

Being all a-Twitter has its perks – and problems

Let me preface this by saying I like Twitter.

I like how I can find links to stories that I might otherwise miss.

I like how I can follow breaking news easily.

And, selfishly, in this clickable world we now are beholden to, I like that there is a fast and easy way to get stories to the masses.

What I don't like is what Twitter is doing to our profession. It is killing us, 140 characters at a time.

At games, I have grown accustomed to a press row of reporters looking down at their laptops instead of up at the action. And in news conferences, I'm numb to folks feverishly sharing quotes instead of thinking up a good follow-up question.

That part of it can be a necessary evil, I suppose, depending on the devil of an employer you serve. And for those of us around since the days of Radio Shack Tandy or longer, it's manageable. We've got a few decades of multitasking and press conferencing under our belts.

But what of college students or young journalists? What are they learning – to be reporters or stenographers? There is a value to paying attention to something and more, to listening.

I write this knowing two things. For starters, I am as guilty of all of this as anybody and you each now have permission to yank me by the hair when I spend a game looking down more than up.

I also know this entire column will make me

Dana O'Neil
ESPN.com
President



sound incredibly old. Which I am.

My kids' teachers tell me that "kids today" just don't learn like we did. Textbooks don't work. They need video and even animation, short snippets and more tactile learning.

And more, they're used to doing 40 things at once. For example, my teenager occasionally talks to me and texts at the same time. I want to yank the phone away, but apparently, she isn't being rude. She is being generationally normal.

So I get that journalism isn't the same anymore, either.

I'm just not sure that our business – like our kids' manners – is getting better.

Along with our attention, Twitter is robbing journalism of something even more critical – reporting. Twitter is the land of the reactionary, a virtual crowd with pitchforks, as one colleague described it to me. If you want to be angry, log on. Someone once chastised

me for choosing Snoopy as my avatar. Who can be angry about a cartooned beagle?

There is a time and place for reaction in our business. Insightful, and thought-provoking columns from people with experiences to understand nuances are a critical part of our business.

But an immediate choice of black or white is not.

At its best, journalism is about the gray – the unknown – and journalists at their best work to clear up the gray. They ask questions and find sources.

They gather opinions of experts far more well-versed in subjects than themselves.

They read. They report

And then, and only then, they write.

We need to get back to that. Heaven knows it's hard, especially in an age where immediacy is rewarded. The old adage of better to be last and right than first and wrong reads like some sort of nostalgic nicety rather than a creed to live by.

Equally difficult, with so much noise out there – from legitimate websites to fan sites to the proverbial dude in his parents' basement – it's harder than ever to distinguish yourself from the crowd.

But it would seem the solution to that is to not join the noise in the first place. The way we get news has changed. The way we read and learn is different.

Credibility, though, still matters, even when it's limited to 140 characters or less.

Online Credentialing Task Force makes recommendations

By **KIRK WESSLER**

Sometimes it helps to be a little naïve and idealistic.

When we formed the USBWA's Online Credentialing Task Force, the goal seemed simple: Figure out how to support legitimate online journalists in their efforts to cover college basketball and help the institutions that grant credentials to make good decisions. Simple?

In hindsight, the task was like Eureka College trying to take on Duke. Forget about winning or even keeping the score respectable. The challenge is so enormous, you start thinking how great it would be just to reach the first media timeout with a tie.

Did we succeed? I think so, but we're thankful for the TO so we can re-evaluate and consider how to attack the next four-minute segment.

We endorsed 14 websites, in addition to the large national sites that we grandfathered before tipoff. Those big boys and girls don't need our endorsement,

ENDORSED LIST

Allsportsdiscussion.com
Bluestarmedia.org
Cityofbasketballlove.com
Eagletotem.net
Hoopville.com
Houstonroundballreview.com
Insidethehall.com
Louisville.scout.com
Metbasketballwriters.org
Midmajormadness.com
Netscoutsbasketball.com
Pickinsplinters.com
Projectshanks.com
Umhoops.com

but we wanted to avoid confusion by omission. The sites we added via the review process can hold their own with the big brands when it comes to quality and commitment to standards of good journalism, but like a lot of those 12-13-14 seeds in the NCAA tournament, they're not household names. Hopefully, our endorsement will help correct that.

