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There's good news, bad news in meetings with NCAA

First, the news. Most, if not all, of the writers' seats at the 2014 Final Four will be back on the floor (although the majority will be in the end zones), and we will have a few more seats in the traditional courtside location than in 2013.

Opinions vary as to whether this represents success or failure in our meetings with the NCAA. Truth is, it's a little of both.

There was success in that the NCAA listened to us and addressed our No. 1 priority, which was to get the writers out of the football press box. Also, the NCAA heeded our suggestion to reinstate a third media row opposite the scorer's table and benches and abandon the four-corners experiment.

There was failure in our attempts to extend the second row back to full length and to get writers out of the hockey press boxes in multipurpose venues the first two weekends of the tournament – at least in the short term.

Specifically, we get back eight courtside seats for the national semifinals, and 17 for the championship.

Kirk Wessler
Peoria Journal-Star
President



There will be two rows in each end zone, adding 168 seats.

Our net gain on the floor compared to 2013 will be about 180, according to the NCAA's David Worlock.

We are concerned whether the elevation of those end-zone seats is sufficient to not be obstructed by students waiving fatheads. Worlock pledged the NCAA would work with security to keep the obstructions down while the clock is running.

The other big concern is the first two weekends.

We were told that, because ticket manifests had been set and there were no acceptable accommodations for auxiliary media when the new plan went into effect last year, changes are not possible for 2014 and unlikely for 2015.

But we made it clear that our expectation is that acceptable auxiliary press rows built into arena seating must be part of the bid specs in the next cycle, 2016-2020.

We will continue to insist on this.

We need to be realistic. Yes, the game and the tournament we love belong to the fans. But the NCAA owns and runs the tournament, and ultimately, its people can do to our working conditions whatever they choose to do. What we need is to continue to work with the NCAA to make the new conditions reasonable, while also guarding against erosion on other important issues.

On that front:

- The NCAA agreed to restore limited access to players on Thursday of Final Four week. One player from each team will be available in a joint press conference.

- Friday breakout sessions with the five starters from each team will be extended from 15 to 20 minutes. A couple of those players will then join their coach on the podium, and the locker rooms will be open for 35 minutes.

- Pool reporters will again have direct access to game officials, after having that availability taken away last season.

- We still have a long way to go toward securing better hotel rates, but in Dallas, there will be a secondary (and cheaper) media hotel. The primary media hotel will run \$299 per night, but the secondary will be \$202.

The credential application will provide a place to express a preference.

To address these and other issues, we formed an ad hoc committee of our USBWA officers and two representatives from the Associated Press Sports Editors: Gerald Ahern of *USA Today* and John Cherwa of the *Los Angeles Times*.

We appreciate the contributions of both, and I believe our cooperation with APSE can help us in other areas as well.

Our work is not done, and we still need your help and your input. Please let us know if you have questions, comments or concerns, or if you encounter problems.

To all of you, have a great season.



The USBWA has worked to keep this from being the media's view of the action at the Final Four in Dallas next April.

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Membership approaching magical 1,000 mark

Welcome to all new and returning members to another season with the U. S. Basketball Writers Association.

There’s never been a better time to be a member of the USBWA.

The USBWA had one of its most aggressive membership campaigns in recent memory this past summer and early fall, thanks to the efforts of USBWA webmaster Ted Gangi, and the results have been very encouraging.

Membership has soared to more than 900 through October and a goal of 1,000 members for the year is within reach.

Should that happen, membership of 1,000 or more would be a first in USBWA history.

In addition to being a part of a growing organization that serves the best interests of writers covering college basketball, there are additional benefits to joining the USBWA.

They include both a printed and online membership directory that contains the names, email addresses and phone numbers of not only members but also the basketball contacts at each NCAA Division I institution and the beat writers, columnists and broadcasters who cover those schools.

The new online directory is always updated with the latest contact information for members. Click on MEMBER CENTER at the top of the USBWA website (usbwa.com) and use your personal online passcode to access the directory.

The directory is a valuable resource tool for writers and sports information directors alike.

