

Courtside seats safe for now, but for all right reasons?

I've been a member of the U.S. Basketball Writers for at least 15 years. I've served as president of the organization for less than a month.

For as long as I've been a member or as long as I've been the president, one topic has always wiggled its way to the top of the USBWA agenda: What is the status of our courtside seats at the NCAA Final Four?

Funny you should ask. A number of us asked five members of the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee who were kind enough to meet with us for several hours during breakfast at the New Orleans Hyatt on April 4, the morning before the NCAA Final Four tipped off.

I believe I can summarize the thoughts expressed by committee member Bob Bowsby, athletics director at the University of Iowa, this way:

We're safe, but not secure.

In other words, the status quo rules. For now.

Bowsby said that while the committee continued to support courtside seating for the media, he also said that the committee was receiving increasing pressure from university presidents as well as from CBS Sports to move the print media from its traditional location. And, at the Louisiana Superdome, our location was three rows on the side of the floor across from the team benches, plus an additional two rows behind those benches.

Perhaps the most alarming thing Bowsby said was that one reason the writers have remained at courtside is

that nobody has created another spot that is superior logistically.

Which is not exactly saying something like what I had in mind: "We respect the heck out of the job that writers and newspapers perform during the regular season as well as the post-season tournaments.

"Although CBS is the network that carries the tournament into the homes of our TV viewers (and pays a remarkable sum of money to do it), it is the print media that serves as the true eyes and ears of all of our basketball fans for our 300-plus Division I teams.

"You're the folks who cover the teams all year, from summer recruiting through the first days of October practice through holiday tournaments through conference play through the dog days of late February through the conference tournaments and all the way through all three weekends of the NCAA Tournament.

"You're the folks who are always there, reporting on the sprained ankles as well as the buzzer beaters. When Keith Bogans twists his ankle in the regional semifinals, you're the ones who cover it from the medical angle, the substitute angle and the opposing angle. Sometimes we're blown away by the passion of your coverage during the tournament with all the charts and graphs and match-up boxes and statistics.

"You're the folks who bring us all the up-close flavor of the individual match-ups. And one reason you can do it so well is you're sitting right there where you

can smell the action. You told us about the great time Gerry McNamara of Syracuse and T. J. Ford of Texas had talking to each other through every dribble of their national semifinal game. Nothing trashy. They were just having fun. You're the ones who described how incredibly fast Kansas moved the ball downcourt for layups against Marquette. You told us how they did that.

"You're the ones who noticed the amazing ovation that former UCLA coach John Wooden received when he stood up and walked out of the championship game. CBS didn't catch that. You're the ones who captured the prolonged and heartfelt embrace that Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim and Kansas coach Roy Williams shared after the game.

"Because of you, there will always be a history of the huge pile of Syracuse players at the end of the game, punctuated by Kueth Duany jumping on the very top.

"CBS has taken this tournament coast to coast, enhancing the tradition established by NBC more than 20 years ago. CBS does remarkable work. But so do you print folks.

"Long ago, well before the Final Four created its place as the second-most loved sports event on the calendar, it was the writers who embraced the NCAA Tournament, filing their colorful stories from Kansas City, Freedom Hall in Louisville, Cole Fieldhouse at Maryland and other historic college basketball addresses.

"And now the USBWA has only enhanced that tradition. One of the highlights of Final Four weekend is always the USBWA breakfast the morning of the championship game, when the writers honor their Most Courageous Player as well as a top person in the sports information business.

