

In changing world, USBWA members prove adaptability

I ran into UNLV coach Lon Kruger in early October, at a tennis tournament no less, and it served as a reminder that basketball season is upon us.

It has been an interesting summer to say the least, as the economy has impacted our profession in ways we never dreamed possible.

Think about it.

Did you ever believe the day would come when you wouldn't have a media guide at your beck and call to refer to at courtside while on deadline?

How much would you have wagered that accompanying you to your team's home games would be a fellow staffer from your newspaper whose job it was to blog? Stuff that would normally appear in a "notebook" crafted by you for the newspaper is suddenly on your paper's Web site in the form of a blog.

You're probably asked to Tweet by the paper. You more than likely have a Facebook page sponsored by your paper.

Everything you write that appears in your paper's on-line edition includes comments at the bottom of your story from readers who pretty much rip you anonymously. You know, real brave souls who would never have the guts to put their name on anything they write.

Yeah, it's a different world all right, a world that is changing by the week.

As newspapers shrink or disappear altogether, as budgets gets slashed to the bone, as you are asked to do more "New Media" things, some of you are asking yourselves, "Is all of this worth it?"

How many of you are going to the NCAA Tournament or the Final Four in Indianapolis next April if your team doesn't make it? How many of you aren't even going to go on the road with your own team this season because your boss has been told to watch his or her budget and he or she decides it's cheaper to pay a stringer \$50 instead of sending you on the road?

Even in a perfect world, we'd be dealing with issues. We're sitting in seats behind the basket or sharing press row with well-heeled boosters. Stats won't get delivered on time, if at all. The WiFi is probably going to go out while we're on deadline trying to file. Access to players is still going to be limited after games. Practices will be closed.

Flights will be delayed. Hotel rooms won't be ready. The cigarette lighter in the rental car won't work, which means you won't be able to charge your cell phone or Blackberry. You'll try to find somewhere to eat after you filed your story following an ESPN Big Monday game that tipped off at 10 p.m., and you'll be lucky to find a drive-thru window at a fast-food joint open that late.

Yet we can deal with all of that.

Why? Because we love college basketball. We love the excitement. We love the intensity. We love the rivalries.

We love the history that we get to chronicle every time the ball gets thrown up at mid-court and we're

hunched over our laptop trying to come up with a witty lead for our story.

We put up with a lot. But in the end, we always manage to make it work for us.

And these new challenges will be handled. We'll learn to deal with media guides in pdf form.

We'll learn to enjoy the company of our blogger colleagues.

We'll accept the tradeoff of not having to get on a plane for a chance to watch our kid's winter band concert or sports activity.

Sure, we'll miss the Marriott points and the frequent-flier miles.

But after going to the same places in your respective

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



leagues year after year after year, don't you think a little break would be nice?

I posed the question earlier, "Is it worth it?"

And despite all the headaches, all the frustration and aggravation, the answer, at least to me, is, "You're darned right it's worth it."

Enjoy the season.

Jayhawks are overwhelming favorite to win '09-10 title

Kansas is the nation's preseason No. 1 team, according to the U.S. Basketball Writers Association board of directors.

The Jayhawks return all five starters – including All-America candidates Cole Aldrich and Sherron Collins – from a team that went 27-8 in what generally was considered a rebuilding year after they won the 2008 national title. They also added wingman Xavier Henry, considered one of the nation's top freshmen.

The Big Ten Conference played five teams among the USBWA's Top 25, four of them among the top 15. Michigan State is ranked second and Purdue is tied for fifth with Villanova. Michigan is 14th, Ohio State is tied for 15th with Washington and Illinois is 20th. Minnesota also was among schools receiving votes.

The Atlantic Coast Conference, Big East Conference and Southeastern Conference each received four teams among the Top 25.

The ACC placed defending national champion North Carolina at No. 7, Duke at No. 8, Georgia Tech at No. 23 and Clemson at 24.

Besides Villanova's tie for fifth, the Big East was represented by Connecticut (13), Louisville (tied for 18th with Dayton) and Georgetown (21).