The full task force conducted several teleconferences to identify a list of standards and best practices that any respectable journalism enterprise employs. Our first thought was to publish those and let nature take its course. If a website appealed to us for help, we could

apply those guidelines case-by-case. But that wasn't realistic.

So we set up a process through which websites could apply for USBWA endorsement. A subcommittee of the task force was charged with reviewing applicants. We received almost 50 by the Sept. 1 deadline, and finished making our decisions in early October. The

endorsed list is published on our website, and CoSIDA agreed to distribute to its members.

One important point: While we expect media directors to give full consideration to the endorsees, the schools retain the right to grant or deny credentials to anyone. But USBWA will go to bat for endorsees who encounter problems.

Also, we received a lot of applications from traditional media outlets – newspapers, magazines, TV/radio stations – and from individuals and some sports information directors. We did not endorse traditional media outlets because they already have access to full consideration. Nor did we endorse individuals, whom we classified as freelancers, and decided they could obtain credentials as freelancers have for decades.

We will clarify those points for the next application cycle.

But we also realize the landscape will continue to evolve, and we need to adapt. If you have suggestions for improving the process, or rationale to consider expanding our scope, please email me – kwessler@pjstar.com – and I will share your thoughts with the task force.

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Spread the word about USBWA’s many benefits

If you haven’t done so before now, spread the good word about the USBWA to your colleagues and friends in the media who are not already members and encourage them to join before the end of the year.

Be sure to tell them also about the many benefits members receive.

As a USBWA member, you are receiving this issue of the Tipoff as part of the USBWA’s annual membership benefits program.

It’s one of four Tipoff newsletters that you will receive during the college basketball season. Tipoff will keep you informed with lodge notes about the latest association news and columns by USBWA officers and board members on current issues impacting writers.

In addition to Tipoff, you’ll receive a complimentary seven-month subscription to *Basketball Times*. Each issue of *Basketball Times* includes columns by some of the nation’s top sportswriters.

The USBWA’s annual membership directory is scheduled to arrive in your mailbox in mid-November. This year’s directory has been redesigned to provide greater readability. It is considered by many to be worth the cost of membership alone.

The directory features the contact information of members and the primary basketball contacts at every Division I school and the beat writers, columnists and broadcasters who cover each team.

It is a “must-have” directory for every sports information director and writer in college basketball.

The directory is also available online at usbwa.com. It’s always updated with the latest contact information. Simply click on MEMBER CENTER at the top of the USBWA home page and use your personal online passcode to access the directory.

There’s more. USBWA members receive up to a 20 percent discount on rooms at Hilton Hotels, a 10 percent discount on car rentals at Hertz and a 15 percent savings on merchandise at Brooks Brothers’ clothiers. Fly American Airlines and receive selected discounts for air travel to major events and meetings.

Mitch named to Missouri Valley’s Hall

USBWA executive director Joe Mitch will be inducted into the Missouri Valley Conference’s Hall of Fame for Lifetime Achievement. Mitch was an associate commissioner for most of his 27 years with the Valley.

Jim O’Connell of the Associated Press underwent heart and foot surgeries on the same day in early September.

Lead columnist Gregg Doyel is moving from CBSSports.com to the *Indianapolis Star*. ... Jeff Borzello is moving from CBSSports.com to ESPN.com. ... Chuck Culpepper joined the *Washington Post* as a national college football writer. ... Fox Sports hired Stewart Mandel of Sports Illustrated to cover college football and basketball ... Dustin Dopirak, a former college beat writer for the *Bloomington (Ind.) Herald-Times*, joined the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* as the

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



For full details about each discount program, go to the USBWA website at usbwa.com.

Members are also eligible to vote for players on the USBWA’s All-District and All-America teams as well as player, coach and freshman of the year in both men’s and women’s basketball.

