

USBWA finds next leader in Malcolm Moran

A friendly suggestion for the next time any of us chronicles a coaching search: Show the AD just a little compassion.

Most snoops are unaccustomed to identifying, interviewing and evaluating candidates. But as the committee searching for the USBWA's next executive director learned this summer and fall, the process can be challenging, enlightening and, ultimately, quite rewarding.

The latter hinges on landing the model aspirant. That we did in Malcolm Moran.

A USBWA Hall of Famer and past president, Moran emerged from an applicant group that speaks to the organization's mission, membership and future. We didn't need to pay a headhunter six figures to recruit sterling candidates. The USBWA is replete with them, and many wanted to serve, offering their visions of how to make us better.

None was as equipped and eloquent as Moran.

He has been a part of the USBWA for most of Joe Mitch's 36 years as executive director, as a reporter and also in academia. Moran wrote for *Newsday*, the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today* before shifting to direct Penn State's John Curley Center for Sports Journalism. Five years ago, Moran moved to IUPUI, where he directs the Sports Capital Journalism Program, teaches journalism and, oh by the way, works a short walk from NCAA headquarters.

"It would be an honor to take the baton from Joe Mitch after his 36 years as executive director," Moran wrote to the committee. "Please note that I did not dare use the words 'replace him,' because that is not possible.



But in my current role as Director of the Sports Capital Journalism Program at IUPUI in Indianapolis, I am well positioned to build on our improving relationship with the NCAA. And IUPUI students – in Journalism, Public Relations and Sports Management – would make valuable contributions to help the organization grow."

Moran's interview was most revealing. His institutional knowledge and determination to enhance the USBWA's strengths and address our shortcomings was unsurpassed.

Moran knows we need to upgrade our website and make the organization more appealing to media members during, and just after, their college days. He believes in our mission and aims to aggressively sell it, with our help, to prospective members and sponsors. Moran understands our frustrations with regular-season and post-season seating and access. He also realizes we need not always view schools and the NCAA as adversaries, and his long-established relationships with NCAA officials such as Dave Worlock and Dan Gavitt will be invaluable.

Indeed, in 2017 Moran accompanied then-president Vahe Gregorian to San Antonio to lobby the NCAA Division I men's basketball committee for greater transparency in the tournament selection process.

So it's not like we're dusting off a flip phone hoping it will translate to the smart phone world. Moran has remained on the front lines with us. He speaks annually to the Sports Journalism Institute, has hosted the Associated Press Sports Editors' Diversity Fellows program and continues to organize the USBWA's Full Court Press seminar at the Final Four.

Moran served as USBWA president for the 1988-89 season, during which the organization established women's basketball awards for player, coach and freshman of the year, most courageous and media service. He was inducted into the USBWA Hall of Fame in 2005 and two years later received the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame's Curt Gowdy Print Media Award.

"It would be an impeachable offense if I didn't thank those who served on the selection committee: Mike Waters (*Syracuse Post-Standard*), Seth Davis (*CBS*, *The Athletic*), Shannon Ryan (*Chicago Tribune*) and past presidents and USBWA Hall of Famers Dave Dorr, Blair Kerkhoff, John Feinstein, and Hoops Weiss. Their input was essential, as was guidance from *Basketball Times* editor John Akers and, as Moran mentioned, the irreplaceable Joe Mitch.

Moran's tenure begins June 1, and even though he's a young 65, if he approaches Mitch's 36 years, it will be a bigger upset than UMBC over Virginia.

Hall of Fame class had humble beginnings

By MIKE WATERS

Dan Wetzel got his start in sports journalism covering the women's cross-country team for the *Daily Collegian* at UMass.

"Not a lot of color in cross-country writing," Wetzel said. "They shoot a gun and they run into the woods. Then they come back and you have to write a story on what happened."

Bill Rhoden played defensive back on the football team at Morgan State, where he took just one journalism class. But the professor just happened to be Frances Murphy, whose family founded the *Afro-American Times*.