Among SEC schools, Kentucky was ranked fourth, Tennessee 11th, Mississippi State 17th and Florida 25th.

Other members of the Top 10 were Texas at No. 3 and Butler at No. 10. Other schools named to the Top 25 were California, at No. 12 and Siena at No. 22.

USBWA Board of Directors' Top 25

1. Kansas (9)	272
2. Michigan State (1)	251
3. Texas	241
4. Kentucky	230
5. (tie) Purdue	221
5. Villanova	221
7. North Carolina (1)	213
8. Duke	181
9. West Virginia	173
10. Butler.....	158
11. Tennessee	150
12. California	140
13. Connecticut	114
14. Michigan	99
15. (tie) Ohio State	94
16. Washington	94
17. Mississippi State	77
18. (tie) Dayton	47
18. Louisville	47
20. Illinois	45
21. Georgetown	41
22. Siena.....	38
23. Georgia Tech	34
24. Clemson	31
25. Florida	29

Others receiving votes – UCLA 27, Oklahoma State 24, Minnesota 22, Florida State 21, Maryland 21, Brigham Young 18, Gonzaga 15, Tulsa 15, Vanderbilt, Notre Dame 14, South Carolina 9, Wake Forest 6, Syracuse 6, Kansas State 5, Xavier 5, Old Dominion 4, Boston College 2, Cincinnati 2, Missouri 2, Northern Iowa 2.

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It's looking like it's going to be a very good year

The USBWA's annual membership drive is underway and prospects are such that this could be one of the best years ever for the organization.

The USBWA has already surpassed last year's 700 membership total, and with applications coming in at a steady pace, it's not too farfetched to think that total membership numbers by the end of the year could approach the organization's all-time high of 900 members.

Ted Gangi, who handles the USBWA's website, is largely responsible for increasing membership. He has been diligent about sending out e-mails to past members urging them to rejoin and seeking writers who have never been members before.

The USBWA directory listing contacts, e-mail addresses and phone numbers of every Division I institution – both men and women, along with the beat writers and broadcasters of every school in the country – is the greatest benefit of membership. The directory is a resource tool that every SID and writer covering college basketball must have.

USBWA members receive four issues of the organization's *Tipoff* newsletter during the season and seven issues of *Basketball Times*.

The Athletic VIP Marriott card offering huge discounts at all Marriott properties remains extremely popular with members, as is the Discount Savings Card from Hertz.

USBWA members vote on the organization's men's and women's All-America teams at the end of the season and are eligible to submit entries for cash awards in the USBWA's best-writing contest.

So there are lots of reasons to join the USBWA.

Joe Mitch USBWA Executive Director



Spread the word and take on this challenge: contact one person in the profession and ask them to join.

It's easy and painless to sign up. Go to the USBWA website at usbwa.com and click on the link that says MEMBERSHIP. You can register online and pay with your credit card.

Or send or fax someone you know the membership application below and have them send it to the address listed with a check for \$40 membership dues.

Now is the time to begin thinking about candidates for the USBWA's annual postseason awards.

Nominations are now being accepted for the following: Hall of Fame, Katha Quinn and Most Courageous.

The Hall of Fame recognizes past and present members who have made significant contributions to the organization and the sports journalism profession.

The Katha Quinn Award is presented in memory of the former St. John's sports information director to someone who has excelled at servicing the media or provides an inspiration to sportswriters and SIDs.

The Most Courageous Award is given to a player, coach or administrator who has faced enormous challenges in life and demonstrated extraordinary courage.

All nominations can be submitted to me at mitch@mvc.org.

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
- 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 \$40 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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Next decade of sports writing will try – yet require – our patience

Maybe sportswriters need a fresh strategy: Complain less and reason more. In college basketball coverage, the old ways really haven't worked out.

The clear view of the court has been blocked by some tense rich guy in a hideous red coat. The clear path to the locker room has been blocked by newly empowered Barney Fifes and overly protective coaches who routinely use the terms "babysit" and "kids" while describing the basic chores of their lavishly compensated work.