Finally, members can enter the USBWA’s best writing contest for plaques and cash prizes.

To join the USBWA, go to sportswriters.net/membership. Dues are \$50 and \$25 for retirees, students and recent grads.

CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS. The USBWA makes financial contributions to specific charities designated by recipients of the USBWA’s Most Courageous awards for men and women. On the men’s side, USBWA donations were made on behalf of Penn senior guard Dau Jok to the Dau Jok Foundation to help educate children of Sudan through sports and to the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network on behalf of Akron athletics administrator Dan Peters, who is suffering from pancreatic cancer. On the women’s side, a contribution was made to the Sports Outreach Institute in Lynchburg, Va., for mission trips to Africa on behalf of women’s Most Courageous winner and Westmont (Calif.) College women’s coach Kirsten Moore. Moore had to deal with the death of her husband just a few weeks before giving birth to a baby girl. Despite the tragedy, she led her team to the 2012 NAIA national championship.

The USBWA also makes a donation each year on behalf of basketball legend Oscar Robertson to the national kidney foundation. The USBWA’s men’s player of the year trophy is named after Oscar, who donated a kidney to his daughter.

beat writer of the Tennessee football program.

Oliver Pierce, a past winner of the USBWA’s Katha Quinn Award, retired following 25 years as sports information director at Gonzaga. ... Bob Vazquez retired following 37 years as an SID at UC Santa Barbara, Stanford and Cal State Northridge. ... Sam Goldman, a fixture at Bay Area games, died on June 17. He was the first SID for what became the West Coast Conference, as well as San Francisco State and Skyline College, and volunteered at hundreds of games following his retirement in 1989. He was 87.

John Adams and Gary Johnson announced their retirements from the NCAA. Adams, the NCAA supervisor of basketball officials, will retire following the Final Four. Johnson worked in NCAA statistics for 30 years.

Lodge Notes

Record-setting number of entries in best-writing contest

A record-setting number of entries were turned into the USBWA's best-writing contest for a second year in a row, again turning it into a highly competitive affair.

There were no double-winners – also for the second year in a row – among the 162 entries.

The judge said “the quality of writing this time around was excellent.”

This year's winners were John Feinstein of the *Washington Post*, Zak Keefer of the *Indianapolis Star*, Eric Prisbell of *USA Today*, Luke Winn of *Sports Illustrated* and Mike DeCourcy of *The Sporting News*.

In his winning column about the dementia that has stripped Dean Smith of most of his memory, Feinstein recounted the first time he had ever witnessed Smith have difficulty recalling a detail. It was in 2005, and Smith couldn't recall the name of an assistant coach he had met years ago during the national semifinals. Smith was 74, and Feinstein reminded him that most folks would still love to have half his memory. But for Smith, this was new, and it upset him.

Feinstein wrote: “Dean Smith remembered every name, every game, every play in every game. He also remembered every call that went against him and anything written or said about one of his players or friends that he thought was a slight — real or perceived. He never asked me how my kids were. He asked how Danny and Brigid were.”

DeCourcy won the category for moderate length features by writing about a blind student at Evansville, Bryce Weiler, who is passionate about basketball.

DeCourcy wrote: “At birth he was four months premature, with no eyesight. He sits on the bench for Evansville home games, adjacent to a team manager who provides him with a play-by-play call of the action on the court. This is one of the many small kindnesses his fellow students have volunteered during Bryce's college years, designed to make his experience richer or more profound or less isolated or, in some cases, merely to make it possible.”

Weiler's hope for a life in basketball is no fantasy, DeCourcy wrote. He has a network including Brad Stevens, the Boston Celtics coach, and Louisville's Rick Pitino, that he can go to for questions and career advice.

Speaking of Stevens, Keefer's winning story in the enterprise/investigative category relived the day that the coach left Butler for the Celtics, visiting with persons touched by Stevens' departure at a variety of levels.