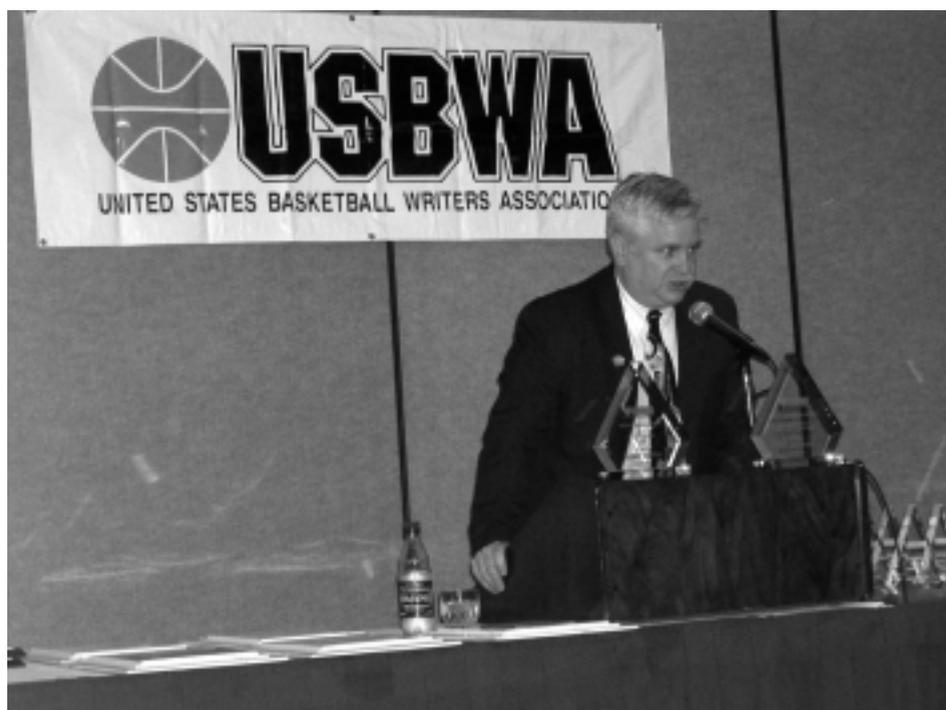
"I defy anybody to attend one of those breakfasts and not leave feeling better about the game. It's a reminder of how much the writers truly care about the game. And good luck trying to walk out of that breakfast with a dry eye."

The writers have always been there. And they're always going to be there covering the Final Four – as well as the entire college basketball season. Let's hope the committee remembers that courtside will always be the place we can do our best work for the readers who depend upon us to serve as their eyes as well as their ears.

President's Column

By **RICK BOZICH**

Louisville Courier Journal



Steve Richardson presides over the USBWA for the final time.

Emotional awards program caps a great season

The USBWA concluded one of its best years ever as an association with an awards program at this year's NCAA men's Final Four in New Orleans that will be remembered for many years to come.

The couple hundred people who attended the breakfast at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on the morning of the national championship game most certainly were moved by the remarks they heard from various speakers, including those who received awards from the USBWA.

Inspiring stories were told on two fronts. First, Jack Watkins, assistant commissioner for media relations with the Missouri Valley Conference, gave an emotional speech about his daughter Kate, born prematurely with a brain, eye and muscle disability and was only three feet long and weighed 32 pounds when she died at the age of 6 last April.

Yet, despite the strain he and his wife Genny faced caring for a disabled child, Watkins continued to do his job for the conference at a high level and in a fashion that

inspired those who knew him.

And it was for this reason that the USBWA wanted to honor Watkins and present him with this year's Katha Quinn Award for service to the media and lifetime inspiration. When he was introduced by former USBWA president Steve Wieberg of USA Today at the breakfast, Watkins received a standing ovation.

"Jack embodies the spirit of Katha and what this award stands for," said Wieberg, who nominated Watkins for the award, named after the late St. John's University sports information director who waged a personal battle with cancer before passing away in 1988.

Later in the program, the human spirit was again recognized when the USBWA honored Virginia Tech women's basketball player Rayna DuBose with the Most Courageous Award. DuBose was a freshman at Tech last season when she was stricken with a rare brain and spinal cord bacterial infection that led to her losing parts of all four of her limbs. She has since been fitted with prosthetics on each limb.

DuBose, too, was given a standing ovation when introduced by her coach Bonnie Henrickson, whose words of love and admiration for her former player moved many of those in attendance to tears. A short video produced by CBS, which aired on the network during the Final Four weekend, also told Rayna's story.

Earlier, the USBWA inducted two new members into the Hall of Fame – Bill Jauss of the Chicago Tribune and Jim O'Brien of Street & Smith's Basketball Magazine. This Hall of Fame honor, recognizing those in the profession for their career achievements, has become a highlight of the awards breakfast and is an obvious source of pride for the inductees. That was quite evident in both Jauss and O'Brien's acceptance speeches, each showing a life-long passion for their jobs and the sports journalism profession.

O'Brien remains active in civic functions in Pittsburgh and last year was named editor emeritus of Street & Smith's Basketball, generally regarded as setting the standard for basketball annuals in the country.

Jauss continues to write sports for the Chicago Tribune after nearly 50 years in the business. He was scheduled to cover the NCAA Women's Final Four in Atlanta, but the Tribune assigned him to cover the men's Final Four, instead, when his editors learned that he was to be honored by the USBWA in New Orleans.

