

Power of USBWA apparent in Yom Kippur oversight

One of the enjoyable things about serving as President of the USBWA has been learning how much this organization, thanks to Joe Mitch and my predecessors, is held in high regard.

The basketball community really understands the role that the USBWA plays in the sport and that, I'm happy to say, is a benefit to all of us.

The latest example of this came last month when we learned that the Mountain West Conference had inadvertently scheduled its basketball media days on Yom Kippur, the most holy day on the Jewish calendar.

I heard from some of our Jewish members who were justifiably upset and concerned. They felt like the MWC's decision had put them in a situation where they would have to choose between their jobs and spending time with their families observing what is a very special day in their faith. They were also concerned that the MWC had shown some insensitivity by not realizing the conflict (Yom Kippur is listed on most calendars) before scheduling the event.

As USBWA president, I wrote MWC Commissioner Craig Thompson, a former sports information director, and expressed our concerns. I respectfully asked Craig to consider changing the date of the MWC's media days.

To Craig's credit, he immediately wrote back and apologized for the oversight. Because so many plans were already in place, including travel for participating student

athletes, he said that it would be impossible to change the schedule at this late date. But he assured me that any Jewish member of our organization who missed the event because of the conflict would receive the full cooperation of his schools in terms of setting up interviews he or she needed. Craig copied the letter to the MWC's athletics directors and presidents. In short, he took our concerns very seriously.

I responded by letting Craig know how much we appreciated his quick response and his willingness to work with our membership so that we could all do our jobs. I also told him that given the circumstances, it was best that we all move on and work together to make the best of the situation.

Did we get the dates changed? No. We could have taken a hard line, and no doubt there were some members

who wanted us to do that. But digging in our heels here would not have been in our long-term best interest.

As an organization, we were able to make our point that conferences need to be aware of these kinds of situations when planning their events. And you can bet that the news about this episode will be passed along to the rest of the conferences. The net result will be a greater sensitivity to this sort of thing throughout college athletics. I don't think we'll ever face this issue again.

That's a tribute to you. If I had written that letter as an individual representing one newspaper, it would not have carried nearly as much weight. But the fact that I represented the USBWA got the MWC's attention. That's the way it's supposed to work.

President

By **TONY BARNHART**
Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Schools, conferences should know how to reach members

The Mountain West scheduling media day on Yom Kippur without thoroughly investigating the date (forget about looking at the majority of calendars) made me think about a centralizing email account for conferences.

We, as an organization, shouldn't have an issue providing a list of all USBWA email addresses to every conference, which in turn could give it to each school. This could solve myriad problems.

First, any major scheduling issue would go out to our membership and, in turn, solicit any concern about dates. Secondly, and more importantly, on a daily and weekly basis, a master list would allow schools to get their basic information out to the masses.

Too often, colleagues will get an email on an injury, news conference or just an announcement that I might not receive. Sometimes, I get it, and they don't. The same is true for the NCAA's announcement of news conferences.

We need to have a centralized list for all of these occasions. There's no reason why a school and conference can't have a sport-by-sport master list for its news releases. If it's a basketball-related issue, then the school and conference should attach the USBWA email listing to the file. Obviously, the local writers who might not be members would get the email as well. Then, once it is received, we should decide what to do with the information. Had this

type of thing occurred then, the MWC wouldn't have been able to say that it let some media know about the date. Not everyone was made aware of the date, and when we were, it was too late to affect a change. The MWC did the right thing by admitting its error and writing a letter to the conference member presidents and athletic directors. I'm sure this won't occur again.

Final nuggets As the season starts, keep thinking about notable people for our end of the season awards, especially the Most Courageous and the Katha Quinn Award.

