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Sugar Bowl preparing for media, title game

The Nokia Sugar Bowl has been working with FWAA and Bowl Championship Series representatives in recent months to beef up and streamline its press operations for the national championship game Jan. 4, 2004.

The Sugar Bowl will be the site for the game between the two top-ranked teams in the BCS poll after games in early in December. And the FWAA will hold its annual meeting Jan. 3-4 at the New Orleans Hyatt, which is adjacent to the Louisiana Superdome.

In two separate meetings with the FWAA and BCS, the Nokia Sugar Bowl staff has revealed plans to change some of its press operations at the Louisiana Superdome, which last played host to a title game three years ago.

Among the most dramatic improvements will be a larger media spaces for print, radio and television.

Along with the traditional Press Box A&B areas on the third floor (225 seats), the Sugar Bowl is building another press area on the Plaza Level with an additional 128 seats. The print media (local, school and national writers) will occupy the traditional press box and radio and television media will be moved to the Plaza Level.

There will also be a separate dinner area before the game on the field level to relieve congestion in the traditional press box areas.

In addition, there will be two "warehouse" locations near the field where nondeadline writers, late approvals and other personnel will be stationed. This area also will be equipped with phone lines and could be used by media for filing stories late in the game or before the post-game press conferences.

Under BCS guidelines, the Sugar Bowl will install

courtesy phones every three seats in the two main press boxes. Media still will be able to order their own phone lines if they so desire.

"It has been encouraging to see how the Sugar Bowl staff has embraced improvements in media operations, which can make the jobs easier for the media at this game,"

said FWAA executive director Steve Richardson.

John Paquette, Big East Conference director of media services, and Greg Blackwell, Sugar Bowl director of communications, have worked hard to improve the press operation. Paquette, the FWAA's Sugar Bowl press liaison, expects to be on site on Dec. 30 when press interviews begin. All current questions about the Sugar Bowl press operation for the game should be directed to Blackwell.

The FWAA will have links to the Sugar Bowl's website (www.nokiasugarbowl.org), and media members will be able to start applying for credentials and hotel rooms in mid November. We will have more information on the Sugar Bowl, the FWAA meeting, including a complete press list of events, in the coming weeks.



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President's column



WALLY HALL

Is it just me, or has no other president of the Football Writer's Association been required to write so many of these columns.

It seems one gets finished and Tiger (sometimes known as Steve Richardson) is calling saying another one is due.

No, I don't want any cheese with this whine.

I want less TV time outs, less sideline reports and better parking.

Actually, there are a couple of items that need to be addressed and one is a compliment, and the other, well, we'll get to that last.

Congratulations to the Football Bowl Association for forming a seven-person committee to formulate a comprehensive game plan to improve communications among the post-season bowls, media and public.

With Charlie Fiss from the Cotton Bowl on the point, the FBA is polling selected reporters from around the country about ways to be more efficient. There were 20 concerns listed they wanted feed back on, and it was a very thorough list.

Granted, media hospitality and press box food were near the bottom — Sorry, Beast (sometimes known as John Klein) — but that really is appropriate when our concerns should be the credentialing process, telephone availability and of course, accessibility of players and coaches during a bowl week.

For some reason coaches have gotten more skittish than a long-tailed cat at a rocking chair convention during bowl week.

Which reminds me of the time a coach said he might start banning tape recorders at his press conferences be-

cause we were reporting what he said and not what he meant.

Anyway, there are 20 legitimate concerns and the FBA people are interested in our input, and that is a very positive approach for all of us.

The final item is there will not be a fund raising campaign for potential bail money for any Arkansas based sports writers covering the Arkansas-LSU game this year.

Two years ago only reporters from Arkansas, who had left the press box with six minutes to play, were removed from the field and held in a fenced off area until two minutes remained in the game, missing much of the final action.

When they were allowed to reenter so they could cover the game, they were forced to kneel in the mud.

On the LSU side of the field, no one kneeled and every fan in the place was on their feet.

Anyone who stood up on the visitor's side of the field was cursed by field marshals and escorted off the field again.

The next day LSU sports information director Michael Bonnette called with an impassioned apology. He was truly outraged.

Bonnette made sure it never happened again, but he has to be reassured now that someone has his back.

Long-time LSU SID Herb Vincent is back on campus as assistant athletic director, and like the guys from the FBA, he was one who was always concerned with helping the media.

Any school can have a slip up at any time.

If you encounter a problem such as this, or a student sitting next to you in the press box and cheering, or just about anything else, let Steve Richardson our executive director know immediately.

He gets things done, even a column when there was no idea for one.

Bowl association forms panel to address media concerns

As announced previously, the Football Bowl Association has formed a seven-person Marketing/PR Committee that is working to formulate a comprehensive game plan to improve communication among the bowls, media and public.

The committee includes Mike Schulze, Director of Communications & Sponsorships for the Outback Bowl; Dave Herrell, Associate Director of Marketing, Music City Bowl; Charlie Fiss, V.P. Communications, SBC Cotton Bowl; David Epps, V.P., Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl; Harold Graeter, Associate Executive Director, AXA Liberty Bowl; Shawn Schoeffler, V.P. Media Relations, Tosititos Fiesta Bowl, and Charles Bloom, Associate Commissioner, SEC.