Keefer led with the reaction by Brandon Gaudin, the voice of Butler basketball, when an email flashed across his phone with the subject line “STEVENS HIRED BY CELTICS.”

Keefer wrote: “Frantic, he fired off a text message to Josh Rattray, the Butler sports information assistant who'd sent the email out moments earlier. “Haha,” Gaudin wrote. “That's funny.””

Prisbell also had unusual access for his winning

USBWA Best-Writing Contest

COLUMNS

1. John Feinstein, *Washington Post*
2. Kirk Wessler, *Peoria Journal Star*
3. John Akers, *Basketball Times*
4. Caulton Tudor, *WRAL SportsFan.com*
5. Bryan Burwell, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

ENTERPRISE/INVESTIGATIVE

1. Zak Keefer, *Indianapolis Star*
2. Pete Thamel, *Sports Illustrated*
3. Mick McCabe And Mark Snyder, *Detroit Free Press*
4. Laura Keeley, *Raleigh News & Observer*
5. Tom Noie, *South Bend Tribune*

GAME STORY/SPOT NEWS

1. Eric Prisbell, *USA Today*
2. Jesse Temple, *FoxSportsWisconsin.com*
3. David Teel, *Newport News Daily Press*
4. Gary Parrish, *CBSSports.com*
5. Skip Myslenski, *NUSports.com*

MAGAZINE LENGTH FEATURE

1. Luke Winn, *Sports Illustrated*
2. Jason King, *Bleacher Report*
3. Kevin Armstrong, *New York Daily News*
4. Seth Davis, *Sports Illustrated*
5. Ryan Kartje, *Orange County Register*

MODERATE LENGTH FEATURE

1. Mike DeCourcy, *The Sporting News*
2. Andrew Kahn, *SportsOnEarth.com*
3. Myron Medcalf, *ESPN.com*
4. Brendan F. Quinn, *MichiganLive.com*
5. Doug Lesmerises, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

story in the game story/spot news category – from inside the locker room of then-unbeaten Wichita State before the Shockers' game against Indiana State for the Missouri Valley Conference tournament championship.

Prisbell wrote: “Standing in front of a dry erase board, he delivered a blunt message in 43 seconds ...

“This,” (Gregg Marshall said), ‘is from the Sycamores, Indiana State alumni association.

“Scroll to the bottom. They have planned tonight a pep rally to welcome the 2014 Arch Madness tournament champions home. Hulman Center. Doors open at 8 o'clock, OK. Tonight. To welcome the Valley tournament champions home, all right ...

“They want a piece of us. They want a piece of us.

Dean Smith's Dignity Worth Remembering
From Pernicious To Picasso
Johnny Orr's Hilton Magic
Reminder: Team, Not NBA Draft Prediction
The Game We Waited For

The Day That Rocked Butler
Transfers The New Prized Recruits
Fired Coach Accused Of Abuse
College Basketball Needs A Commissioner
Digger's Sacred Corner

They Gave 'Em The Whole Enchilada
Badgers Dance Into Final Four
Virginia Title A Masterpiece Of Patience
Something Special, Something Great
Compelling Victory Marks A First

The Freshman: Wilt To Manning To Wiggins
Adreian Payne's Princess Lacey
Cleanthony: From The Bottom To Perfection
A Lonely, Wounded Search For Meaning
Weathering Of A Hoosier Legend

He Sees Basketball Differently
UConn's Breanna Stewart: Best Ever?
Butch's Death Softened Bo
Peace After An Easter Tragedy
Aaron Craft's Zen Huddles

Let's give 'em the whoooole thing. Let's give them the whole enchilada.”

Winn was also in Kansas for his winning magazine length feature that compared the arrivals by Jayhawks freshmen Andrew Wiggins, Wilt Chamberlain and Danny Manning.

“To Wiggins, Kansas basketball did not exist before 2008, when he watched Mario Chalmers hit his miracle three against Memphis in the national title game ...

“To him, Manning is the father of a teammate: sophomore walk-on guard Evan Manning ...