"She told me if I didn't get drafted that I would march my butt to the newspaper," Rhoden recalled. In February of 1972, shortly after his college football career had end-



John Akers



Jack McCallum



Bill Rhoden



Dan Wetzel

basketball and judicial.

"The real opening was in sports, which was probably a good thing," McCallum said. "I was better in sports than I was a courthouse reporter."

John Akers grew up on a farm in the tiny Iowa town of Dows (population 700), where the weekly arrival of his *Sports Illustrated* sparked the imagination.

"You read a story about Pete Maravich," said Akers, "and your image of

him was how he was described to you in *Sports Illustrated*."

Akers went on to college at Iowa State, where he saw a story about the school's new sports information director.

"That sounds pretty cool," Akers thought. He went

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Cherishing nearly four decades' worth of memories

In my final few months before retiring as executive director, I've been asked what I've liked best about the job and what has been the most rewarding.

I shouldn't say "job," because it hasn't been that at all. It's been a privilege and an honor to be a part of this organization. Serving the interests of the members, putting them ahead of everyone else, has been a priority of mine every year, and I've never wavered from that.

What I'll miss the most is working with the writers I've come to know as friends in my 39 years with the USBWA (36 as executive director and three as Tipoff editor).

My proudest moments were seeing the joy in the faces of those we've honored every year, especially those inducted into the Hall of Fame. It remains one of the USBWA's most cherished awards.

I wiped away tears every year, it seemed, when we recognized the Most Courageous award winners at the Final Four and heard their remarkable stories of enormous physical challenges and debilitating hardships.

It's exciting every year to see our organization honor writers under 30 with the Rising Star Award and to recognize individuals for their service to the USBWA with the Katha Quinn Award for men and the Mary Jo Haverbeck Award for women.

The Dean Smith Award, established just a few years ago, brings national attention to the USBWA every year by honoring coaches who embody the spirit and values of the late legendary North Carolina coach.

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



I've often said the strength of the organization has been the presidents for their leadership. It has been an honor for me to present the Ray Marquette Award each year to the outgoing president of the USBWA.

We are grateful for the support of our partners such as ESPN, CoSIDA, the NABC and USA Basketball. Our relationship with the NCAA, while bumpy at times, continues to improve. A major breakthrough this past year was the NCAA endorsing best practice recommendations to member schools for access, seating and security for writers.

The one sticky point is getting the NCAA to allow a USBWA rep inside the basketball tournament selection committee meeting room during the week of Selection Sunday. If the Football Writers can have a rep in the room while the College Football Playoffs committee gathers information, then the NCAA should provide the USBWA with the same opportunity in basketball.

Finally, words cannot fully express my deep feelings for this organization and what it has meant to me. The USBWA has been a major part of my life for nearly four decades. I will miss the association and the people and will forever cherish the memories.

USBWA announces midseason watch list

The USBWA announced the 20 players on its midseason watch list for the Oscar Robertson Award, given to the nation's top player.

Nickeil Alexander-Walker, Virginia Tech (6-5, Soph.); R.J. Barrett, Duke (6-7, Fr.); Bol Bol, Oregon (7-2, Fr.); Ignas Brazdeikis, Michigan (6-7, Fr.); Jordan Caroline, Nevada (6-7, Sr.).

Brandon Clarke, Gonzaga (6-8, Jr.); Jarrett Culver, Texas Tech (6-6, Soph.); Mike Daum, South Dakota State (6-9, Sr.); Carsen Edwards, Purdue (6-1, Jr.); Rui Hachimura, Gonzaga (6-8, Jr.).

Ethan Happ, Wisconsin (6-10, Sr.); Markus Howard, Marquette (5-11, Jr.); De'Andre Hunter, Virginia (6-7, Soph.); Dedric Lawson, Kansas (6-9, Jr.); Caleb Martin, Nevada (6-7, Sr.).

C.J. Massinburg, Buffalo (6-3, Sr.); Luke Maye, North Carolina (6-8, Sr.); Shamorie Ponds, St. John's (6-1, Jr.); Grant Williams, Tennessee (6-7, Jr.); Zion Williamson, Duke (6-7, Fr.).



