More battles are being lost along press row

President's Column

By ROBYN NORWOOD
Los Angeles Times

USBWA, Marriott reach deal

The USBWA has struck a deal that will be good for its members' travel budget — and for their Marriott points totals.

After several months of negotiations, USBWA Executive Director Joe Mitch has secured a relationship with Marriott to provide members with access to the chain's Athletic VIP program, which provides significant discounts on room rates.

The USBWA will mail Athletic VIP cards to members who are listed in the current USBWA directory.

This card will entitle each member to a sports rate of 50 percent off the regular room rate on a space-available basis at Marriott and Renaissance hotels and 25 percent off the highest mid-week rate on a space-available basis at Courtyard, Fairfield Inn, Residence Inn, Springhill Suites and TownePlaces Suites hotels. It is not applicable for conventions, playoffs or bowl games.

For reservations at U.S., Canadian and participating international properties, members are asked to call 1-800-228-9290 or the hotel directly. Request the Athletic VIP rate/promotional rate.

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Visit: www.usbwa.com
password: tipoff

January, 2005

Sapakoff wins scholarship

Christie Lee Sapakoff, daughter of Charleston (S.C.) Post and Courier sportswriter Gene Sapakoff, will receive a $1,000 college scholarship awarded annually to a son or daughter of a USBWA member.

Sapakoff is a freshman at Wofford College majoring in biology. She was an honor roll student at the prestigious Academic Magnet High School in Charleston and co-captain of the tennis team. She also worked over 250 volunteer hours at the University of South Carolina's Children's Hospital. She will continue to receive $1,000 scholarship for each year up to four that she is a full-time student at Wofford.

Sapakoff wrote in her application: "With the aid of this scholarship, I will further my education and plan to contribute optimism to others in need."
Sports-writing workshop is on again at Final Four

After a one-year hiatus, the USBWA sportswriting workshop held annually at the NCAA Final Four is back in business.

The workshop for aspiring journalism students looking to pursue careers in sportswriting will be held at this year’s NCAA Final Four in St. Louis on Thursday, March 31.

Canceled last year due to a lack of funding, the seminar is being held in conjunction with the Final Four once again after the St. Louis-based Pulitzer Company agreed to sponsor this year’s event.

Past board member and St. Louis Post-Dispatch sportswriter Vahe Gregorian spearheaded efforts that led to the USBWA getting a commitment from the Pulitzer Foundation, the charitable-giving division of Pulitzer, Inc.

Gregorian initially contacted Post-Dispatch Editor Ellen Soeteber, who pitched the sponsorship opportunity to the Pulitzer Foundation.

“In our efforts to support worthy causes, it is with great pleasure that we can contribute to the success of this program,” said Alan G. Silverglat, secretary-treasurer of the Pulitzer Foundation.

The Pulitzer’s sponsorship will provide funding for a three $1,000 scholarships to be awarded to students who participate in a seminar and then submit stories in a writing contest of events they’ll be assign to cover at the Final Four. The Pulitzer Foundation will also serve as sponsor of the USBWA’s annual board of directors and past presidents’ dinner during the Final Four weekend.

The scholarships will be awarded in the name of the late Basketball Times publisher and USBWA president and Hall of Famer Larry Donald, who died unexpectedly four years ago at the age of 55.

The workshop will begin with a seminar in the morning, where several USBWA members will serve on a panel and speak to students about their experiences in the sports-writing profession.

The workshop will be aimed primarily at college journalism students from the St. Louis metropolitan area. The University of Missouri School of Journalism has agreed to host the seminar and promote the workshop to their students.

Credit for Missouri’s involvement in the workshop should go to Jack Watkins, associate commissioner of the Missouri Valley Conference, a past winner of the Katha Quinn Award and a Mizzou J-School graduate. Through his many contacts at Mizzou, Jack was able to get the university to participate in the program.

Besides Missouri, journalism students from other universities in the St. Louis area, including Washington University, St. Louis University, Missouri-St. Louis and Southern Illinois University Carbondale and Edwardsville campus will be invited to attend the workshop.

Following the seminar in the morning, students will receive credentials to cover various events at the Final Four in St. Louis.

One lucky student will be given the opportunity to cover the national championship game Monday night.

Other events the students will be able to cover that weekend include:

- NABC all-star game at Savvis Center matching the Harlem Globetrotters against a team of college all-stars
- Friday practices of the four Final Four teams and their press conferences at the Edward Jones Dome
- Friday press conference of NCAA President Miles Brand
- NCAA Hoop City, an interactive fan festival involving basketball competitions and clinics
- March to the Arch where 3,000 fans will dribble basketballs on a downtown street in St. Louis for several blocks ending at the Arch.