Also at the breakfast, the USBWA recognized a former president for his work helping sportswriters to do their jobs after leaving the sports-writing profession to start a new career in administration and public relations. The USBWA honored Bill Benner, USBWA president in 1998-99, and his brother David for their efforts handling press operations for the World Basketball Championships in Indianapolis last summer. Bill left the Indianapolis Star a couple years

ago as a sports columnist to become vice president of communications for the Indiana Sports Federation. David is PR director for the Indiana Pacers.

Finally, the USBWA presented its player and coach of the year awards. For the first time in recent memory, both recipients were in attendance to pick up their trophies. Tubby Smith of Kentucky received the Henry Iba Coach of the Year Award, and David West of Xavier the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year Trophy.

The USBWA's sports-writing seminar for students, held annually at the site of the NCAA Final Four, was also

The USBWA awards program will be remembered for many years to come. Those who attended the breakfast most certainly were moved by the various speakers' remarks.

a huge success. Some 75 college and high school students from the New Orleans area attended the seminar, hosted by Loyola University.

Representing the USBWA were board member Lee Feinswog of Baton Rouge and past presidents Mike DeCourcy of The Sporting News, Malcolm Moran of USA Today and Blair Kerkhoff of the Kansas City Star. Peter Finney, columnist for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, served as moderator.

The NCAA, through the cooperation of media director Bill Hancock, provided the students with press passes to cover the NCAA's Hoop City, the Friday practices and press conferences for the four Final Four teams and the press conference of NCAA President Miles Brand. Andy Gerken of the NABC granted passes to cover the coaches' all-star game with the Harlem Globetrotters. One student also was given a credential by the NCAA for the championship game Monday night. Students were asked to submit their stories in a writing contest, with three winners selected to receive a \$1000 scholarship each from the USBWA.

I want to thank friend and colleague Steve Richardson of the Dallas Morning News for serving as USBWA president this past year. "Tiger," as he is affectionately known in the business (he is an alum of the University of Missouri Tigers), doubled as president and executive director of the Football Writers Association of America, no easy task considering the demands that come with one writers' organization, let alone two of them. A job well done, Steve!

Executive Director

BY JOE MITCH
MVC



The United States Basketball Writers Association

1818 Chouteau Avenue

St. Louis, Mo. 63103

Visit us at: www.usbwa.com

314-421-0339

Fax: 314-421-3505 Fax: 314-421-6120

PRESIDENT

Rick Bozich

Louisville Courier-Journal

Office: 502-582-4650 Home: 812-944-5206

Fax: 502-582-7186

email: bozichra@aol.com

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Robyn Norwood

Los Angeles Times

Office: 213-237-7145 Home: 562-433-3314

Fax: 562-494-2627

email: robyn.norwood@latimes.com

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Tony Barnhart

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Office: 404-285-2147 Home: 770-399-5204

Fax: 770-352-9242

email: tbarnhart@mindspring.com

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Joe Mitch

Missouri Valley Conference

Office: 314-421-0339 Home: 314-777-9113

Fax: 314-421-3505

email: mitch@mvc.org

TIPOFF EDITOR

John Akers

Basketball Times

Office: 612-825-6378 Home: 612-823-3188

Fax: 612-825-6378

email: hoopgroup@aol.com

Reporters have responsibility to ask the tough question

About 100 years ago, when I was a young reporter at the Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record, one of my mentors, Irwin Smallwood, gave me three journalism rules to live by:

1. If you're writing about a horse race, then bring on the &^%\$# horse. In other words, get to the point.
2. Never be cynical, but *always* be skeptical. It takes no talent at all to be cynical.
3. A good reporter asks questions to obtain information, not a reaction. Good information lasts forever. A reaction lasts about one news cycle.

I thought about Irwin when I got back from the Final Four and finally had a chance to watch the interview between Kansas coach Roy Williams and CBS reporter Bonnie Bernstein.

Bonnie is a good reporter and was faced with a situation that is familiar to all of us: Having to ask a coach a tough question after a difficult loss.

Kansas had just lost a close game for the national championship, but the whole world knew that it was very possible that Williams had just coached his last game for the Jayhawks. All during the Final Four, Roy made it clear that he did not want to discuss reports that he was the leading candidate to be the next coach at North Carolina. For the most part, the media in New Orleans respected his wishes.

But as soon as the national championship game was over, the dynamic changed. Yes, it was an uncomfortable and emotional situation for Williams. Yes, it was an

uncomfortable position for the reporter. Okay, so everybody's uncomfortable. You *still* have to ask the question.

