

Change a common denominator among writers of all ages

John Wooden's zone press and Dean Smith's Four Corners became fixtures on the strategy map, but times and distances changed the map.

In an age of shot clocks and 3-pointers, the driveway bomber and summer league dunker rule the talent pool. Some nights, the toughest strategic call is choosing whether to go over or under picks against certain shooters at the 3-point line.

The sportswriting game has also changed, the rate calculated by squaring each writer's hyperbole level and multiplying 2X for each wireless crisis.

Dick "Hoops" Weiss of the *New York Daily News* remembers the College Park, Md., practices during his first Final Four in 1970. Wooden walked over to the stands and held court with about 25 reporters – no blue curtain, no moderator, no microphone caddy, no briefing book of interview rules, no restrictions on locker rooms.

"You didn't feel like you were at the Super Bowl," Weiss said. "Coaches were making the same money as writers. Everybody felt like they were on the same page. People did it because they liked it. Players stayed four years, so you'd have intelligent kids who could make some life observations that today you don't have the luxury of, because they don't have many life experiences before they leave. It's an AAU generation, and I think if you're going to cover this sport, you'd better know the players when they come because they're going to be gone in two years."

Over the past decade, the digital revolution altered the media approach even faster, flooding the profession

with devices, platforms and insatiable info appetites. The evolution of event coverage accelerated. The mix seems wildly different on the other side of Print Street and online, cackling with tweets (some quite antisocial) and crackling with fresh numbers from novel angles.

Luke Winn, who began covering college basketball for SI.com in 2005, can measure a coach's touts about his alleged stopper by studying game tapes and using Microsoft Excel database to quantify defensive prowess. Winn considers advanced stats a natural extension of the similar baseball movement.

"I've really tried to push this stuff over the past five years, not because I hate the old forms of reporting but because I think there's a lot of truth in analytics," Winn said. "Tempo-free stats help us understand why certain teams excel or struggle. While I know there are some writers who mock the overuse of this stuff, I think it's a means for us to be smarter as journalists. If a coach says his team is playing up-tempo, rather than just taking his word for it, we can now check exactly how fast they play in comparison to their peers."

Winn balances the stat-freak change-up with tradi-

tional long-feature fastballs in *Sports Illustrated*. He considers sites such as grantland.com and longreads.com evidence of hunger for extensive narratives.

"The classic gamer is fading, being replaced by analysis pieces or hybrid features/columns, but there's still demand for good storytelling," Winn said.

In the newspaper world, the emergence of social-media opinion tracks even engulfed Weiss, the master of East Coach shuttles long before NASA got into the business. "I'm doing twice the work for the same money," Weiss estimates, "but I'm not saying that's a bad thing in the here and now."

The texture of basketball coverage has changed because new media convey the details immediately.

"I think intelligent opinion can overcome a lot of

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Most Courageous honors go to Summitt, Florida State's James

By Dana O'Neil

One stood up for his country.

The other stood up for herself.

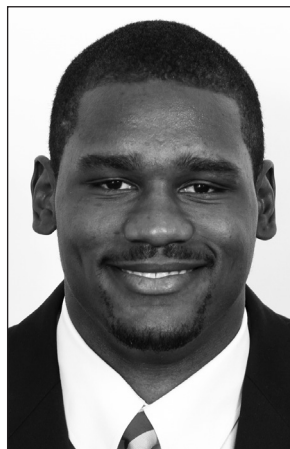
Both, however, stood tall, not just defining courage but exemplifying it.

This year, the USBWA honors Florida State's Bernard James and University of Tennessee coach Pat Summitt as recipients of the 2012 Most Courageous Awards, two people who defined the word differently but lived it fully.

James is the most unconventional of high school dropouts, a kid who grew disenchanted with the social hierarchy of school yet would head to Barnes & Noble to read on the days that he cut.

After receiving his GED, he followed footsteps of his stepfather, a career military man, and at the age of 17, James enlisted in the Air Force.

It is one thing, of course, to join up when the military offers a chance to simply see the world. It is another to sign on when the United States is at war. James went in with eyes wide open, nonplussed when he was deployed to the Middle East, stopping in Qatar and Iraq. There he witnessed both the terrifying realities of war – a mortar round landed just 75 feet from him, knocking him



Bernard James

off of his feet – and the simmering seeds of hate directed at Americans abroad.