Temple coach Fran Dunphy receives the Dean Smith Award at a luncheon in Philadelphia to benefit Coaches vs. Cancer.

Akers, McCallum, Rhoden, Wetzel enter Hall

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to the sports information office to see if they were taking volunteers or interns. "They said 'Sure.' That exposed me to newspaper people."

From those beginnings, Wetzel, Rhoden, McCallum and Akers would embark on careers that led them to this year's enshrinement in the United States Basketball Writers Association's Hall of Fame class.

It's a group so accomplished that the only question regarding their candidacies was summed up by Wetzel, who said of his fellow inductees: "My thing was, how were those guys not already in the Hall of Fame? Bill Rhoden and Jack McCallum and John Akers are all guys I love reading. Insightful and impactful and trail-blazing."

Wetzel, the national columnist at Yahoo Sports, grew up just outside of Boston. His father would get several newspapers. Wetzel soaked up the sports coverage in the Boston Globe, the Boston Herald and the Patriot Ledger, but he never considered going into the business. During his high school days, he worked at Fenway Park, selling popcorn and Fenway Franks.

"I was not someone who wrote for my student newspaper in high school," Wetzel said. "I didn't go to college expecting to be a journalist."

Once he got to UMass, Wetzel landed the women's cross-country beat. He climbed the student paper's ladder, eventually moving up to the basketball beat around the time UMass hired a coach named John Calipari and brought in a recruit named Marcus Camby.

"Not only did the team turn into a Top 10 team, but we had this guy who is just this incredible newsmaker and personality," Wetzel said. "And he loved the media."

Wetzel was in the room when Temple coach John Chaney stormed into Calipari's post-game news conference. "The A-10 was awesome," Wetzel said.

After college, Wetzel interned at the Indianapolis News, covering the police beat. He moved to the Chicago Tribune, where he continued on the news side.

"Murders. Plane crashes. A safe falls out a window and lands on a guy," Wetzel said. "Every day was total mayhem."

Then the late Larry Donald, a past president of the USBWA and a Hall of Famer himself, contacted Wetzel about a job opening at Basketball Times.

"I could've been happy as a news reporter, but I loved how Larry allowed 18,000-word stories about the history of Mississippi State basketball," Wetzel said. "The idea of getting the opportunity to go super-deep on a subject I liked appealed to me."

Wetzel left Basketball Times for CBSSports and now writes for Yahoo. He has written several books, including *Sole Influence* and *Glory Road*, the story of legendary UTEP coach Don Haskins. But Wetzel said

he's never forgotten the lessons that Donald taught him.

"If it's a great story, go write a great story," Wetzel said. "That's all Larry cared about."

Bill Rhoden of The Undefeated was caught completely off-guard when USBWA president David Teel called with the news that he was part of the 2019 Hall of Fame class.

"I thought he was pitching a story," Rhoden said.

Rhoden got his first newspaper job at the Afro-American in 1972, but he became an author when he was in the fourth or fifth grade. He "wrote" a Christmas story, making liberal use of his *Childcraft Encyclopedia*.

"My father said 'What are you doing?'" Rhoden recalled. "I said 'I'm writing a book.' He said 'No. No. You've got to write your own.'"

It's ironic that Rhoden is going into a college basketball organization's Hall of Fame. The Chicago native went to Morgan State to play football.

"I always thought basketball players were prima donnas," he said. "We're up there beating the hell out of each other and the basketball players would waltz in."

On his first day of work at the Afro-American in Baltimore, Rhoden wanted to make a good impression.

"I got there at 8 in the morning," he said. "Sam Lacy was there. He'd been there since 5 in the morning. That was my first lesson."

A year and a half later, Rhoden got a job at *Ebony* magazine and spent four years there as an associate editor. He wrote as well, but only occasionally on sports-related topics. He returned to Baltimore, where the *Evening Sun* had started a new features section. He wrote features and covered jazz.

In 1983, Rhoden got a call from a friend at the *New York Times*. The paper was looking for an editor for its *Weekend Review*.