Roy did not handle the question well and let his emotions get the better of him. He used the word "insensitive" before throwing out the "S" word in front of Bernstein and a national TV audience. He knows better.

Roy was coming from a place that many coaches feel they have a right to occupy: That is to pre-empt any question by simply stating in advance that he doesn't want to answer it.

At times like that, the coach, or his handlers, must be gently reminded that in this process, everybody has a role to play and everybody *must* be free to play their assigned roles.

The coach is free to answer or not answer any question that is put before him. He is free to say "Yes," "No," or "It's

none of your damned business."

Likewise, the reporter has to be free to ask the tough question. Once it becomes clear that there will be no response, the reporter can and probably should back off. But the initial effort has to be made. The coach's decision not to answer a question has to be put on the record.

Now, does this mean that we, as reporters, should not be sensitive to the pain and disappointment that Williams was feeling at that moment? Of course not.

Off the air, Bernstein let Williams know the question was coming, as a good reporter should. You don't blind-side a guy in that kind of situation.

Some of my television friends would argue that Roy's emotional reaction *was* the news. On that, we will simply have to agree to disagree. I'll stick with Irwin Smallwood's Rule No. 3.

Ultimately, it comes down to respect. The reporter can respect a coach, be sensitive to his circumstances and still ask the difficult question. And if the coach doesn't want to answer the question, then, as a professional, he has to put a lid on his emotions and respectfully decline.

The coach has to understand that once the game is over, he is just one part of a very large process. Everyone in that process has to understand and appreciate that each participant has a job to do. And it can't work any other way.

Vice President
By TONY BARNHART
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

USBWA Application Form

If you have not yet renewed your membership to the U.S. Basketball Writers Association now is the time to act. For your \$35 membership fee you will receive the most complete directory in college basketball and you will also get all 12 issues of *Basketball Times* and, as well, you will be eligible to enter our Best Writing Contest.

Send a check for \$35 and let the USBWA make your job of covering college basketball easier.

Title _____

Newspaper/Publication/ College _____

Address _____

City _____ STATE _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____

City _____ STATE _____ Zip _____

Office Telephone _____ Home Telephone _____

Fax _____ Email Address _____

c/o Missouri Valley Conference
1818 Chouteau Avenue

June 13 deadline set for contest entries

Entries are now being accepted for the USBWA Best Writing Contest for stories and columns written and published during the 2002-03 college basketball season.

The deadline to submit stories is June 13.

Entries can be submitted in five categories: columns, moderate length features, magazine length features, spot news/game coverage and enterprise/investigative stories.

Only dues-paying members of the USBWA are eligible to enter the writing contest. Members may enter more than one category but may only submit one entry per category.

Plaques and cash prizes will be awarded in each category, with \$200 given for first place, \$175 for second, \$150 for third, \$125 for fourth and \$100 for fifth.

Winners will be announced in the fall issue of *The Tipoff* and posted on the USBWA website.

Send all entries to:

Joe Mitch

USBWA Writing Contest

1818 Chouteau Ave.

St. Louis, Mo. 63103

(314) 421-0339

or e-mail entries to: mitch@mvc.org

For entries submitted by mail, print the name of the category, the author of the story, the publication in which the article appeared and the date of publication on a 3 x 5 card and staple it to the article.

Sights from the USBWA's annual Final Four breakfast



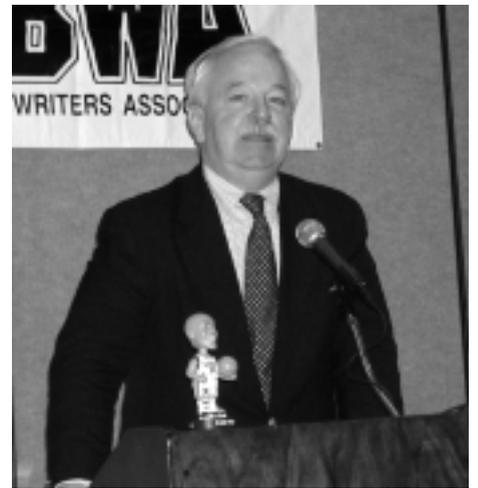
Rayna DuBose
Most Courageous



Jack Watkins
Katha Quinn Award winner



Bill Jauss
Hall of Fame inductee



Jim O'Brien
Hall of Fame inductee

David West, Tubby Smith gather USBWA's top honors



David West accept the Oscar Robertson Trophy.