Sports Illustrated writer and past USBWA president Alexander Wolff once said “the directory alone is worth the cost of membership.”

USBWA membership is a boon for writers who will travel to cover games during the basketball season.

The USBWA offers discounts for hotel rooms and car rentals and savings on the purchase of clothes at airports.

Members receive a 20 percent discount off the best-available rate at participating Hilton properties

around the country.

For car rentals, Hertz is offering members a 10 percent discount.

USBWA members can enroll for a Brooks Brothers corporate membership card and receive a 15 percent savings on regular-price merchandise online and at Brooks Brothers stores, many of which are in major airports across the country.



Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director

HOW TO RECEIVE USBWA BENEFITS

AMERICAN AIRLINES. USBWA members can accumulate personal miles on American and help the association build miles for USBWA business travel by joining American Airlines’ Business ExtrAA program. When making reservations, go to aa.com and login with your American Airlines’ AAdvantage number and the USBWA’s Business ExtrAA account number 848168.

HILTON HOTELS. To receive discounts up to 20 percent at participating hotel properties, go to HiltonFamilyMVP.com for reservations and login with your Hilton Honors account number. Hilton account numbers can be obtained by clicking on the Hilton logo link on the USBWA website (usbwa.com). Hilton hotels include Doubletree by Hilton, Embassy Suites, Hampton Inn, Hilton Garden Inn and Homewood Suites.

HERTZ CAR RENTALS. Save 10 percent by going online at Hertz.com and entering the CDP code of 16446337 when making a reservation.

BROOKS BROTHERS. Enroll for a Brooks Brothers corporate membership card to receive a 15 percent discount on merchandise purchased there. To receive your membership card, go online at membership.brooksbrothers.com and enter the USBWA organization ID 11355 and pin code 76322.

USBWA members receive a complimentary seven-month subscription to *Basketball Times* from November to May. Four of those issues include the USBWA’s newsletter, The Tipoff, which provides members with lodge notes, columns from officers and board members and the latest association news.

In addition, the USBWA’s website, usbwa.com, is an online source for news releases, the membership directory and back issues of The Tipoff newsletter.

Finally, you have in the USBWA an organization that continues to fight for improved access and for better working conditions for writers covering in-season games and post-season tournaments.

That has never been more evident than the recent push by USBWA officers and board members to regain coveted court-side seats that the NCAA has attempted to eliminate or reduce for writers at the Final Four and the

NCAA’s preliminary-round games.

Thank you for joining the USBWA.

If you have a colleague or writer friend who is not a member, forward them this link and encourage them to join:

<http://www.sportswriters.net/membership/>

Membership is \$50 and \$25 for retirees, students and recent grads.

USBWA's task: Help SIDs identify worthy websites

Twenty years ago, the credentialing process was comfortable for all involved. Beat writers along with Associated Press stringers and other local print media and television stations generally comprised the pool of applicants whose requests were fielded by sports information directors. The blueblood programs also welcomed national outlets such as *Sports Illustrated*.

Since then, as we all know, much has changed. The rise of the Internet has led to the proliferation of independent sites covering schools and conferences at all levels, significantly diversifying and increasing the pool of applicants seeking credentials.

The USBWA embraces this change and the challenges that are part and parcel with this positive, exponential growth. We recognize that there are numerous bloggers and others in the ever growing digital sphere who are passionate, operate with a sense of journalistic integrity and do great work. On the other hand, there are independent sites that – while humorous, entertaining or frequently visited – fall short of the standards and ideals for which the USBWA stands.

The challenge is navigating through the digital debris and helping committed and journalistically sound independent sites and bloggers gain access and cover the sport they follow.

Chris DiSano College ChalkTalk New Media Liasion

USBWA President Kirk Wessler and the organization's leadership feel it's incumbent upon the USBWA to collaborate with like-minded organizations and roll up our sleeves on this issue. We recognize that the questions that confront sports information directors on a daily basis – many of which pertain to online entities and individuals seeking credentials – are complex and varied, and we want to help.

