offer college students a special discount. I don't care if you get caught on an FBI tape because the discount already exists.

Of course, the USBWA will continue to work with the NCAA on major issues involving the media's coverage of the game. Seating and access continue to be major issues for our members to do their jobs well. It's sad when some reporters have better seats and more access at the NCAA tournament than they do all season while covering their teams – and it's no wonder that coverage also improves with better seating and more access.

Our board of directors' annual meeting with NCAA leadership at the Final Four drove home once again that common ground can often be found. How do I know this? When one of our members had an idea or, gasp, a complaint, David Worlock didn't just nod his head. He picked up his pen and jotted down a note on his pad.

Worlock remains a friend of the show, so to speak, and open to our suggestions. He's also one of the most responsive people in the media relations business and an excellent example to our members from that side of the business on how to treat the media.

Seriously, just as I'd tell a younger reporter to just do everything Mike DeCourcy or David Teel do, then I'd tell a young media-relations type to just watch David Worlock.

I'm sure Tipoff editor John Akers is hoping I'll make it to dash-30-dash soon, so I'll wrap by saying this:

I value everything about the USBWA. I'm sure that goes back to 1990 and getting to cover the Final Four only because of Feinstein and the USBWA. To him, it was probably just a phone call. I bet he doesn't even remember it.

That's why I want younger reporters to know about our organization and how it can benefit them. And I want to be there for them. Please reach out to me or any other USBWA member.

And if you see me at the Final Four in Atlanta next year, I'll be easy to find. I'll be the one in the brown suit.



Retiring USBWA Executive Director Joe Mitch receives the Cliff Wells Appreciation Award from the NABC's Jim Haney.

Mitch receives NABC's Cliff Wells Appreciation Award

Joe Mitch, who will retire as executive director of the USBWA in May, received the Cliff Wells Appreciation Award from the National Association of Basketball Coaches, presented for long and outstanding service to college basketball and the coaching profession, at the AT&T NABC Guardians of the Game Awards Show during the Final Four weekend.

The late Jim O'Connell was presented with the Big East Media Award before the start of the Big East tournament. O'Connell also was honored during the Final Four by the NCAA with a courtside seat that was left open for him.

The late Al Featherston was a recipient of the Atlantic Coast Conference's Skeeter Francis Award, which recognizes distinguished coverage of the ACC.

Al Shrier, a decorated sports information director at Temple and winner of the USBWA's Katha Quinn Award in 1998, passed away on March 4. Shrier served at Temple for 57 years, primarily in media relations. He was 88.

Nathan Baird of the Lafayette (Ind.) Journal & Courier placed first in explanatory writing and teamed with Ron Wilkins for first place in breaking news in the APSE's C Division writing contest.

Lodge Notes

A weekend with the U.S. Basketball Writers Association



Zion Williamson is awarded the Oscar Robertson Trophy, with Oscar himself.



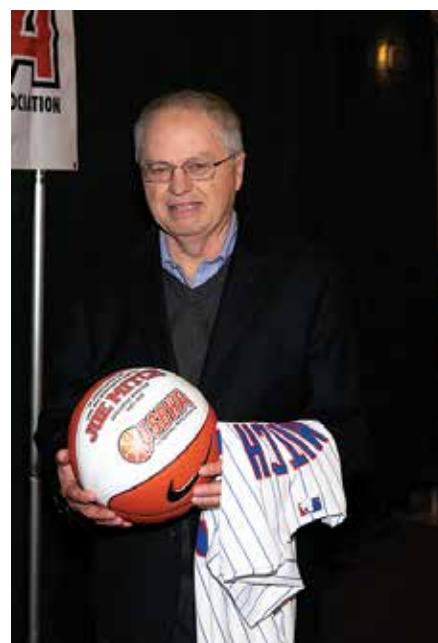
Glen Crevier, Pat Borzi, Rachel Blount and Dana O'Neil at the Full Court Press seminar.



Anne O'Connell accepts the first Jim O'Connell award for beat writing.



The 2019 Hall of Fame class: John Akers, Dan Wetzel, Jack McCallum and Bill Rhoden.



Katha Quinn Award winner Mike Sheridan; Most Courageous winner Erica Downey (with Billy Gillispie); Rising Star Sam Vecenie; and retiring Executive Director Joe Mitch.