“Chamberlain, to Andrew Wiggins, is but a ghost, a number on a banner hanging in Allen Fieldhouse's south rafters.”



Feinstein



Keefer



Prisbell



Winn



DeCourcy

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 AND MARY JO HAVER-

BECK. Both awards recognize individuals in men's and women's basketball for their service to the media and for the inspiration they provide to those in the sports journalism profession. The awards are presented in honor of two former sports information directors who have passed away -- Quinn (St.John's) in 1988 and Haverbeck (Penn State) last January. Send nominations for the Quinn Award in men's basketball to past president Malcolm Moran at moranma@indiana.edu and to Mel Greenberg at poll@att.net for the Haverbeck Award in women's basketball

.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.

Mitchell Miller wins USBWA scholarship

Mitchell Miller, who enrolled this fall as a freshman at Arizona State University, has been selected the winner of the U. S. Basketball Writers Association's college scholarship given annually to the son or daughter of a USBWA member.

Mitchell is the son of longtime USBWA member Craig Miller, former Villanova sports information director and now the chief media/communications officer for USA Basketball.

The scholarship is a \$1,000 grant awarded annually by the USBWA for four years.

"Out of an exemplary collection of applicants, Mitchell stood out and the USBWA is pleased to present him with its annual scholarship," said USBWA president Dana O'Neil of ESPN.com.

"Mitchell excelled not only in the classroom in high school but also as an athlete and active member of the Colorado Springs community. On behalf of the USBWA, it is my pleasure to wish Mitchell well and congratulate him on a deserving scholarship."

Mitchell, who plans to study aeronautical engineering at Arizona

State, has been accepted to Barrett, The Honors College, at Arizona State. He graduated with honors from The Classical Academy in Colorado Springs. He was a member of the National Honors Society for three years, named a Commended Student in the 2014 National Merit Scholarship Program and earned AP Scholar with Distinction honors.

"I am truly honored to receive this scholarship," Mitchell said. "There are many goals I have set for myself as I begin my experience at ASU. I know that receiving this scholarship will help me reach them."

Mitchell was a starting offensive and defensive tackle in football for The Classical Academy team that advanced to the Colorado State 3A semifinals in 2013, and earned academic all-state honorable mention honors.

A three-year starter in lacrosse, he led the Air Academy High School lacrosse team in scoring as a junior and senior, compiling 91 goals and 24 assists. Selected team MVP as a senior, he is a two-time all-state, all-area and all-conference honoree who finished 2014 ranked tied for seventh in goals scored for all Colorado 4A schools.



Mitchell Miller

Kentucky, Okafor heavy favorites in men's poll

For the second year in a row, Kentucky is the USBWA favorite to win the national title.

Marcus Paige of North Carolina was named the favorite to win the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year Award by just one vote, and Duke's Jahlil Okafor is the heavy favorite to win the Wayman Tisdale Award, given to the nation's top freshman.

Kentucky earned all but three first-place votes. The other first-place votes all went to Arizona, which finished in a tie for second with Wisconsin.

The rest of the top 10 included, in order, Duke, North Carolina, Kansas, Louisville, Wichita State, Virginia and Florida.

The rest of the Top 20 included: Gonzaga, Villanova, Texas, Iowa State, San Diego State, Michigan State, VCU, Connecticut, Oklahoma and Nebraska. Rounding out the Top 25: Ohio State, SMU, Syracuse, Stanford and Michigan.

Other vote-getters included: Iowa (25), Colorado (20), Harvard



Marcus Paige



Jahlil Okafor

Hollis-Jefferson of Arizona and Georges Niang of Iowa State. Ron Baker of Wichita State, Karl-Anthony Towns of Kentucky and Delon Wright of Utah also received votes.

Okafor received all but one vote for the Wayman Tisdale Award, with the other going to Stanley Jefferson of Arizona.

(17), Memphis (17), Utah (16), Kansas State (13), Stephen F. Austin (10), Arkansas (5), Minnesota (3), UCLA (2), LSU (1), Dayton (1) and Pittsburgh (1).