Armed with nothing more than pepper spray and rubber bullets, James served as a prison guard, with nothing more than a fence between him and the terrorists he was charged with containing.

"You get a real clear view that there are people out there who want to hurt you just because you're an Amer-



Pat Summitt

ican," James told *Basketball Times*. "That was big to me and it gave me a much greater appreciation for what we have here."

The grand plan wasn't terribly grand. James figured the military life would be his for eternity, a 20-year commitment that would get him through adulthood.

Like it so often does, life had a different plan. Drafted to the intramural basketball team, James partnered a five-inch growth spurt with his newfound confidence and found a new direction. With a renewed purpose, James pursued basketball, rising up the military basketball ranks to the Air Force all-star team.

James turned enough heads through the international competition that he changed course, enrolling at Tallahassee Community College so that he could transition to Division I as a full qualifier.

A year later, James arrived at Florida State, a literal man among boys in both age (he's now 26) and life experiences.

Pat Summitt has experienced life more fully than most of us. With more wins than any other coach in basketball history – man or woman – and eight national titles, Summitt has achieved unparalleled success yet has

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Most Courageous Award presented for 35th time

Joe Mitch
 USBWA
 Executive Director



This year marks the 35th time the USBWA has presented its Most Courageous Award, which ranks as the third-oldest award in the USBWA’s 56-year history. The two longest are the association’s national player and coach of the year awards.

First presented in 1978, the Most Courageous Award has honored individuals in college basketball who have shown extraordinary courage in the face of adversity and provided an inspiration by overcoming a physical handicap or injury or living through a hardship.

Originally, only one award was presented each year, but since 2010, the USBWA has selected both a male and female recipient annually.

The award was created by former president and later executive director Steve Guback. It has remained a highlight of the USBWA’s annual awards breakfast on the morning of the men’s and women’s national title games.

“I was elected president of the USBWA and wanted the organization to expand its horizons,” Guback said. “I was looking for ways to get the membership more involved.

“I was also a member of the Pro Football Writers of America and they had a courage award that was lingering. I thought it was a good idea and that we could do better. So we adopted it and did better – as 35 years and the list of recipients shows.”

The first award winner was John Kratzer, a cancer victim who played basketball at William & Mary.

That was followed in 1979 when a one-armed player named Bill Wanstrath at Batesville High School in Indiana was selected. The next year, in 1980, another cancer victim was chosen – Niagara’s Phi Scaffidi.

It was in 1981 that the award took off and began to receive national recognition.

Mark Alcorn, a transfer from Saint Louis University who was a walk-on at LSU, was the recipient that season. He was diagnosed with cancer during the season and, although seldom-used, he came back to play for the Tigers after beginning cancer treatment.

The president of the USBWA at the time – Bill Brill of the *Roanoke Times & World News* – presented Alcorn with the courage award at the USBWA’s annual awards breakfast. The entire LSU team and coach Dale Brown were in the audience to be there for their teammate. A few hours later, those same LSU players played in the consolation game at the NCAA Final Four in Philadelphia.

“Even cynical reporters were moved by the sight of all the Tigers leading the applause for their stricken teammate,” wrote past USBWA president John Feinstein in

his book, *The Last Dance. Behind the Scenes at the Final Four*. Alcorn died a few months after receiving his award, on Valentine’s Day.

There have been winners who have had to learn to live with a handicap: Virginia Tech’s Rayne DuBose (2003), who lost parts of all four limbs due to a spinal cord bacterial infection; South Carolina’s James Bradley (2002), deaf since he was 18 months old; Landon Turner (1989), paralyzed from a car accident a few months after leading the Indiana Hoosiers to a national championship; Mike Sutton (2006), current Tennessee Tech coach who continued to coach from a wheelchair while battling the paralyzing effects of Guillain-Barre Syndrome; and Tiffara Steward (2010) who at 4-foot-6 was thought to be shortest collegiate player ever and battled multiple permanent disabilities including blindness in one eye and 50 percent hearing

USBWA NCAA Final Four Schedule of Events

Men’s			
Thursday, March 29	8:30 a.m.	Sportswriting Seminar	New Orleans Marriott
Friday, March 30	8 a.m.	USBWA College Basketball Awards Breakfast	New Orleans Marriott
Saturday, March 31	8 a.m.	NCAA Basketball Committee Meeting/USBWA Board Meeting	New Orleans Marriott
Monday, April 2	9 a.m.	USBWA Annual Business Meeting and Breakfast	New Orleans Marriott
Women’s			
Tuesday, April 3	9 a.m.	USBWA Awards Breakfast	Denver Hyatt Regency

loss while playing at Farmingdale (N.Y.) College.