High on the priority list for this committee is the establishment of basic operating guidelines for all the bowls to follow in a collective effort to assist the media in a more effective way. All areas of media operations will be evaluated, ranging from bowl week news conferences, press box management, postgame interviews, etc. The committee also plans to survey all media covering the bowls after this year's games to obtain their feedback as a part of an on-going effort to improve bowl operations.

"This is long overdue and I believe necessary to be the best we can," said Mike Schulze, chairman of the committee. "A bowl game is a special experience for the teams and fans and should be special for the media as well. While we all have different resources and facility limitations, we need to strive to be a model for how others work."



The committee is currently soliciting feedback from numerous media members to incorporate into its guidelines. To offer your list of the most important issues/needs and the top concerns/problems you've encountered recently at bowls email them to Charlie Fiss at charlie@sbcottonbowl.com.

The committee is also hard at work promoting the benefits of the bowl system throughout the country. This will be done through publications, TV and radio PSAs and a new web site www.footballbowlassociation.com.

"There are a lot of people, including many media, who don't really know about what the bowls mean to college football and the communities that host them," notes Schulze. "Nobody has ever been out front to tell that story. The bowls are an integral part of the sport, and almost every coach and player I speak with is adamant about the importance of the bowls to the game."

FWAA ALL-AMERICA COMMITTEE

All-America ballots will be e-mailed to FWAA members. Please return your completed ballot to the FWAA All-America committee member representing your region.

- ? **Mark Anderson**, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, manderson@reviewjournal.com, MWC
- ? **Rob Daniels**, *Greensboro News & Record*, rdaniels@news-record.com, ACC
- ? **Dennis Dodd**, *CBS SportsLine*, dennisd@sportsline.com, Conference USA, Sun Belt, Independents
- ? **Steve Henson**, *Los Angeles Times*, steve.henson@latimes.com, Pacific 10
- ? **Stewart Mandel**, *SI.com*, stewart.mandel@cnsi.com, National, SEC
- ? **Michael Pointer**, *Indianapolis Star*, michael.pointer@indystar.com, Big Ten, MAC
- ? **George Schroeder**, *Daily Oklahoman*, gshroeder@aol.com, Big 12
- ? **Jeff Shain**, *Miami Herald*, jshain@herald.com, Big East
- ? **Keith Whitmire**, *Dallas Morning News*, kwhitmire@dallasnews.com, WAC

Courage Award nominees announced

Fifteen athletes, a student manager and an assistant coach, each with a special story of accomplishment in the face of difficult circumstances, are nominees for the 2003 FWAA/ESPN The Magazine Courage Award.

Nominees include San Jose State special teams player Neil Parry, who returned to college football with a prosthetic leg after an on-field injury led to an amputation in 2001, and Oklahoma's Lynn McGruder and Mark Clayton, who barely escaped a fatal car accident, then helped others who were caught in it. Southern California assistant coach Chris Carlisle and Georgia Tech punter/holder Hal Higgins survived Hodgkin's Disease. And Louisiana Lafayette defensive end Justin Venable was awarded three medical hardship seasons — his career could span an unprecedented eight years — because of a series of injuries.

The award honors someone in college football who shows great courage in the face of adversity. Requirements for candidacy include displaying a courageous act on or off the field, overcoming any injury or physical handicap, preventing a disaster or living through a lifetime of hardship. Toledo running back William Bratton, who endured a blood disorder and great pain but still played football, won the inaugural award.

Nominations for the award were solicited by the

Football Writers Association of America. A panel of nearly three dozen FWAA members will vote on the nominees, and the FWAA will announce a winner in mid-November. The winner will receive the award Jan. 4 at the FWAA awards breakfast and meeting at the New Orleans Hyatt.

Inspired by the story of Jekelsy Johnson, a linebacker from Alcorn State who was murdered while coming to the aid of a woman being harassed by four non-students on campus, the award was created by ESPN The Magazine's Gene Wojciechowski.

In alphabetical order, the nominees are:

DE C.J. Ah You, Soph., Brigham Young; Assistant coach Chris Carlisle, USC; WR Mark Clayton, Jr., Oklahoma; CB Emmanuel Franklin, Jr., Arizona State; Student manager Travis Freeman, Sr., Kentucky; P/H Hal Higgins, Sr., Georgia Tech; OL Norm Lewis, R-Jr., UCF; DT Lynn McGruder, Jr., Oklahoma; FS Medford Moorer, Sr., Colorado; FS Tez Morris, RSoph., Pittsburgh; ST Neil Parry, Jr., San Jose State; DB Rayshun Reed, Sr., Troy State University; OT Alan Reuber, R Sr., Texas A&M; K Keith Robinson, Jr., UTEP; QB Jeff Smoker, Sr. Michigan State; DE Justin Venable, GR, Louisiana Lafayette; OT Chad Wangerin, Sr., Western Michigan.



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