Whether we honor him now or later, I would like to point out a legend in this business who operates with less

than most. Lawrence Fan of San Jose State is one of the country's hardest-working SIDs. He's also one of the greatest characters. (John Akers can attest that there is no one quite like Lawrence and his famous Fan cake.) One of my favorite stories was when I jokingly said to him that he should bring the Fan Cake to the WAC tournament in Las Vegas. When I arrived, UNLV beat writer Steve Carp told me that Lawrence had called in and was bringing his pots and pans and cake mix to his house to whip up a few cakes for the press room. Classic Fan. His car, at last check, had over 300,000 miles on it. That should say something about this man's dedication and loyalty to serving the media.

Second Vice-President

By **ANDY KATZ**
ESPN



Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the USBWA

This season marks the 50th anniversary of the U. S. Basketball Writers Association and plans are already underway to celebrate the occasion at this year's NCAA Final Four in Indianapolis.

The USBWA board of directors and officers met by conference call in October and tossed around ideas about how best to commemorate the USBWA's founding in 1956 and 50 years of service to writers who cover college basketball for a living.

One novel suggestion by board member Steve Carp of the *Las Vegas Review Journal* was to recognize 50 members who have made the most significant contributions to the organization's growth in the last 50 years.

Other plans include picking the top 50 people in college basketball and the 50 most memorable college basketball stories in USBWA history.

More details will follow in the next issue of *The Tipoff* but if members have other ideas about ways to celebrate the association's 50th anniversary, please pass them along to either me or President Tony Barnhart.

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BY JOE MITCH
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Also during the Final Four, the USBWA presents several awards honoring members for their service and dedication to the association and people in college basketball for their contributions to the sport. These include:

HALL OF FAME. There is no greater honor than to be recognized by your peers and since 1988 when the USBWA Hall of Fame was established, 46 members of the organization have been inducted into its Hall of Fame.

To be eligible, individuals must have 20 years of service in the profession and have achieved a level of distinction in the sports journalism profession.

The USBWA's Hall of Fame includes a "Who's Who" among sports writers, including current members Bill Brill, Bob Ryan, John Feinstein, Jerry Radding, Alex Wolff, Jim O'Connell, Mel Greenberg, Caulton Tudor, Dick Weiss, Billy Reed, Dave Kindred, Ron Green Sr., Dave Dorr, Bob Hammel, Steve Guback, Gordon White, Curry Kirkpatrick, Dan Foster, Mal Florence, Bill Millsaps, Jim O'Brien, Bill Jauss and Jay Simon.

KATHA QUINN

AWARD. Presented in memory of Katha Quinn, former sports information director at St. John's University who died following a courageous battle with cancer.

The award recognizes those in college basketball who like Katha have excelled at servicing the media but can also include individuals in college basketball who provide an inspiration to those in the sports journalism profession.

Media services recipients include Bill Hancock and Jim Marchiony (NCAA), Al Shrier (Temple), Craig Miller and Amy Early (USA Basketball), Roger Valdiserri (Notre Dame), Skeeter Francis (ACC), Rick Brewer and Steve Kirschner (North Carolina) and Tim Tolokan (UConn).

Inspirational winners include *Washington Post* writer Mark Asher, who continued to cover major sports events while battling serious health problems, and Jack Watkins, associate commissioner of the Missouri Valley Conference whose daughter Kate died during a time when he served as

media coordinator for the Valley and an NCAA Tournament.

MOST COURAGEOUS AWARD. This is the USBWA's oldest non-player/coach award and perhaps the association's crown jewel.

First presented in 1979, the most courageous award has been the highlight of the USBWA's annual Monday morning breakfast at the Final Four, bringing tears to just about everyone who is present for the awards ceremony.

The award recognizes a player, coach, game official or administrator who has faced severe challenges or adversity in life. Some have fought and lost battles with cancer: Jim Valvano; Phil Scaffidi (Niagara); and Mark Alcorn (LSU).

Others have had to deal with their handicaps: Virginia Tech's Rayna DuBose, who lost parts of all four limbs due to a spinal cord bacterial infection; South Carolina's James Bradley, deaf since he was 18 months old; Indiana's Landon

USBWA looking for longtime members

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, the USBWA would like to recognize those current members who have maintained membership in the organization the longest since the USBWA's inception in 1956.