Some recipients have had to deal with bigotry or racial hatred. Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir, the 2011 women’s award winner, was believed to be the first Muslim woman to play in Division I with her arms and hair covered during games for Memphis.

Former Arkansas coach Nolan Richardson spoke of the racial prejudice he faced while growing up and then having to deal with the death of his daughter due to leukemia when he was coaching. Richardson openly wept at the dais while accepting the award on the morning his team played for the national championship that evening in 1995.

The Most Courageous Award is one of the most coveted awards given by the USBWA. This year’s recipients – Tennessee coach Pat Summitt and Florida State’s Bernard James – follow in a long line of recipients who have been honored for the courage they’ve shown dealing with what life has brought them.

We thank Steve Guback for making this award happen over three decades ago.

Washington Post's Yanda is 2012 Rising Star winner

Steve Yanda's road to the USBWA's Rising Star Award has sent him crisscrossing the United States, to a foreign country and to the sharp end of a former Notre Dame forward's chin.

Yanda, 24, who covers Virginia for the *Washington Post*, is the third recipient of the honor given to a member of the USBWA who is under 30 and has distinguished himself in our profession. Past winners include Dan Wolken (then of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*) and Kevin Armstrong of the *New York Daily News*.

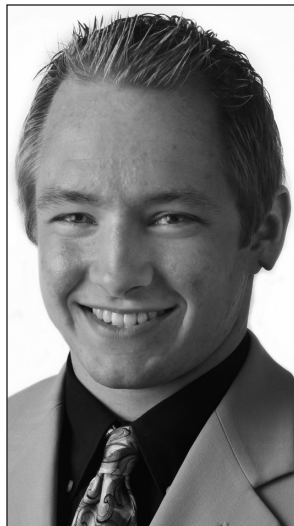
Yanda has also covered Maryland for the Post and helped with coverage of Gary Williams' retirement and the search for his successor.

Yanda also teamed with Eric Prisbell to place second in the APSE writing contest in project reporting (over 250,000 circulation) for a three-part series on Williams' recruiting missteps since winning the Terrapins' national title run in 2002.

They also teamed to break a story last fall that Michael Beasley had filed a civil suit that contended that Bell Sports Incorporated President Joel Bell bankrolled Curtis Malone's nationally recognized DC Assault summer basketball program and that, in return, Malone steered Beasley to Bell for professional representation. Yanda later got Gregory M. Holloway, the chairman of a D.C.-based certified public accounting and consulting firm, to admit that he provided Beasley and his mother with financial benefits and a car while Beasley played at Kansas State.

"Steve is a very aggressive, fearless reporter, a tireless worker," Prisbell said. "From working closely with him on a variety of stories, I can say that his reporting instincts, ability to read individuals and ability to cultivate relationships with sources are well beyond most others his age."

"He's also versatile. He's covered his share of the summer AAU scene as well as athletic department budget issues. And because of his well-placed sources, he is used quite often anytime we have coaching searches here. He contributed important news and leads in the stories involving the firing of Ralph Friedgen, the hiring of Randy Edsall and the hiring of Mark Turgeon, just to name a few significant ones. We would not have been



Steve Yanda

as competitive on those stories without Steve's work."

When Virginia failed to make last season's NCAA Tournament, Yanda covered VCU's Final Four run and wrote on Shaka Smart's personal history and some of the racial tensions that Smart encountered while growing up.

Also in 2009, Yanda was sent to Venezuela to spend five days with Maryland star Greivis Vazquez in Vazquez's native homeland for a story in *Washington Post Magazine*.