The clear phone line has been replaced by fickle wireless systems that function marvelously until the tech guy goes home and deadline shows up screaming for a quick fix. This confounding corollary of technology usually generates more angst and profanity than resolved problems, and the frustration might seem absurdly overblown if not for another techno monster.

One day soon – like, tomorrow – the simplest records check might require more patience than "babysitting that kid" at a humongous semiprofessional summer prep camp crawling with teen agents.

We're talking about the paperless record book, which may or may not be easily accessible on deadline (SEE: tech guy, wireless connection, Internet browser, site map, etc. or dial 800-SID-HELP). Even if the deadline writer makes the connection seamlessly, there's the process of scrolling through a media guide that seldom fits the laptop screen in any manageable way and eventually locating the subsection that verifies the school's 10 highest-scoring performances.

Prediction: Lots of school scoring records will not make lots of deadline stories if schools eliminate familiar printed guides.

For basketball writers, who commonly cover 9 p.m. tipoffs and deal with tighter end-game deadlines, the complaints can add up in a hurry. Anyone listening? Some SIDs listen and respond, especially when they care about information flowing smoothly and residual goodwill. Some don't, because they don't.

Either way, the SID (or the coach dictating aloof policies behind closed doors) will respond to civilized argument and logical reasoning a lot better than the SID buffeted by the verbal assaults of barely rational sportswriters.

SIDs can't decide all the media-guide issues, particularly budgets. In the absence of a formal guide, though, they could provide printed histories full of records, reachable by arm rather than Web.

They can't unilaterally open all locker rooms, but they could find a middle ground, or middle room, suitable for postgame interviews with any requested player, not just the two starters the coach trusts to appear in public.

They can't guarantee perfect wireless service every time, but they could set up a couple of live wires for filing stories if all else fails.

They can't prevent a marketing marvel from trying to sell press-row seats to Gucci row wannabes, but they can make an internal argument for rescuing some seats from the money-chasers.

The NCAA has resisted the campus seating trend so far, a sportswriter victory in the scrimmage to remain within eyesight and earshot of tournament games. Often accused of paranoia, NCAA Tournament managers actually understand that a reporter can't look an undergraduate in the eye and tell whether someone else took his SAT.

When colleges banish reporters to the mezzanine rim or obstructed-view end zones, they suck the human element right out of the story. They make basketball hard to see, hard to hear and hard to report. They create obstacles, thus achieving the opposite of effective public relations. Maybe someone needs to point that out, politely.

Lenox Rawlings Winston-Salem Journal Vice President



In an imperfect media world, reporters sometimes must sit in the second row or higher up, in the end zone. This isn't anywhere near an ideal arrangement, but you get a closer look at a different class of folks.

Reporters in the second row at N.C. State became familiar with the hand-wringing stress that Wolfpack misadventures inflicted on McQueen Campbell, the real-estate developer in the red coat and chairman of the school's trustees.

Well, at least he was chairman until the state university system discovered his role in hiring the wife of the previous governor for a high-paying college job. Campbell bragged – in writing – about his political connections speeding up development permits. He flew Gov. Mike Easley to campaign stops on a private plane, now the subject of a federal grand jury.

From the end-zone press section at North Carolina, reporters glanced across the tunnel entrance and followed the sporting proclivities of presidential candidate John Edwards. He lost, and other proclivities made headlines, but Edwards still showed up for the 2009 title run in blue jeans – with his wife and kids (and perhaps, once or twice, a babysitter).

If they had a paperless record book for such things, you could look it up.

New media is just an invitation to new opportunities

This year, the Football Writers Association of America grew its membership by more than 20 percent. In a time in which the newspaper industry is on life support, how in the world did that happen? It was just a matter of finding the new breed of media.

Truth is, despite the state of the traditional printed newspaper, there's more being written and said by more people in more outlets than ever before.

And, the evolution that has created more non-tradition and now "social" media continues at a rocket pace.