Since records dating back to the formative years of the USBWA are incomplete, members are asked to e-mail their names and years of membership to Joe Mitch, executive director, at mitch@mvc.org.

Turner, paralyzed from a car accident; and Florida guard Eddie Shannon, blind in one eye since grade school.

Then there was Nolan Richardson, on the day Arkansas was to play in the 1995 national title game, openly weeping at the dais while accepting the award for dealing with racial prejudice while growing up and the death of his daughter due to leukemia when he was coaching.

And finally, no one will forget Eddie Sutton accepting on behalf of the Oklahoma State program following the plane crash that killed 10 members of his team. It was one of the most emotional USBWA awards ceremonies ever.

Nominations for all of these awards are now being accepted and should be sent to my attention at mitch@mvc.org by Jan. 1.



USBWA

UNITED STATES BASKETBALL WRITERS ASSOCIATION

A shorter USBWA meeting might be better attended

As your first vice-president, I have no power. Therefore, I hereby promise to do the following:

- Look into shortening our annual meeting at the Final Four. No, it has nothing to do with tee times, although that's not a bad idea.

The annual USBWA meeting is our family reunion. They're terrific. But last year's meeting ran a bit long. We lost nearly half the room to the Basketball Hall of Fame press conference, which announces its class at a room adjacent to our meeting each year.

What to lose? That's a toughie. Our Most Courageous Award and our own USBWA Hall of Fame are untouchable. Those are the highlights. Last year, we had a guest speaker, former Oklahoma A&M star Bob Kurland, as I recall. It's interesting to hear the old stories. But I believe this is one area we could cut out. The longer we go, the more it hurts attendance for our business meeting. By the time I get to be president, it might just be me and Joe Mitch.

Tom: "Well, Joe, do you have anything?"

Joe: "No, Tom, I'm good."

Tom: "Well, we're adjourned. Let's go grab our clubs."

- Have a USBWA golf outing at the Final Four. We could do it Monday afternoon, a light play day for most golf courses.

- Increase enrollment in USBWA by offering a golf play day at the Final Four. At Indy, we play Crooked Stick.

Last year's meeting ran a bit long. We lost nearly half the room to the Basketball Hall of Fame press conference.

At Atlanta, Augusta National.

I think the latter might spark a little interest in USBWA. Now, all we need is an Augusta National member to join USBWA. Hmmm. Do you think Hootie Johnson can type?

- Move all press rows to the floor. If that's not

possible, then build the press rows in the stands close to stairwells and easy access to the press room, locker rooms, etc. And make all press areas in the stands wireless-friendly.

- Start a discussion about whether to target our broadcast

brethren in our membership drive. TV and radio guys have needs, too. So, for that matter, do photographers, who share our press space. Should we represent them? Would we be stronger as a group when going to the NCAA, especially if we had ESPN or CBS types as members?

Food for thought.

- Work with ESPN and CBS to get starting times that are reasonable (hint: before the 11 p.m. eastern Sports Center).

- Work with APSE to get later deadlines.

- Get the NCAA to pick up the tab for all wireless at their events. Eventually, make all arenas in college basketball wireless friendly (and free).

- Have a USBWA seminar to teach the old-schoolers (like me) how to use wireless and ethernet.

Anyone need a telecopier? It's used but in good shape.

First Vice-President

By TOM SHATEL
Omaha World-Herald



Technical advice: Don't lose your mind over memory

We've all had it happen to us. Our laptop is lifeless. The hard drive crashed. You can't connect to the Internet or, worse, you can get connected, but you can't get into your company e-mail. Seemingly, you're in a huge jam. And, almost certainly, you're on deadline far from home.

There's nothing we can do to prevent some of those so-called acts of God. But, there are some little things you can do to make sure you can still get your job done. Here are some tips to help you be prepared for the worst.