Nominations are still being accepted for several USBWA awards, including Hal of Fame, the Katha Quinn service award and the Most Courageous award. Send all nominations to mitch@mvc.org.
Let’s help stop violence before it reaches college level

In February of 2003, I was asked to represent the national media in the NCAA’s first-ever “Sportsmanship Summit.” In the wake of fan violence at college sporting events, some of the biggest names in college athletics gathered in Dallas to ask two basic questions: 1) Why does this kind of behavior happen? and 2) What, if anything, can be done to prevent it?

I was taking part in a panel discussion about the causes of fan violence. Excess testosterone combined with large amounts of alcohol seemed to be the consensus culprits.

But then one of the gentlemen sitting at the table looked directly at me and said: “What about the media’s role in all of this?”

I babbled some response, which I’m sure made no sense. But the look I gave the guy basically said: “Are you out of your &^%$#@ mind? The media is just there to report the news. We don’t make the news!!”

The look he gave me said: “Yeah, sure. You guys love it when this kind of stuff happens. And you don’t do a damned thing to prevent it.”

The tragic brawl in Detroit on Nov. 19 made me think of that exchange again. Other than reporting it, the media had no role in that awful moment. But it did make me, as someone who loves college basketball, pause and think.

The NBA will survive that dreadful night in Detroit. David Stern will make sure of it. But I’m not sure the NBA will ever fully get over it. There a lot of people who already had their doubts about the NBA before the fight. Those people are gone and will never come back.

Could such a thing ever happen in college basketball? And if it could, does the media have any role in trying to prevent it?

The answers are yes and yes. It could absolutely happen in college basketball because at some arenas, the intent is still to provide a hostile, intimidating atmosphere for opposing teams and their fans.

Now, intimidation comes in many forms.

Some schools purposely put the home students right on top of the opposing bench. Sometimes they are simply loud.

That’s OK. That’s part of playing college basketball on the road.

But sometimes they are profane. Other times, they are worse than profane. And the home school tolerates it in the name of giving their team every possible edge.

A year ago at Maryland, students were wearing ob-scene T-shirts and acting every manner of crude speech toward Duke’s J.J. Redick. Maryland officials wondered if clamping down on such behavior would be an infringement of the students’ right to free speech. Such a notion would be a laughable if it didn’t have the potential to be so tragic.

Give Maryland credit, however. Since then, athletics director Debbie Yow and her staff have worked hard to get the problem under control.

Obviously, this is a scene that is played over and over throughout college basketball as fans want to show the folks watching ESPN that they can be just as entertaining as Duke’s Cameron Crazies. Only they lack the creativity of the Duke students. They get drunk and shout things at players that, if it happened on the street, would get them hauled into jail. They storm the court after a big victory.

But after all, it makes for great TV.

It also has to stop. And here’s where the media comes in.

How your local university handles crowd control and the kind of atmosphere it creates at basketball games is a legitimate news story. Does it create the kind of hostile atmosphere that could potentially lead to violence between players and fans? Does it keep fans off the floor or does it allow a stampede that could cause serious injuries to fans and athletes alike?

Last season, after a big win at home over Florida, Georgia fans stormed the floor of Stegeman Coliseum. One fan was caught on camera delivering a perfectly executed right cross to the head of Matt Walsh. Walsh, to his credit, got off the court as fast as he could. Another player might have laid waste to several students on his way to the locker room.

Is it going to take an NBA-like episode for people to take this problem seriously?

Be it college basketball or state government, the media has an obligation to recognize potential problems in the institutions they cover and to report on what could happen if those problems continue to be ignored.

Given what happened in Detroit last November, we in the media have an obligation to be honest with the public on the potential for a similar event in college basketball.

We also have an obligation to hold athletics officials’ feet to the fire to do everything in their power to make sure it doesn’t happen. Not after the fact. Now.

It might not make for great TV. But it just might save some kid’s life.

Taking inventory of our cherished press-row seats

Hello again, it’s me. PressBx. Or, maybe it should be PressRw.

Anyway, I polled the six BCS leagues, just for starters. We’ll get to several of the mid-majors next time (this accomplishes two things: 1, it’s good information for USBWA and 2, it give me a Tipoff column).

I received responses from the Big East, Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac-10. I found the results very interesting, and a little surprising that so many schools are going away from courtside. I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised. I just don’t get it.

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A writer's guide to NCAA Final Four credentials

The NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Committee has reiterated its opposition to all forms of sports wagering and encourages the media to assist in the education of the public with regard to the hazards of sports wagering.

Agencies shall direct requests for working media credentials for first/second rounds and regionals to the host media coordinator. Requests for the Final Four shall be directed to the NCAA national office. If space is limited at preliminary-round sites, preference will be given to applications received before March 1. Deadline for submitting 2005 Final Four applications will be Feb. 18.