"I figured, 'Just let me get on the train and I'd work my way up to the engine,'" he said. "I spent about a year at *Weekend Review* as an editor, which was about as much as I could stand. I was a writer at heart."

Rhoden got a chance to write again in the *Times*' sports section. He was put on the St. John's beat, giving him the opportunity to cover St. John's and the Big East during their heydays. He stayed on the beat until becoming a columnist in 1990.

This will be Rhoden's second Hall of Fame induction ceremony. In 2015, he spoke when Bryan Burwell was inducted posthumously.

"Bryan was a dear friend," Rhoden said "This really makes it all the more special."

John Akers would deserve his Hall of Fame nod for no other reason than what he's done at Basketball Times since becoming the magazine's editor in 2001 and publisher in 2011.

Brendan Quinn, of The Athletic, said this in his nomination of Akers: "He's not only single-handedly kept Larry Donald's legacy going but has nourished a fertile ground for both up-and-coming writers needing a break (ahem) and for some of the greatest voices in our game."

A past president of the USBWA, Akers created the organization's Rising Star award, which recognizes excellence in a member who is under the age of 30.

But Akers' career stretches well beyond his extraordinary work at Basketball Times. As an undergrad at Iowa State, he started working for the Ames Tribune. He took scores over the phone before earning the right to "actually go cover games," he said.

He went to the Burlington Hawk Eye after graduation and then went back to the Ames Tribune. He joined the San Jose Mercury News in 1984, first on the sports desk and then moving to college basketball. He covered Santa Clara, Cal and San Jose State. He got the Stanford beat as that program began to take off in the 1990s.

Akers and his wife Ann moved to Minneapolis. It was because of Ann that Akers found his way to Basketball Times.

"My wife worked at the National Scholastic Press Association and they were having their convention in Boston," Akers said. "Bob Ryan was going to be a speaker and she needed a mug shot of Bob. I called Basketball Times. That's where I learned that they were without an editor at that moment."

Akers has maintained Basketball Times and Larry Donald's legacy ever since. He said he's thrilled that former Basketball Times staffers Dan Wetzel and Mike Sheridan are part of this year's ceremony.

"It wasn't easy to follow Larry," Akers said. "It's pretty cool that Dan and Mike are getting in at the same time. They were key parts of the making of Basketball Times."

McCallum went to Muhlenburg College to play basketball; not cover it.

"I played one year," he said. "They were really good."

McCallum is best known for the nearly three decades he spent at *Sports Illustrated*. Before joining the magazine in 1981, he worked for several different newspapers.

"I worked at four newspapers," he says, "and I killed three of them."

His first assignment at *Sports Illustrated* was a feature on Danny Ainge, the BYU guard who was set to embark on a baseball career at the conclusion of the 1981 NCAA tournament.

"I was there when Danny Ainge went coast-to-coast to beat Notre Dame," McCallum said.

Because of his newspaper background, McCallum got assigned stories that needed a quick turnaround.

"At that time, SI had a lot of thumb-sucking writers who took three weeks to write a story," McCallum said, chuckling. "I could do things fast."

When informed of his nomination into the USBWA Hall of Fame, McCallum said he felt unworthy at first.

"I haven't done as much college as other guys," McCallum said. "I felt bad, so I immediately began trying to remember all the college stuff I did do."

McCallum was there when North Carolina State stunned Houston in the 1983 NCAA championship game. He saw Tyus Edney and Ed O'Bannon lead UCLA to the 1994 title. He covered Connecticut's 1999 championship team, featuring Richard Hamilton and Khalid El-Amin.

"I'm very proud and very happy because I've always loved college basketball," McCallum said. "There's nothing like the Final Four. I covered the pros but there's nothing like the three weeks in March."

Basketball community loses three greats

Jerry Radding, a USBWA president in 1973-74 and Hall of Fame inductee in 2004, died of natural causes at the age of 92 on Oct. 30. He retired from the Springfield (Mass.) Union News in 1991 and was a Final Four fixture for nearly four decades.

Al Featherston, 69, who covered the Atlantic Coast Conference for more than four decades, died Nov. 5 following a lengthy illness. He worked for the Durham Sun and the Herald-Sun from 1974-2005.