First and foremost, if you don't have a web-based e-mail client like Yahoo! or Hotmail, get one. A basic account is free. Just go online and sign up. AOL will do, too, but you have to pay for it. By doing this, you will be sure to have an e-mail box you can access from the Internet on any computer, even if you have to ask a fellow writer to let you "borrow" some web time. Plus, there's always the business center at the hotel and/or a nearby Kinko's or coffee shop with Internet access. In most cases, you can configure any web-based e-mail to check your other accounts and, in some cases, leave those messages on the host server.

The next piece of advice might be more helpful. Invest in some backup memory. A jump or flash drive plugs right into one of your USB ports. With 256 KB or more of memory, you can store plenty of text on one. Drop your can't-lose files onto that drive. That way, if your computer decides to take the day off, gets lost with your luggage or dies on you completely, you won't lose critical work and/or research. Another option is an online "briefcase" with

First and foremost, if you don't have a web-based e-mail client like Yahoo! or Hotmail, get one. A basic account is free. Just go online and sign up. By doing this, you will be sure to have an e-mail box you can access from the Internet on any computer, even if you have to ask a fellow writer to let you "borrow" some web time.

Yahoo! It's an online accessible file folder that you can always expand – if you must – for a small price.

Don't get caught in a situation where you not only can't use your laptop, but you can't even access critical files

you might need. The best thing about a jump or flash drive is that it's small enough to put on your keychain or wear around your neck. And, like an online "briefcase," you can easily access the files from just about any computer.

Also, if you have a CD-RW drive, you should carry a couple of blank CDs in your bag, just in case. If not, at the

very least, carry a blank floppy disk (if your laptop still has a floppy drive). You never know when you might have to get or receive a file from someone in the pressroom without the benefit of e-mail access. For example, if a pool of

writers is breaking up transcription duties after a news conference, you each can share the text without having to use e-mail. In many cases, you might be in a place where you can't get online. Both blank CDs and floppy disks are quite inexpensive.

These are just some small ways to you help take the headaches out of the unexpected events that often occur while trying to get your job done.

Ted Gangi serves as the webmaster of the USBWA's official site, www.usbwa.com and is the assistant sports editor for DallasNews.com, the website of *The Dallas Morning News*. His tech tips column will appear regularly in *The Tipoff*.

Web Site Editor

By TED GANGI
HiTEX! Enterprises



Moving off press row is only part of seating problem

I've been covering Syracuse University's basketball program for 17 seasons, but I'm going to have trouble finding my seat when the Orange opens the 2005-06 season on Nov. 8 against Bethune-Cookman.

Back in August, Syracuse University's new athletic director Daryl Gross announced that the university would make 150 seats on the sideline opposite the team benches available to the ticket-buying public, turning the former press row in an Upstate New York version of Gucci Row.

The price tag on these Spike Lee-quality seats depends on their location (Gross is putting in not one, but two, rows). Still, the cost ranges from \$3,000 to \$6,000. All seats must be purchased for two years, and there are the usual expectations for booster-club donor levels.

Now, schools across the country have been moving the media out of the courtside seats; prime real estate in today's college basketball landscape, for a long time. This is an issue of major concern for members of the United States Basketball Writers Association.

But the egregiousness of Syracuse's decision lies not in the seats the media is leaving, but where Gross is sending us ink-stained wretches.

Rather than relocate the media in a raised area above the sideline bleachers or on the endlines, as is done in most NBA arenas, Syracuse officials will cram the media into a triangular set of risers in a corner of the Dome where in past years a furniture store's living room set was located.

The location offers such a severe angle that it will be difficult to see the 3-point line on the opposite end of the court. The sideline in front of the Syracuse bench will be obstructed. If the visiting team's bench players stand up, the entire court could be blocked out.

And a direct view of the benches, a key element in covering a game, will be gone.

The whole arrangement shows a blatant lack of respect for the job the media does. Either that or absolutely no understanding of how we do what we do.

When announcing the move, Gross said he wanted to increase the atmosphere at the Carrier Dome.

"To me, Syracuse basketball at the Carrier Dome is

Guest Opinion

By MIKE WATERS
Syracuse Post-Standard



like the Knicks at Madison Square Garden," Gross said. "I could see a Spike Lee wanting to fly up to a Syracuse game to sit on the floor.