That wouldn't be the wildest trip of Yanda's career. In November 2010, he went on a two-week road trip that began on Nov. 17 with a trip from D.C. to Palo Alto, Calif., where he reported on a story

on the sons of former Washington lobbyist Bill Phillips and covered the Virginia men's basketball team's game at Stanford the next night. On Nov. 19, he flew to Boston to cover the Virginia football team's game at Boston College. On Nov. 21, he flew to Hawaii to cover Virginia in the Maui Invitational over the next four days. He returned to D.C. on Nov. 25, and that night his car was broken into and his backpack that included his recorder, computer and notes was stolen. On Nov. 26, his car window, tape recorder, notebook and computer were replaced and he headed to Blacksburg, Va., for the Virginia-Virginia Tech football game. He drove back to D.C. on Nov. 28 and flew on Nov. 29 to Minneapolis for Virginia's ACC/Big Ten challenge game at Minnesota. He returned to D.C. the following day.

"It was totally exhausting," Yanda said, "and totally awesome."

Finally, former Rising Star winner Armstrong reports that the 5-foot-5 Yanda is willing to play hurt.

"He also survived an elbow from former Notre Dame forward Zach Hillesland (who's 6-9) during a pickup game at the Final Four in Indy," Armstrong said. "Yanda needed stitches under the chin but still managed to write his gamer."

Other Rising Star nominees included 16-year-old sports broadcaster Joey Brander; Eamonn Brennan of ESPN.com; Michael Cohen of the *Daily Orange*; Baxter Holmes of the *Los Angeles Times*; Brendan F. Quinn of Nooga.com; Aaron Smith of the *Kentucky Kernel*; and Jonathan Tannenwald of Philly.com.

Lenox Rawlings

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that," Weiss said. "A lot more people want to know what you think of the event as opposed to just reporting the score. If you reiterate what people just saw on television, they're going to lose interest."

In every seismic change, especially during economic convulsions, unintended consequences bury treasures along with outmoded trash. ESPN and other cable companies made college basketball a national sport from early November to early April, increasing the emphasis on elite teams.

Winn sees the impact at the coverage level, with ESPN.com and other top web sites "almost carpet-bombing the nation with coverage. Whereas I feel like once you drop down from the major teams, coverage is thinning out at the local level, probably because newspapers don't have

the resources to commit to, say, a full-time beat guy for a decent mid-major."

Weiss suspects that schedule front-loading and cable saturation could turn NCAA basketball into a tournament-only sport.

"Maybe college fans in other parts of the country feel differently, but with sports editors in the Northeast corridor, it is rapidly becoming a six-week sport, and not in a good way," Weiss said. "The way college football now ends Jan. 10 with the BCS game, if you're in the Northeast and, God forbid, you have an NFL team in the playoffs, there is no space. I'm worried that the sports editors are going to say this is not a three-month sport."

That concern fits the pattern. Lost somewhere in the past four decades is the precise moment when "Hoops" Weiss first worried that basketball was anything less than a 12-month sport.

Mentors are critical for the next generation

By Kevin Armstrong
New York Daily News

On March 10, 2008, a Monday, the MAAC championship game, played between Siena and Rider inside the Times-Union Center of Albany, N.Y., distracted attention from the capital city's biggest news: revelations of Eliot Spitzer's relations with a hooker. I listened to the lurid allegations in my car as I drove north from Manhattan, then parked in a garage across from the arena. March Madness, in a most unlikely way, had started.

Once inside, I met with Pete Thamel of the *New York Times* and agreed to give him a ride back to Manhattan at game's end in order to watch the Big East tournament's beginning the next day. The Saints, behind 21 points from birthday boy Tay Fisher, ran the Broncs off the floor; Thamel and I filed our reports, then walked to the garage. It was locked. No access until 6 a.m. when it re-opened. I failed to read the sign that states closing time is one hour after the game concluded, and now had no room, but Thamel had yet to check out of his down the block. His chair-sized couch would be my place of rest.

It was not the first time Thamel assisted me, and would not be the last. Whether opening his room or Rolodex, he has served as a mentor during my development as a reporter, under deadline and over beers with Maurice the bartender in Manhattan. His reporting, both by enterprising and investigative means, challenges those competing with him, building storylines from the ground up, but his friendship extends beyond that.