Over the summer, we assembled a Credentialing Task Force comprised of USBWA folks representing all angles. Those serving on the Task Force are as follows: Chris DiSano - Founder/President, CollegeChalktalk.com (Chair); Kirk Wessler – USBWA President, *Peoria Journal Star*; Dana O'Neil – USBWA Vice President, *espn.com*; Dan Wallenberg – Sports Information Director, Ohio State; Patrick Pierson –

Sports Information Director, Arkansas; Randy McClure – Founder/President, *RushtheCourt.net*; Gerry Ahern – *USA Today/APSE*; Brian Morrison - Associate Commissioner, Atlantic Coast Conference; Joe Mitch - USBWA Executive Director.

The Task Force's goal is straightforward: develop a set of credentialing guidelines and best practices that can be shared with SIDs, conference officials and administrations around the country.

On Oct. 2, we held our first hour-long conference call. The participation on the call was excellent and the discussion helped solidify our method of attacking this issue and action plan moving forward. We plan to collaborate with both the APSE and CoSIDA and work to further define the minimum standards to which online entities can be held. We'll also explore whether to recommend a waiting period before new online sites can apply for credentials and perhaps assemble a mechanism (i.e. standing committee(s)) for reviewing online sites/bloggers and making recommendations to SIDs about their fitness for credentialing.

We've only just begun our work. That said, we're optimistic about developing a framework that balances the interests of many and which can be fair in its administration nationwide.

Weiss, Lopresti, Clark leave longtime jobs

Dick "Hoops" Weiss left the *New York Daily News* after 20 years, though he will continue to cover major college events for the paper. He also continues to freelance for Blue Star Media, www.georgeraveling.com, the American Athletic Conference and Basketball Times – and has agreed to be part of the studio panel for the Big Ten Network.

Mike Lopresti retired in May after 31 years as a columnist for *USA Today*. He will continue to freelance for various newspaper in Indiana and is working with Skybox Publishing of California, which publishes historical books on sports teams and programs.

Bob Clark retired after 36 years as a fulltime employee with the *Register-Guard* of Eugene, Ore., where he covered each of the past six Oregon coaches for at least one season. Clark also continues to freelance.

Jeff Goodman, former of CBS Sportsline, was hired as an on-air reporter for ESPN TV. Goodman also contributes on college basketball at *espn.com*. ... Ron Higgins, a 28-year veteran of the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, returned to his hometown of Baton Rouge, La., to cover LSU and the Southeastern Conference as a columnist for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

and *Nola.com*. ... Lenn Robbins, who had covered colleges for the *New York Post* since 1997, left the paper to write exclusively for *BrooklynNets.com* and *BarclaysCenter.com*. ... After 13 years with the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, C.L. Brown will cover North Carolina for *espn.com*. ... Brendan F. Quinn, who won two ASPE awards in only seven months of covering Tennessee for the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, joined MLive.com to cover Michigan. ... Ben Frederickson, formerly of Fox Sports Midwest in St. Louis, has joined the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* as the Vols' beat writer. ... Lew Freedman was named sports editor of the *Casper (Wyo.) Star-Tribune*. ... Ryan Thorburn, who spent 13 years at the *Boulder Daily Camera*, now covers Oregon football for the *Eugene Register-Guard*.

USBWA Executive Director Joe Mitch, who spent most of the 44 years of his professional life in athletic administration, was honored with the CoSIDA Lifetime Achievement Award in June.

Ken Davis was inducted in June to the New England Basketball Hall of Fame. Davis' third book, "100 Things Kansas Fans Should Know & Do Before They Die," was recently published.

Lodge Notes



John Feinstein: Curt Gowdy Award winner.

Nominations being taken for USBWA awards

Nominations are now being accepted for the following USBWA awards to be presented next April.

HALL OF FAME. Established in 1988, the USBWA honors past and current members for their contributions to the organization and for their achievements in sports journalism. To be eligible, an individual must have a minimum of 20 years experience as a sports writer or college athletics administrator dealing with basketball. Send nominations to USBWA Executive Director Joe Mitch at mitch@usbwa.com.

