



Reflecting on McGrane Tributes



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In 2010, the FWAA will have a special on-line area where we will celebrate past winners of the Bert McGrane Award with biographies. In case FWAA members don't know what the Bert McGrane Award is, it is the FWAA's Hall of Fame, honoring those who have performed great service to our organization or profession.

We talk about it in this issue because life sometimes can be fleeting and uncertain for our FWAA members, what with the way the sports news profession is going these days. And yet sometimes we can be lulled into what we think are certainties. Both those feelings hit home in recent weeks.

Several months ago, we decided to start working on an on-line tribute to all the McGrane winners as a way to preserve the history of those who have been the backbone of this organization since it was organized in 1941. McGrane, from the *Des Moines Register*, was the long-time executive director of the FWAA.

The on-line section will be a collection of anecdotes from the early years about the swash-buckling sports writers who sometimes were former athletes, entrepreneurs, war heroes and quite frankly characters worth writing about in their own right. Those were the days when sports writers often made the news and were celebrities.

That brings us to the news on Oct. 10 about one of those writer celebrities who has endured for six decades. It once was a certainty that the legendary Furman Bisher would appear in the paper at least one time a week, but no

more. Bisher, the long-time columnist for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, has written his farewell column. He penned his first column in 1950. There will be a nice piece on him in the FWAA's on-line tribute as a McGrane winner. Certainly, at 90, Bisher deserves some time off, but he leaves the paper with bittersweet feelings.

That brings us to the uncertainty of life, which also ties in with the Bert McGrane Award.

Houston sports writer Gene Duffey, who wrote the FWAA's book on its Outland Trophy winners "Sixty Years of the Outland Trophy," also was commissioned to write the McGrane tributes. He finished them during this past summer.

Then suddenly in early September, at a friend's birthday party in Houston, Gene was felled by cardiac arrest. He slumped to the floor, had no pulse, until he was revived, and was rushed by ambulance to the hospital. Gene finally awoke from an induced coma 10 days later. And now he is returning slowly to his normal self and is back home. All of his friends are very grateful for this development.

That was a shocking episode in which we nearly lost a very dear comrade who has meant a lot to this organization and has always held the profession tightly to his heart. In both cases, with Furman and Gene, life will move on. But it's always good to stop and reflect at these junctures.

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President's column



GEORGE SCHROEDER

There's some good news on the endangered species we know as media guides.

The NCAA's recruiting cabinet recently threw its support behind Proposal No. 2009-42. You know it as the SEC's proposal to "prohibit distribution of media guides to recruits" – but more importantly, to allow schools to print media guides for, well, media.

Meanwhile, the committee took no action on a competing proposal from the Pac-10 that would have prohibited printed media guides. That proposal (endorsed by the Big 12) was pitched as a cost-saving measure. I think it was short-sighted and ill-conceived.

Short-sighted because, regardless of savings, we're talking pennies compared to the amount of revenue generated by football at many schools (especially if you consider the television revenue). And the cost-cutting comes at the expense of publicity. There's no tangible way to make this case, but making it more difficult for the media to access information isn't a good long-term strategy.

Worse, the Pac-10's proposal would prevent other schools from printing media guides. It's one thing to save money by cutting out the guides, but if another school doesn't need or want to do the same, why should it have to?

The SEC proposal is better for working journalists. Also, it simply makes more sense. Prohibiting the guides from being sent to recruits would allow schools to strip out the recruiting sections – those huge, worthless sections at the front of the guides that had begun to crowd out, you know, the actual information.

Get rid of the recruiting sections and the rushing records go back into the guide. The guides don't have to be as elaborate and fancy – we don't need glossy pages or three colors to get the job done.

End the recruiting aspect, and no school should feel compelled to print a media guide just to "keep up with the Joneses." At least not for recruiting purposes. But if a school sees competitors making information easily accessible to the media and feels pressure to do the same, is that a bad thing?

John Humenik, the executive director of CoSIDA, made a presentation to the recruiting cabinet at its meeting last June. Although Humenik believes the printed media guide is on its way out, and will eventually be replaced by digital formats, whether online or on your laptop's hard drive, he favored the SEC's proposal and said the consensus among many media relations directors was also in favor.

The proposal will wend its way through the NCAA's channels, but it will eventually come up for a vote. When it does, the recruiting cabinet's support will be a positive. Other important groups will have a say, as well. Humenik and the Knight Foundation's Malcolm Moran recently met with athletic directors, and the media guide was among the topics.

If you feel strongly about the issue, talk with the media relations directors and athletic directors you deal with and let them know how you feel and why.

Some odds and ends

- Update on the access battles: Montana coach Bobby Hauck has cut off access to the school's student newspaper because of a recent news story about an alleged assault by two Montana players.

Hauck has refused to answer questions posed by reporters from *The Kaimin* and has belittled them for asking. His players have followed suit (Hauck said that he did not instruct them not to deal with *The Kaimin* and that it was their

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One writer's take on voting In the Associated Press poll

By **DOUG LESMERISES**

The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer

In my third year of voting in the Associated Press poll, I've chosen to judge teams almost strictly based on what happens on the field while following the first guideline listed by the Associated Press: "Base your vote on performance, not reputation or preseason speculation." And, for a while, I became the "crazy" voter.