Terry Hutchens, who covered the Indiana Hoosiers for more than 20 years, died Dec. 21 after being critically injured in a three-car accident. Hutchens wrote for 15 years for the Indianapolis Star and

most recently worked for CNHI Indiana Sports.

USBWA Executive Director Joe Mitch will be presented the NABC Cliff Wells Appreciation Award for his long and outstanding service to men's college basketball during the NABC Guardian of the Game Awards Show on April 17 during the Final Four in Minneapolis.

Past president and Hall of Famer Dick "Hoops" Weiss presented Temple coach Fran Dunphy with the Dean Smith Award at a luncheon in Philadelphia last November to benefit Coaches vs. Cancer. The event raised over \$40,000.

Tom Keegan, a recent USBWA board member who spent 11 years as a columnist for the Lawrence, Kan., *Journal-World*, was named a columnist for the Boston Herald.

Lodge Notes

Kidney donor Downey is Most Courageous

By SHANNON RYAN

Taking a break from organizing a closet, Ericka Downey opened an article on her phone that detailed basketball coach Billy Gillispie's need for a kidney transplant.

The article moved Downey so much, she felt an intense need to help. At first, she shared on social media, hoping that someone who saw it would be compelled to donate.

"I got, like, seven retweets," she said.

She thought and prayed and talked to her husband. Then she logged onto the Mayo Clinic web site and registered herself as a potential kidney donor for Gillispie, a former head coach at UTEP, Texas A&M, Kentucky and Texas Tech. That was a Saturday. On Monday, she called the hospital eager to proceed.

In April, she underwent surgery to give one of her kidneys to a coach she had never met before her decision.

What was it about Gillispie's story that urged Downey to act so selflessly? Most of us see at least a story a day that's sad or troublesome and wish that the subject of the article somehow will find help. Then we move on, the story replaced in our minds with another heavy item of news or our own busy lives.

But Downey couldn't forget.

For that reason, Downey is the 2019 USBWA recipient of the Most Courageous Award.

Downey isn't sure exactly what motivated her. Some of it was the strong ties she feels to the college basketball community. Her husband Mark coached



Ericka Downey

at nine schools as an assistant or head coach before being hired as the head coach at Northeastern State in Tahlequah, Okla., in April 2017.

She said she also was moved by her faith. And she had seen what kidney failure can do to a person when her father-in-law died of renal disease after spending the final years of his life on dialysis.

"When I read the story, I felt a pull or a tug," she said. "We didn't know how far it would go. It was really just saying, yes, I feel like I need to do something."

A month after Downey read the Dallas Morning News story about Gillispie, they got in touch via text. An assistant coach had reached out to Downey after seeing her pleas for help for Gillispie in case she wasn't a match – or for anyone considering there are more than 100,000 people on a kidney waiting list often for a median wait time of 3.6 years according to the National Kidney Foundation.

Gillispie, now coaching at Ranger College in Texas, wanted to thank her. They began talking frequently. She found out on Feb. 19 that she was a match with Gillispie. More testing was needed, requiring a three-day stay at the Mayo Clinic, but all results showed she could donate to him.

"He was appreciative of my effort before the gift," Downey said. "(He would say,) 'I understand going through this for a loved one, a mom or dad, brother or sister. We're complete strangers. You don't even know me.' The basketball tie is what ties us together. It's hard to explain that to people who aren't in trenches."

The Downeys host an annual dinner at the Final Four. That's where she met Gillispie for the first time in San Antonio last year.

"It was emotional," she said. "It just felt like he's family. It was just meeting a long lost friend."

In late April 2018, they were back in Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic for the transplant. Her kidney worked well in Gillispie, who she said took a four-mile walk the first day after the transplant in the hospital.

Downey had planned to walk to his room after the surgeries. But her blood pressure dropped and she collapsed in the hallway. She said doctors told her the transplant surgery can be much harder on a donor, whose body is being weakened, than a recipient, whose body is being repaired in the process.