The true value of a mentor can be immeasurable. Since first writing for my school paper, *The Heights*, at Boston College in 2002, mentors offered assuring hands down meandering paths. I collect them like guideposts, knowledgeable of the roads they've covered and ones I will likely follow. I've been lucky enough to learn at the side of many, beginning with former *Boston Globe* managing editor Tom Mulvoy and alongside *Sports Illustrated's* team of Luke Winn, Tim Layden and B.J. Schecter. Their examples provide models for success.

They all complement each other. Mulvoy, an understated newspaperman, marked Latin notes in his writers' margins, pushing them to improve while allowing them the space to learn. Winn, an elegant writer with a new-age comprehension of statistics and endless interest in the international aspects of the game, repeatedly challenges other writers to think wider and deeper about issues in the game. Layden, lastly, burns the candle on both ends better than anyone I know, capable of balancing a plethora of responsibilities while writing each story as if it is the sole assignment he has on his plate.

The focus is forever on what's next in reporting, but the most valuable lessons lie in what has been written and reported in the past, particularly now that so much is available in writers' archives.

I continue to study long-form features, exhaustive projects and nuanced reports.

Study the people who put out the product as well. Better yet, befriend them.

Their voices provide you with needed advice. Their generosity can grease the rails for the next generation as well.

(Armstrong is the 2011 winner of the Rising Star Award.)

Louisville's Kenny Klein wins Katha Quinn Award

By Pat Forde

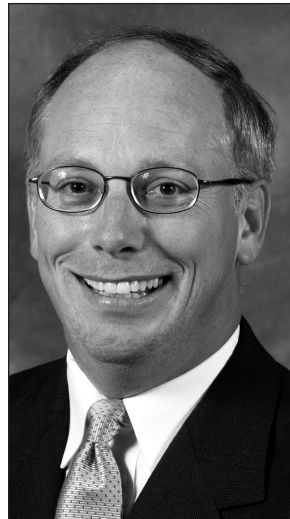
He's the last one out. Every game.

When the Louisville Cardinals play home games, the final person to leave the media work room is Kenny Klein. He's the Senior Associate Athletic Director of Media Relations at the school, and has been the Louisville basketball media contact for 29 years. He is the very deserving 2012 winner of the USBWA's Katha Quinn Award, given annually to someone in college basketball who has performed a special service to the media who cover the sport.

Kenny could go home hours earlier if he wanted to. His peers around the country do, leaving for dinner or a night out or a good night's sleep. They may leave an assistant around to answer any reporters' questions that come up – or not. They may leave nobody but the janitors. Just about every reporter has a story or two about being locked in a building after a game while the sports information department is long gone.

That doesn't happen on Kenny's conscientious watch. He's like the Marines – no one is left behind. (Though there may be a few dead soldiers left behind. Rare is the postgame when Kenny doesn't offer a beer to the writers as they work.)

Most everyone has gotten The New York Times treatment from Kenny over the years.



Kenny Klein

The willingness to stay – game after game, year after year – speaks to Kenny's professionalism and dedication to the job. In deliberations for this award the USBWA board heard from writers across the country, at media outlets

large and small, who vouched for Kenny's work. One, who had been at an obscure publication but covered a game at Louisville, said Kenny treated him like he was from *The New York Times*.

Most everyone has gotten *The New York Times* treatment from Kenny over the years, whether it was in the cramped press room at Freedom Hall or his opulent current digs at the KFC Yum! Center.

Fairness is a trademark of the Kenny Klein experience. When I worked for *The (Louisville) Courier-Journal* in the 1990s, I was involved in a long and at times very contentious investigation of the Louisville basketball program. Kenny and I had a few disagreements during the process, but it never prevented him from treating me in a thoroughly professional manner. Unlike some media-relations directors, there were no attempts at retribution by withholding access, pulling credentials or punitive seat assignments. That may have disappointed some Louisville fans at the time, but it earned Kenny the respect of everyone at the *Courier-Journal*.

In one respect, Kenny has lived a lucky professional life – he's worked with exactly two head coaches. The first was Denny Crum, a Hall of Famer and winner of two national titles, whose laid-back relationship with the media probably helped make Kenny's job easier. The second is Rick Pitino, who is also very accessible but in higher demand. Both men have been smart in one way: they trusted Kenny and he rarely, if ever, steered them wrong.

While Kenny's first priority is serving the university, he's also served the media ably. Many reporters can tell stories of asking to get Pitino on the phone in a hurry to react to news – and Kenny has made it happen. Good luck trying that with Mike Krzyzewski.