A “media agency” for purposes of these criteria shall mean a daily or weekly publication, cable system, radio or television station and network requiring immediate news coverage. “Immediate news coverage” for purposes of these criteria shall mean that the editorial, audio and/or visual deadline for the tournament action being documented occurs no later than 48 hours after the completion at the site has been completed.

Any agency that has been certified for a Final Four credential shall receive a first-/second-round and/or regional credential upon request.

Agencies that do not meet the criteria for circulation (for print media) or designated market area (for electronic media), but represent the geographic area of a participating institution, must staff each of the participant’s previous tournament games in order to receive credentials to each subsequent game.

A press agency or television or radio station in the immediate geographic area and/or locale of a participating or host institution that has staffed its games on a regular basis throughout the season and does not otherwise meet the criteria may be designated by the participating or host institution as a “minority media enterprise.” A “minority media enterprise” shall mean a business enterprise involved in the dissemination of sports news to individuals socially or economically disadvantaged from cultural, racial or chronic economic circumstances or other similar cause. Such persons include, but are not limited to, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Spanish-speaking Americans and American Indians.

Except for television photographers, a credential may be issued only to an authorized full-time, salaried representative of, or a representative who regularly and customarily performs services for, the agency submitting the request. Credentials are not transferable.

Membership in a writers’ or broadcasters’ association (e.g., United States Basketball Writers Association) does not automatically qualify an agency for credentials.

Subject to limitations of space, credentials at all sites shall be assigned in accordance with the following priorities:

- Separate publications sharing common ownership may not be combined for purposes of meeting circulation or other criteria.
- Print
  1. A daily agency with circulation greater than 60,000, a weekly with circulation greater than 500,000 or a monthly with circulation greater than 750,000 will be identified as “national media” and will qualify for credentials even if it does not meet the provisions in No. 1 or No. 2 above. Press agencies may receive credentials according to the following:

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<th>Daily Circulation</th>
<th>Credentials</th>
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<tr>
<td>60,000 - 99,000</td>
<td>one seat</td>
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<tr>
<td>100,000 - 249,999</td>
<td>one seat, one limited access</td>
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<tr>
<td>250,000 - 349,999</td>
<td>two seats, one limited access</td>
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<tr>
<td>350,000 - 449,999</td>
<td>three seats, one limited access</td>
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<tr>
<td>450,000 - 649,999</td>
<td>four seats, one limited access</td>
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<tr>
<td>650,000 - 999,999</td>
<td>five seats, two limited access</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 million and above</td>
<td>six seats, two limited access</td>
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- Weekly Circulation
  1. Credential
  2. 500,000-3 million
  3. 3 million and above
  4. Monthly Circulation
  5. 750,000-3 million

- 3 million and above

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- SportsTicker and Sports Reporting Network
  1. One credential may be assigned to SportsTicker.

- Membership in a writers’ or broadcasters’ association (e.g., United States Basketball Writers Association) does not automatically qualify an agency for credentials.

- Subject to limitations of space, credentials at all sites shall be assigned in accordance with the following priorities:

1. One credential may be issued to an Online agency that (1) registers at least one million unique users per month in each of the 12 months before the tournament and (2) covers college basketball daily.
2. One credential may be issued to an Online agency that does not meet Criteria No. 1 if it covers college basketball daily.
3. A writer that does not meet Criteria No. 1 qualifies for credentials if a full-time staff member has covered at least 90 percent of the participating institution’s regular-season home games and each of its games in the NCAA championship. (Covering all of the institution’s competition in a different NCAA championship fulfills the latter requirement.) Such an agency can receive one more than the number of credentials it used for a majority of the institution’s home games.
4. An agency that does not meet Criteria No. 1 qualifies for credentials if a full-time staff member has covered at least 90 percent of the host institution’s regular-season home games.
5. A publication that covers college basketball exclusively and is distributed on a national basis—but does not meet Criteria No. 1—qualifies for one credential if space is available.
6. The Associated Press and the primary newspaper(s) that provide daily coverage for the host institution each may receive a maximum of four tabled seats, four non-tabled seats and two limited-access credentials.
7. At the media coordinator’s discretion, one credential may be issued to a reporter representing the “news side” of the major newspaper of the participating and/or host institution.
8. A writer that does not meet Criteria No. 1 qualifies for credentials if a full-time staff member filed reports at least 90 percent of the participating or host institution’s home games.
9. One credential may be assigned to SportsTicker.
10. The official Web site of a competing institution, as approved by that school’s sports information department, may receive a maximum of two credentials in addition to the two credentials noted under Print, No. 8.
11. An online entity may receive a credential only if its own full-time staff writes an overwhelming percentage of the site’s material.
12. Online entities will not receive photography credentials.
13. Any online service that is recognized as an outlet intended primarily for the purpose of delivering news related to the recruitment of student-athletes will not qualify for credentials.
14. A writer that does not meet Criteria No. 1 qualifies for credentials if a full-time staff member.