KATHA QUINN. This award is presented in honor of the former sports information director at St. John's University who waged a courageous battle with pancreatic cancer before passing away in 1988. The award recognizes individuals for their service to the media and for the inspiration they provide to those in the sports journalism profession. Send nominations to Malcolm Moran, a past president and member of the USBWA Hall of Fame, at moranma@indiana.edu.

MOST COURAGEOUS. The USBWA presents

a male and female award, honoring a player, coach, official or administrator who demonstrates extraordinary courage while facing adversity in life. First presented in 1978, it is the USBWA's oldest award. Send nominations to Ed Graney, USBWA third vice president, at egraney@reviewjournal.com.

RISING STAR. The USBWA honors a member who is under 30 and shows outstanding promise as a journalist covering college basketball. Send nominations to John Akers, Tipoff editor, at johna19081@gmail.com.

Burlison resigns as VP, replaced by Graney

Citing time constraints and possible conflicts of interest, Frank Burlison tendered his immediate resignation as the USBWA's Second Vice-President on Oct. 8.

Burlison, named to the USBWA's Hall of Fame in 2005, was serving his second year as an officer following two years before that as the representative for the USBWA's District IX.

Pat Forde of Yahoo! Sports will move from Third Vice-President to Second Vice-President. Ed Graney of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* will assume the duties of the Third Vice-President.

Burlison has covered college basketball for the

Long Beach Press-Telegram, Orange County Register and FoxSports.net and two years ago created his own scouting service, BurlisonOnBasketball.com.

"I find it not only a large constraint on my time to perform any and all USBWA duties, now and especially over the next two years," Burlison wrote in his resignation, "but I also feel that it is mostly a large conflict of interest (given that he is paid by college programs) ... that reflects poorly on the organization."

Present and past USBWA presidents noted that Burlison played a large role in the organization's efforts to retain courtside seats at future NCAA Tournaments.

"Frank has been a great asset to USBWA and our work on the issues we've confronted the past couple of years," said USBWA President Kirk Wessler. "You don't lose a Hall of Famer from the core group and not feel it. But I respect his decision, given the nature of his business. It's another example of his professionalism. We thank him for his service."

In the March 20123 issue of *The Tipoff*, past USBWA President John Akers wrote: "Burly brought passion and – significant in these days of down-sizing and defunct newspapers – the deepest appreciation for this profession that we represent."

Kentucky, Smart have slight edges in men's poll

The USBWA expects Kentucky to win the national title and Oklahoma State's Marcus Smart to be the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year Award, but both by the narrowest of honors.

The organization also expects Kansas' Andrew Wiggins to be the runaway winner for the Wayman Tisdale Award, given to the nation's top freshman.

Kentucky finished just eight votes ahead of second-place Louisville and 17 ahead of third-place Michigan State.

The Wildcats received six of a possible 17 first-place votes, with the Cardinals and Spartans receiving five apiece and fourth-place Duke picking up another. Kansas rounded out the top five.

The rest of the top 10 included Arizona, Florida, Oklahoma State, Syracuse and Michigan.

Smart edged Creighton's Doug McDermott for the preseason national player of the year honors,



Marcus Smart



Andrew Wiggins

with eight votes to McDermott's six. Wiggins received two votes, and Louisville's Russ Smith picked up another.

Wiggins received 14 votes for freshman of the year, with Duke's Jabari Parker receiving two and Kentucky's Julius Randle one.

Smart and McDermott were unanimous picks for the USBWA's preseason All-America team. Wiggins, Smith and Michigan's Mitch McGary rounded out the first team.

Others who received multiple votes included Randle, Parker, Ohio State guard Aaron Craft and Michigan State forward Adreian Payne.

Michigan State was the only team with two vote-getters, with Payne and Gary Harris. Others to receive votes: Arizona State's Jahii Carson, C.J. Fair of Syracuse, Joe Harris of Virginia and Patric Young of Florida.