"Nothing against the press, but the press is neutral. We're trying to do everything we can to create the atmosphere that I think Syracuse basketball deserves."

Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot my orange and blue pompons. Maybe if I painted my laptop orange. I already use a blue pen.

It's like when one of my friends says he's got tickets to a Syracuse game. He'll ask, "Hey, want to meet us after the game?"

"No," I reply, "I'll be still be working by the time you're home."

I repeat. I'm working. And where the media will sit this year for Syracuse home games prevents me from doing my job to the best of my ability and for the benefit of my readers.

What Daryl Gross and officials at other schools that have made similar seating moves don't realize is that they'll eventually pay for their mix of greed and the need for instant gratification.

For while Syracuse may be the college basketball's attendance leader, the media coverage of the Orange is dwindling. Fans of Syracuse in Buffalo, which is located just three hours away, get no coverage of the Orange in the *Buffalo News*. The *Albany Times-Union*, located two hours east of Syracuse, does not staff Syracuse's games. These

are home games we're talking about.

The *Binghamton Press-Bulletin* does not staff Syracuse's home games either. The *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle* covers home games, but never goes on the road. In fact, the Rochester paper never covers Syracuse in the Big East Tournament. The *Auburn Citizen*, a daily located 20 minutes outside of Syracuse, stopped sending a reporter to home games two years ago.

Publicity generates interest, which generates ticket sales, clothing sales, memorabilia sales, alumni giving and student applications.

Just when you'd think Syracuse officials would be doing everything in their power to increase coverage of their athletic teams, they're doing just the opposite.

Upon hearing of the new seating arrangement, Scott Pitoniak, the *Rochester D&C's* outstanding columnist, said he'd think twice about braving lake effect snowstorms if he's put in a position where the view from his couch is better than the view from his seat at the Carrier Dome.

But what SU officials should really fear is the prospect of Pitoniak – and the rest of us, too – writing about something other than Syracuse.

When Gross came to Syracuse from USC, he chose to move into an office that is smack dab in the middle of the SU athletic department's Manley Field House digs.

It's a move that makes sense. The idea of moving the media into an area of obstructed view seats doesn't make sense. It only makes dollars.

No. 1 Duke puts pair on player-of-year list

J.J. Redick and Shelden Williams of the Duke Blue Devils, the USBWA's preseason No. 1 team, highlight the organization's pre-season player-of-the-year candidates.

The No. 2-ranked Texas Longhorns also placed a pair of players on the list – P.J. Tucker and Brad Buckman.

Others named to the list included: Dee Brown, Illinois; Keydren Clark, Saint Peter's; James On Curry, Oklahoma State; Paul Davis, Michigan State; Jared Dudley, Boston College; Nick Fazekas, Nevada; Nate Funk, Creighton; Ben Jacobson, Northern Iowa; Paul Millsap, Louisiana Tech; Adam Morrison, Gonzaga; and Kevin Pittsnogle, West Virginia.

The USBWA pre-season poll is as follows:

1. Duke (27-6); 2. Texas (20-11); 3. Oklahoma (25-8); 4. Kentucky (28-6); 5. Michigan State (26-7); 6. Connecticut (23-8); 7. Boston College (25-5); 8. Villanova (24-8); 9. Gonzaga (26-5); 10. Louisville (33-5); 11. Arizona (30-7); 12. West Virginia (24-11); 13. Stanford (18-13); 14. Wake Forest (27-6); 15. Northern Iowa (21-11); 16. Illinois (37-2); 17. George Washington (22-8); 18. North Carolina State (21-14); 19. Oklahoma State (26-7); 20. UCLA (18-11); 21. Memphis (22-16); 22. Syracuse (27-7); 23. Ohio State (20-12); 24. Washington (29-6); 25. Kansas (23-7).

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 \$40 membership fee you will receive:

- the most complete directory in college basketball
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