Who knew facts could be so controversial?

My goal is to treat every team as Team X, ignoring reputation, conference affiliation and preseason standing. No team, including No. 1, owns it spot from week to week, so no holding your place as long as you win. Teams are constantly building their resumes over the course of the season, and those resumes need to be reevaluated with a fresh eye each week. And my ballot is a reflection, not a prediction. So no gloating/embarrassment after a team wins/loses, thereby either proving your brilliance/idiocy.

So I won't bring up, for instance, that Ole Miss was No. 4 in the AP poll, No. 5 in the coaches poll but only No. 24 on my ballot when the Rebels lost to unranked South Carolina in the season's fourth week. Or that, for instance, Houston was No. 3 on my ballot, but no higher than No. 12 in a poll, when the Cougars lost to 1-3 UTEP in week five.

That's not the point.

Too often, I believe voters, particularly in the Harris and coaches poll, cast ballots they can't back up. Why is Florida No. 1? Because the Gators were No. 1 the week before. But that rationalization leads all the way back to a preseason poll that was based on preseason magazines published in the summer.

I know some people want to do away with preseason polls, but fans need something to talk about, something to provide a context early in the season. No. 5 Alabama beating No. 7 Virginia Tech to open the season is much more exciting than Really Good Alabama beating Almost As Good Virginia Tech. But every voter should be smart enough to pack those preconceptions away once the first ball is kicked off.

Fans of non-BCS schools especially seem to like this theory, and I had Boise State higher than most voters for several weeks. But I've also ranked Miami, Michigan and Auburn much higher than the overall poll at times. Ignor-

ing the preseason is equal opportunity.

I'm not saying my way is the only way, or even the best way, but I can back up every vote I cast. And I never rely on the "what would happen on a neutral field" argument when assessing teams.

Heck, what do I know? I was the moron that actually picked Ole Miss to play for the national title this season. I don't trust myself. So I'll vote based on what actually has happened, not imaginary future showdowns.

At the start of the year, that made me an oddball. At this point of the season, my ballot looks a lot like all the others. At least I know the teams on my ballot earned their spots.

FWAA Awards Calendar

- Mon., Nov. 9: All-America defense ballots sent to membership
- Sun., Nov. 15: All-America defense selection committee call
- Mon., Nov. 16: All-America offense/special teams ballots sent to membership
- Thur., Nov. 19: Announcement of five Bronko Nagurski Trophy finalists
- Sun., Nov. 22: All-America offense/special teams selection committee call
- Mon., Nov. 23: Announcement of three Outland Trophy finalists
- Mon., Dec. 7: Bronko Nagurski Trophy presentation (Charlotte, N.C.)
- Wed., Dec. 9: Announcement of Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year finalists; ballot sent to membership
- Thurs., Dec. 10: Announcement of Outland Trophy winner (Home Depot ESPNU College Football Awards Show)
- Sat., Dec. 12: Announcement of 25-man FWAA All-America Team (ABC-TV)
- Tue., Jan. 5: Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year presentation/reception (Los Angeles, Calif.)
- Tue., Jan. 5: FedEx Orange Bowl Courage Award on-field presentation (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.)
- Fri., Jan. 8: Grantland Rice Trophy announcement/presentation (Tentative, Los Angeles, Calif.)
- Thurs., Jan. 14: Outland Trophy presentation (Omaha, Neb.)

President's column (continued)

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decision).

Hauck's actions are childish, unprofessional and unbecoming of a highly paid state employee. One of our members, *ESPN's* Pat Forde, put it well. "Nobody likes a bully, and that's what Hauck has been to an easy target," Forde wrote.

- Many of you have heard that Shawn Schoeffler and the Fiesta Bowl have parted ways. Schoeffler has long been a good friend to those of us covering college football, a professional who cultivated personal relationships with many of us.

Schoeffler plans to take some time to evaluate his options. I wouldn't be surprised to see him back in college football in some way, someday.

Meanwhile, the Fiesta Bowl's media relations operation remains in good hands with Tony Alba. He worked for the organization in the late 1980s, and he has been a volunteer during recent years.

- One of the more rewarding aspects of my involvement with FWAA has been the opportunity to coordinate the FedEx Orange Bowl/FWAA Courage Award. We deal a lot with "bad" news; it has been great to get to

handle some of the good stuff.

Often, worthy candidates operate behind the scenes. Media relations directors typically nominate the candidates, but if you've got an idea, please feel free to send it along. E-mail me at gschroeder@aol.com.

I noted these items in the last issue of *The Fifth Down*, but they bear repeating:

- The FWAA's newly formed ethics committee, chaired by Ron Higgins, my immediate predecessor, is in place. The Knight Foundation's Malcolm Moran is also serving on the committee. The FWAA's board of directors has adopted a code of ethics, and the committee is the first stop for resolution of conflicts between FWAA members and the schools we cover.

- The FWAA is seeking nominations for the "Super 11" SID honors. Tim Griffin of *ESPN.com*, the FWAA's first vice-president, is chairing the committee, but we'd like members' input as to the SID staffs doing the best jobs – in some cases, navigating the tough middle ground between coaches and media. A list of the main criteria is available.

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