Oscar Robertson Trophy
David West, Xavier

Henry Iba Award
Tubby Smith, Kentucky

USBWA All-America Team
Nick Collison, Kansas
T.J. Ford, Texas
Hollis Price, Oklahoma
Dwyane Wade, Marquette
David West, Xavier



Tubby Smith earned the Hank Iba Award.

USBWA names all-district teams, top coaches

District 1 (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Syracuse)

Troy Bell, Boston College
Jameer Nelson, Saint Joseph's
Emeka Okafor, Connecticut
Ugonna Onyikewe, Penn
Craig Smith, Boston College
Delonte West, Saint Joseph's
Drew Schiffino, West Virginia

Ben Gordon, Connecticut
Brandin Knight, Pittsburgh
Julius Page, Pittsburgh (tie)
Ryan Gomes, Providence (tie)
Player of the Year: Bell
Coach of the Year: Phil Martelli, Saint Joseph's

District 2 (New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Washington, D.C.)
Carmelo Anthony, Syracuse
Andre Barrett, Seton Hall

Keydren Clark, St. Peter's
Luis Flores, Manhattan
Marques Green, St. Bonaventure
Jermaine Hall, Wagner
Marcus Hatten, St. John's
Gerry McNamara, Syracuse
Mike Sweetney, Georgetown
Hakim Warrick, Syracuse
Player of the Year: Anthony
Coach of the Year: Louis Orr, Seton Hall

District 3 (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland)
Steve Blake, Maryland
Julius Hodge, N.C. State
Josh Howard, Wake Forest
Dahntay Jones, Duke
Drew Nicholas, Maryland
Edward Scott, Clemson
Travis Watson, Virginia
Brett Blizard, UNC-Wilmington
Vyatas Danelius, Wake Forest
J.J. Redick, Duke

Player of the Year: Howard
Coach of the Year: Skip Prosser, Wake Forest

District 4 (Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida)
Jarvis Hayes, Georgia
Matt Bonner, Florida
Mario Austin, Mississippi St
Ron Slay, Tennessee
Keith Bogans, Kentucky
Reece Gaines, Louisville
Erwin Dudley, Alabama
Marquis Daniels, Auburn
Chris Massie, Memphis
Ezra Williams, Georgia
Player of the Year: Bogans
Coach of the Year: Tubby Smith, Kentucky

District 5 (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin)
Brian Cook, Illinois
Dwyane Wade, Marquette
David West, Xavier

Kirk Penny, Wisconsin
Chris Thomas, Notre Dame
Willie Deane, Purdue
Chris Kaman, C. Michigan
Brandon Hunter, Ohio
Matt Carroll, Notre Dame
Daniel Horton, Michigan
Player of the Year: West
Coach of the Year: Tom Crean, Marquette

District 6 (Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota)
Kyle Korver, Creighton
Nick Collison, Kansas
Kirk Hinrich, Kansas
Hollis Price, Oklahoma
Jake Sullivan, Iowa State
Ricky Paulding, Missouri
Arthur Johnson, Missouri
Chauncey Leslie, Iowa
Victor Williams, Oklahoma St
Michael Watson, UMKC
Player of the Year: Korver
Coach of the Year: Dana Altman, Creighton

District 7 (Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana)
T.J. Ford, Texas
Ronald Dupree, LSU
Bernard King, Texas A&M
Andre Emmett, Texas Tech
James Thomas, Texas
Donald Cole, Sam Houston
Hector Romero, New Orleans
Kirby Lemons, Louisiana-Monroe
Michael Southall, Louisiana-Lafayette
Lawrence Roberts, Baylor
Player of the Year: Ford
Coach of the Year: Rick Barnes, Texas

District 8 (Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Montana)
Marcus Banks, UNLV
Ruben Douglas, New Mexico
Travis Hansen, BYU
Jermaine Boyette, Weber State
Donta Richardson, Wyoming

Kirk Snyder, Nevada
Uche Nsonwu-Amadi, Wyoming
David Bell, Montana
Britton Johnsen, Utah
David Harrison, Colorado
Player of the Year: Banks
Coach of the Year: Joe Cravens, Weber State

District 9 (California, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, Arizona, Alaska)
Julius Barnes, Stanford
Tony Bland, San Diego State
Ike Diogu, Arizona State
Carl English, Hawaii
Jason Gardner, Arizona
Jason Keep, San Diego
Luke Ridnour, Oregon
Phillip Ricci, Oregon State
Joe Shipp, Cal
Blake Stepp, Gonzaga
Player of the Year: Gardner
Coach of the Year: Mike Montgomery, Stanford