Beyond his work at Louisville, Kenny has been a driving force in the media-relations effort at the last 27 Final Fours – from statistics to the seating chart to overall game logistics, he has a hand in it. You might also see his bespectacled face working media relations at the Kentucky Derby, or when the Ryder Cup or PGA Championships have been played in Louisville.

He's a father, husband, Parrothead and a remarkably bad dancer. (We won't even get into the broken kneecap suffered on the dance floor of a Memphis hotel the night before Louisville played in the Liberty Bowl one year.) He's a friend to dozens of former Louisville players who will give him warm greetings when they return from around the globe to watch their former team play. He's a vital cog in an athletic department that has grown exponentially during his time there.

And, yes, he's been good to the media as well. For that, we salute him as the 2012 Katha Quinn winner.

USBWA to honor Dave Gavitt at Monday morning breakfast

The late Dave Gavitt will be honored at the USBWA's annual Monday morning breakfast for being a friend of the media and the USBWA as well as a basketball visionary.

In 1988, the group that governed USA basketball announced that the U.S. Olympic basketball trials would be closed to the media. Gavitt's intervention led directly to a pool arrangement that gave reporters rotating access to the trials, which was a huge improvement over the initial plan.

Gavitt also allowed far more open coverage of the 1992 Dream Team that he helped compile for the Barcelona Olympics.

As chair of the NCAA tournament selection committee from 1982-84, Gavitt took the lead in providing the media with information about the selection and seeding process at a time when the NCAA was far more secretive about such details.

Gavitt also was extremely accessible during his term from 1979-90 as commissioner of the Big East Conference, which he founded.

In a column, Bob Ryan of the *Boston Globe* recalled a tale of Gavitt's hospitality:

"Phoenix Suns honcho Jerry Colangelo was there to scout Tony Hanson, as I recall. I was on hand to cover the Providence-Connecticut game.

"When it was over, Dave Gavitt, then in the middle of his memorable tenure as coach of the Providence Friars, said, 'Come on back to the house. I'll fix us something to eat. I used to be a short-order cook in Peterborough, N.H.'

"Sounded good to us.

"We arrived at the house, but there was a little problem. The coach had forgotten his keys. He rang the bell, or banged on the door, or whatever, and before long, Julie Gavitt came shuffling out in her bathrobe and slippers. She let us in, and the look on her face said, 'I've been here before.'

"Chef Gavitt delivered eggs, bacon, and toast, as promised, and it was pretty good. But the food was secondary to the basketball talk. Dave Gavitt was always good for great basketball talk."

Most Courageous

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never sacrificed her own dignity or grace.

She is fierce and tough, yet respected and loved.

She's also never been afraid of a fight, which is why, when she was diagnosed with early onset dementia, Summitt did what she always does – she attacked it head-on.

"It is what it is," she told the *Washington Post*. "I've got to face it."

She could have faced it privately, of course. If Summitt had simply told her assistants and perhaps quietly delegated some of her responsibilities to them, no one would have been the wiser.

Ducking and hiding are not in Summitt's genes, and

so she took her battle public, confronting her own fears and reminding others they are not alone.

It is a bold and daring move, especially in a profession where the opposition is always looking for an edge or digging for a weakness. If the Lady Vols lose, certainly someone will attribute it to Summitt's illness.

But buoyed by the unfailing support of her administration, Summitt resolved to keep coaching for as long as she's able.

Those who know her well were hardly surprised.

"Everyone has always wanted to know what Pat's really like," her longtime assistant Mickie DeMoss told the *Post*. "The word I've always used is 'resolve.' Pat has more resolve than any one I've ever known. She has

a deep, deep inner strength."

That inner strength has now been pushed outward, with Summitt serving as an inspiration for others suffering from Alzheimer's. Opposing teams now sport We Back Pat T-shirts on the benches, raising awareness for Alzheimer's research.

The most courageous thing the coach did, however, was walk into the locker room and explain her diagnosis to her players. A woman who has spent a lifetime doling out life lessons amid the scribbles of X's and O's offered the most important advice of all.

"I just want them to understand that this is what I'm going through, but you don't quit living," she told the *Post*. "You keep going."