Paige received six first-place votes for player of the year, followed by Wisconsin's Frank Kaminsky with five and Branden Dawson of Michigan State, Sam Dekker of Wisconsin and Aaron Harrison of Kentucky receiving one apiece.

Paige and Kaminsky were placed on the USBWA's preseason All-America team, along with Okafor, Montrezl Harrell of Louisville and Fred VanVleet of Wichita State.

Others who received multiple votes included Dawson, Dekker, Harrison, Malcolm Brogdon of Virginia, Rondae

Men's Preseason Top 25

1. Kentucky (11)	346
2. (tie) Arizona (3)	327
Wisconsin	327
4. Duke	301
5. North Carolina	289
6. Kansas	269
7. Louisville	252
8. Wichita State	238
9. Virginia	231
10. Florida	214
11. Gonzaga	197
12. Villanova	193
13. Texas	184
14. Iowa State	139
15. San Diego State	128
16. Michigan State	120
17. VCU	111
18. Connecticut	98
19. Oklahoma	86
20. Nebraska	80
21. Ohio State	70
22. SMU	66
23. Syracuse	61
24. Syracuse	46
25. Michigan	28

UConn, Stewart figure to three-peat in women's hoops

Women's Preseason Top 25

1. Connecticut
2. South Carolina
3. Tennessee
4. Texas
5. North Carolina
6. Texas A&M
7. Notre Dame
8. Kentucky
9. Louisville
10. Rutgers
11. California
12. Baylor
13. Oklahoma
14. Stanford
15. UCLA
16. Iowa
17. Maryland
18. Oklahoma State
19. Dayton
20. DePaul
21. West Virginia
22. Purdue
23. Nebraska
24. Gonzaga
25. Florida State

By MEL GREENBERG

Looking ahead to the women's season, there was a tendency to simply go back to what was said in this space 12 months ago and simply cut and paste much of the same into the narrative.

Coming off the two straight NCAA titles, Connecticut is the overwhelming favorite to add another three-peat to its collection, perhaps another back-to-back unbeaten run and with it the honor of Hall of Fame coach Geno Auriemma tying the immortal men's basketball legend John Wooden of UCLA with 10 championships after he snapped the women's deadlock last season with the legendary and former Tennessee great Pat Summitt.

Barring unforeseen bad news, the Huskies have even greater distance for the most part over the field because last season's prominent challengers have all graduated key players.

South Carolina under Dawn Staley is seen as the best bet to take a shot namely because everyone is back from the Gamecocks crew that won the regular season Southeastern Conference and gained a first-ever No. 1 seed on Selection Monday.

The other reason for such Connecticut dominance is in the race for preseason player of the year where likewise exists with Huskies junior Breanna Stewart, the reigning USBWA national player of the year.

Stewart was the lone collegian on Auriemma's USA Basketball

squad that captured the FIBA Gold Medal at the World Championship in Turkey in early October.

Since a board similar to the men's organization is still being built at USBWA on the women's side, there was no formal vote for honors, but discussions with key members point to several names to be mentioned.

For one, the subtractions mentioned above give rise to the return of such golden oldies in national rankings as Rutgers, which won the WNIT and has everyone back, highlighted by senior Betnijah Laney and sophomore Tyler Scaife, who was last season's rookie sensation.

Likewise for Texas, already picked to win the Big 12, with Nneka Enemkpali, a senior, in the All-America discussion.

Elizabeth Williams returns for her senior season at Duke as one of two potentials to be the No. 1 pick in next April's WNBA draft. Another is Kalenna Mosqueda-Lewis of UConn.

Kaela Davis could send Georgia Tech to its best season yet, while Jewell Loyd picks up the torch at Notre Dame, which is not likely to match its unbeaten record into last season's title game against UConn.

Meanwhile, when it comes to fresh faces, another reason South Carolina is getting so much attention is landing in-state project A'ja Wilson, the No. 1 bluechip prospect of last season who played for Staley last summer on the U-18 USA Basketball gold medalists.