USBWA Board of Directors' Top 25

1. Kentucky (6)	408
2. Louisville (5)	400
3. Michigan State (5)	391
4. Duke (1)	381
5. Kansas	355
6. Arizona	325
7. Florida	290
8. Oklahoma State	289
9. Syracuse	281
10. Michigan	274
11. North Carolina	263
12. Ohio State	255
13. Memphis	178
14. VCU	162
15. Wichita State	136
16. Marquette	128
17. Connecticut	114
18. Gonzaga	108
19. Oregon	96
20. Tennessee	89
21. UCLA	85
22. Wisconsin	83
23. Notre Dame	74
24. Creighton	70
25. New Mexico	58
Others receiving votes – Virginia 54, Baylor 49, Iowa 34, Indiana 31, Colorado 19, Iowa State 10, Saint Louis 8, Boise State 4, UNLV 4, Harvard 3, La Salle 2, New Mexico State 1.	

UConn, Stewart figure to lead way in women's hoops

Women's Preseason Top 25

1. Connecticut
2. Duke
3. Tennessee
4. Maryland
5. Kentucky
6. Stanford
7. Notre Dame
8. Louisville
9. California
10. North Carolina
11. Baylor
12. Purdue
13. Texas A&M
14. Oklahoma
15. Colorado
16. Penn State
17. Georgia
18. Iowa State
19. LSU
20. Oklahoma State
21. Dayton
22. Vanderbilt
23. South Carolina
24. Michigan State
25. DePaul

By Mel Greenberg

Women's Representative

After returning to the top of the women's basketball world last spring in the NCAA Tournament, Connecticut is likely to stay there, and sophomore Breanna Stewart, who fueled the Huskies' March Madness run, is likely to be national player of the year.

That's the sense of key USBWA members who deal primarily on the women's side of the organization. Since a full equivalent board is still being built here, no formal votes were taken to produce the first USBWA women's outlook, but in listening to the conversation, there seemed to be a strong consensus of who should be in the preseason Top 25, national player and top freshmen mixes.

As to who will land freshman of the year, the competition is a bit wide open, but North Carolina's Diamond DeShields arrives in Chapel Hill as the nation's top recruit.

Stewart had a dazzling finish to her rookie season, but some outstanding seniors could give her more competition than she and her UConn teammates might get in landing what would be an NCAA stand-alone record nine titles in the women's tournament after tying Tennessee with eight in New Orleans.

While UConn is receiving near unanimity as the favorite in all preseason talks, teams that could challenge are Duke, Tennessee, Maryland, Kentucky, Stanford, Notre Dame, Louisville, California

and North Carolina to round out a top 10.

Other teams worthy of consideration in a preseason top 25 are, in order, Baylor, Purdue, Texas A&M, Oklahoma, Colorado, Penn State, Georgia, Iowa State, LSU, Oklahoma State, Dayton, Vanderbilt, South Carolina, Michigan State and DePaul.

As for player of the year, besides Stewart, some top contenders, who could be considered USBWA preseason All-Americans include Stanford senior Chiney Ogwumike, whose older sister and WNBA star Nneka is a past USBWA All-American; Baylor senior Odyssey Sims, a past USBWA freshman winner; Maryland senior Alyssa Thomas; Duke senior Chelsea Gray; Connecticut junior Kaleena Mosqued-Lewis; and Penn State senior Maggie Lucas.

And at least honorable mention stature should be given to Duke's Elizabeth Williams, Tennessee's Meighan Simmons, Notre Dame's Kayla McBride and UConn's Stefanie Dolson.

Four other prominent freshmen in a field of outstanding collegiate newcomers to go with DeShields are Kentucky's Linnae Harper, UConn lone freshman Saniya Chong, who was last season's Parade Magazine high school player of the year; Duke's Oderah Chidom; and Notre Dame's Taya Reimer.

Honorable mention stature, at least, could go to Tennessee's Mercedes Russell, Georgia Tech's Kaela Davis, Duke's Rebecca Greenwell and Rutgers' Tyler Scaife.