Don't tell that to the writer struggling to find a job after a third round of layoffs at his paper, right?

Yet, there are more media opportunities than ever.

Just look at what ESPN has done with the launch of three local Web sites in Boston, Chicago and Dallas – with more to come. Though much of the content is repurposed from ESPN's vast resources, there are local staff contributors. Surely, there are more ESPN microsites to come and, surely, someone will copy this trend.

Right now, as has been the case since newspaper Web sites became prominent more than 10 years ago, the biggest challenge is to make this new media profitable. Even the hugely prominent sites like Facebook and Twitter are struggling to find a way to become profitable.

So, what's the point? Despite shrinking numbers along press row, college sports are getting more than their

share of coverage. Couple that with many schools that produce their own editorial content by hiring local writers to contribute to their official Web sites. For example, the Big 12 has a regular, full-time blogger and schools as different as Texas and Rice have dedicated fulltime writers for their official sites.

Keeping that in mind, this is a good time for the USBWA to push its membership levels to new heights.

With over 600 combined men's and women's programs, all of whom have at least one sports-information contact in addition to beat writers, bloggers and radio play-by-players, there is little reason that the USBWA cannot attract more than 1,000 members.

In a time in which there is so much change – people leaving the industry, while others are finding new outlets for their talents – one of the best ways to network is to know whom to network with. Membership in the USBWA can help you do that.

While the initial membership deadline has passed for this season, the USBWA is still taking applications. The

Ted Gangi USBWA Webmaster



\$40 annual dues pay for themselves in benefits and, most of all, you get a membership directory to help you stay in touch with the college-basketball world.

As a USBWA member, if you were to encourage just one of your colleagues to join, the association could easily top the goal of 1,000 members. By attracting more non-traditional media, the FWAA now has its largest membership ever. and thus the resources to create more programs and add even more benefits.

Yes, the newspaper industry that most of us grew up on is hurting, but by no means is the media business dead. Those of you who love what you do, who love to write, who love college basketball, will find an outlet for expression. The USBWA just wants to find you.

Those last media guides – perhaps – begin to arrive

Six months from now, we might face tough choices. Toss the past year's media guides and the worthless, outdated information they contain?

Or allow them their favored place on your desk, knowing there will never be another to replace them?

Will we squeeze every last paragraph of pertinent information before placing them in a box with the old Radio Shack TRS-80? Do they become collector's items? Or will they just be taking up space?

As we all by now, the printed media guide is going the way of the Walkman. While there is still a chance that the elimination of printed media guides will not be legislated next season by the NCAA, that day appears to be coming. The idea became a reality when Ohio State, Michigan and Wisconsin announced in late May that they not only would print no media guides this season, but that they were encouraging other schools to follow suit.

"With Ohio State and Michigan together making this statement, I hope our decision will be a catalyst for other schools to follow suit," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said in a written statement.

Which probably eliminates Mr. Smith from any consideration for this year's Katha Quinn Award, given annually to a friend of the college-basketball media.

I sat in on a CoSIDA conference call about a week after the announcement by the three Big Ten schools. It was enlightening. A few schools were very proud of themselves – perhaps a bit too proud – for their roles in the move toward digital media guides. Others showed genuine concern about how the absence of printed guides would affect reporters' abilities to cover their teams.

Concerns over the elimination of media guides might be too little, too late, but they were raised during the CoSIDA call. How will broadcasters look up information in press-row seating too tight to allow a laptop among their other equipment? Will network researchers who need immediate information be able to find and navigate through a school's Web site with the speed of flicking through a media guide? These are all concerns raised by the SIDs.

And for what it's worth, CoSIDA executive director John Humenik acknowledged organization's role in the printed media guide's demise, for failing to step up when NCAA legislation allowed the guides to grow to the size of phone books about 20 years ago and then when coaches were allowed to turn the guides into recruiting materials. We are, in other words, losing a valuable resource through no fault of our own.