"I'm laying there defeated," she said. "You get in your head. 'Am I being soft? What's wrong with me? He's this hard-nosed basketball coach. What's he going to think of me?'"

She eventually got back to full strength in about a month and said she feels no limitations in life. "My life is as busy and hectic as before," Downey said.

After his recovery, Gillispie returned to coaching. The families have remained close, spending time together on Christmas Eve.

"Kentucky fans and Texas Tech fans don't have nice things to say about him," she said. "The best thing is the relationship I have with him and really seeing who he is. He's a good person and good man and really good basketball coach, too."

Downey hopes those who hear about her kidney donation will be moved to do the same. Just like she was the day she read the article about Gillispie.

"It's such a small price to pay to let someone live their best life," she said.

Villanova's Sheridan wins Katha Quinn Award

By SETH DAVIS

In 1994, Mike Sheridan was working for the monthly publication Eastern Basketball when he decided to author a story featuring the top programs on the East Coast. Hofstra, which had experienced an extended downturn, did not make Sheridan's article. So the school's recently hired basketball coach, an ambitious 33-year-old rookie named Jay Wright, sent Sheridan a friendly letter remarking upon the omission, and asking Sheridan to keep an eye on Wright's program in the future.

Today, that letter is stuck to a bulletin board in Sheridan's office at Villanova, where he serves as the school's assistant athletic director for communications. Wright, of course, is now the head coach at Villanova. Every time he walks into Sheridan's office, he sees that letter.

"It's kind of a running joke we have," Sheridan said. "His point was that it helped them. He was able to bring my article to his AD and say, 'Eastern Basketball doesn't know we exist.'"

Sheridan worked for 14 years at Eastern Basketball and its parent publication, Basketball Times, before coming to Villanova in 1998. The lessons he learned during that period were invaluable as he navigated the welcome but considerable challenges that came with being at a program that has won two NCAA championships in the last three years. Sheri-



Mike Sheridan

dan's patience, diligence, helpfulness and sunny personality have earned him the USBWA's Katha Quinn Award, which is given annually in recognition for the recipient's work in serving the media.

Sheridan was always a basketball fan while growing up in Monsey, N.Y. He had the fortune to be a student at Fordham as its program was just about to experience a rebirth under coach Tom Penders. After graduating from Fordham's communications program, Sheridan was scooped up by Basketball Times, which was run by publisher/editor Larry Donald out of its Troy, Mich., headquarters.

Like everyone else who worked at Basketball Times (including Dan Wetzel, now the lead columnist at Yahoo sports), Sheridan's responsibilities included writing, editing, design, and even ad sales from time to time. The desire to move closer to his East Coast roots and experience other areas of sports led Sheridan to Villanova in the summer of 1998, but he has never totally untethered himself from his writers' roots.

"I've always tried to keep those days in mind," he said. "I think it gave me an appreciation for some of the challenges that people face in this business."

When Sheridan learned he had won this award, one of the first things he thought about was the trip he took in December 1984 to St. John's, where Katha

Quinn, the school's late sports information director, helped him report a story on the Chris Mullin-led team that eventually reached the Final Four.

The award is named after Quinn, who as the sports information director at St. John's was recognized for supervising the basketball venue during the 1987 Pan American Games at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis. Earlier that year, she was diagnosed with liver cancer, but she refused to allow her condition to affect her commitment. Quinn continued her work at St. John's until less than a month before her passing in March 1989, one day before her birthday, at the age of 35.

Sheridan also thought about Donald, a former USBWA president who passed away in 2000 at the age of 55.

"He just loved being a part of the USBWA," Sheridan said.

Sheridan has taken a remarkable and unique journey from ink-stained scribe to assistant AD, but in many ways, he remains true to the principles he held when he got out of Fordham. That gives him a special appreciation for what he has experienced the last few years.

"I know this award wouldn't be possible without the success of Villanova and also the way Jay is with the media," he said. "To have a front row seat to two championships, and to interact with some of the athletes and everyone else who was a part of that, it's just been an incredible experience. I knew when I came here that I was going into a good situation, and that has never changed."