Last summer, Michigan, Ohio State and Wisconsin were merely the most visible of about 50 Division I schools that announced they would immediately cease printing media guides. There is also a proposal by the Pacific 10 Conference to do away with printed media guides, in favor of providing guides in PDF form. Some schools would make Kinko's style printouts for the local media, and some conferences have provided thumb drives of all their schools' PDF-version media guides at media days.

Humenik and Bloom expect the NCAA to rule on the proposals at their meeting in January.

Humenik recently said he believes that about a third of the schools side with the Pac-10 proposal, believing it is the financially and environmentally responsible stance and, as both the media and university athletic departments become younger, simply the way of a changing world.

Indeed, this seems a generational debate, with the greatest opposition coming from the oldest of dinosaurs. Even those among us in that category must grudgingly concede that it will be easier to carry around a thumb drive containing several media guides than a bagful of printed guides. A word search can be faster than page-turning.

Eventually, schools and conferences might be able to produce "living" media guides with updated statistics, results and records, and that would be nice.

While it is difficult to accept the cost-containment argument from the money-making BCS crowd, the savings are no doubt necessary for Division I's majority.

There is a proposal by the Southeastern Conference that would allow 208-page guides to be printed but not be distributed to recruits. In theory, that would eliminate promotional material from guides and return to them to their original role as – *get this* – guides for the media.

Humenik believes there are two other groups of thirds that are rooting for the SEC proposal. One group supports the guides at all costs. Another views them as at least a

will be no printed guides – period," Humenik said. "I think the cost-containment group will win out. I hope not. I personally would like to see them continue to be printed and that it would be a media-friendly position for the first time in a long time. Maybe we'll get lucky and get the SEC rule for a year or two. But clearly, *clearly*, in three years at the max, we're not going to have printed guides. It just isn't going to happen."

John Akers Basketball Times Vice President



Division I Conference Survey – 2009-10 Media Guide Printing			
Conferences	Hard Copies & Electronic Versions	No Hard Copies Providing Electronic Versions	Comments
America East		✓	
ACC		✓*	*Limited hard copies for internal archives
Atlantic Sun		✓	
Atlantic 10	✓*		*Only printing MBB, WBB
Big East	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB
Big Ten		✓	
Big 12	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB, baseball
Big Sky		✓	
Big South		✓	
Big West		✓	
C-USA		✓	
Colonial	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB
Horizon		✓	
Ivy		✓	
MAAC		✓	
MEAC		✓*	*Limited hard copies for internal archives
Mid-American		✓	
Missouri Valley	✓*		*Only printing MBB, WBB
Mountain West	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB
Northeast	✓*		*Only printing MBB, WBB
Ohio Valley		✓	
Pacific 10	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB, VB
Patriot	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB
Southeastern	✓*		*Hard copies and electronic copies for all
Southern		✓	
Southland	✓*		*Only printing FB, MBB, WBB
SWAC		✓	
Summit		✓	
Sun Belt	✓*		*FB, MBB, WBB, Baseball, VB
West Coast		✓	
WAC	✓*		*FB, MBB, WBB, VB

necessary transitional phase. Folks from these groups might argue that the elimination of printed media guides was never a "green" issue before the economy tanked. They might even argue that, as long as there are still arms races over facilities and coaches' salaries, the elimination of printed guides is more about spending *priorities* than it is actual cost-containment. Already, an arms race is developing among schools' Web sites.

Even if the SEC proposal wins – and SEC author Charles Bloom concedes that he is hopeful but not as optimistic as Humenik – the longterm prognosis for printed media guides is not so good.

"If I had to put money, at this time next year, there

This season, please be on the lookout for the outstanding under-30 segment of this organization. It could be that person who has already landed a job at a major news organization or who covers a major beat for a newspaper. It could be a young reporter who is finding his or her own way on a smaller newspaper or through a blog or some other creative means of expression. It could be that aggressive college writer who is scooping the veterans daily. The USBWA will recognize the best of them with our first Rising Star Award. Send nominations to me at johna19081@gmail.com or to Nicole Vargas at nicole.vargas@uniontrib.com.