



TIPOFF

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2001-02 USBWA Award Nominations Continue

By JOE MITCH, USBWA Executive Director
Missouri Valley Conference

Members have until the end of the month to send in nominations for several awards presented annually by the U.S. Basketball Writers Association.

The organization's oldest award is the Most Courageous and it is generally regarded as the one award that has brought the most attention nationally to the USBWA.

Started in 1979, the Most Courageous Award is presented to someone in amateur basketball – primarily college basketball – who has faced enormous challenges in life and in many cases overcome adversity and tragedy. The award has been presented to players, coaches, game officials and administrators.

The USBWA has recognized the long and fatal cancer battles of Wes Flanigan of Auburn (1997), North Carolina State coach and ESPN commentator Jim Valvano (1993), referee Pete Pavia (1992), LSU guard Mark Alcorn and Niagara's Phil Scaffidi (1980).

Among some of the other recipients have been players who have made miraculous recoveries from some severe injuries. These include David Rivers of Notre Dame in 1987 following an automobile accident; Orlando Antigua of Pittsburgh in 1994 following a street shooting that left him with a bullet in his head; Nathan Binham who led Oral Roberts in scoring in 2000 after having the index finger on his shooting hand amputated; and Eddie Shannon of Florida who played his entire career with one eye due to an injury as a child.

Last year the USBWA gave the award to Oklahoma State University's men's basketball program and head coach Eddie Sutton after 10 members of the Cowboy team died in a plane crash on a return trip home from a game.

Perhaps the most memorable Most Courageous presentation was in 1995 to Nolan Richardson, the veteran Arkansas basketball coach who was recognized for overcoming racial prejudice while growing up and going through the first couple years at Arkansas while his daughter fought a losing battle with leukemia.

Richardson accepted the award on the day his Razorback team was playing for the national championship in Seattle. Normally, coaches don't like to be bothered on the day of the game, particularly one this important. But Richardson wanted to accept the award in person. It was that important to him.

"I want to thank the USBWA for the most prestigious award I have ever received in my entire life," said Richardson, who choked

up several times during his acceptance speech.

Besides the Most Courageous, the USBWA established the Katha Quinn Award, which is presented annually to an individual who has rendered special services to basketball writers. The award is named in memory of the former St. John's University sports information director who died of cancer in 1988. Included among the past recipients are Notre Dame's Roger Valdiserri, Skeeter Francis of the ACC, Rick Brewer of North Carolina, Al Shrier of Temple, Tim Tolokan of Connecticut, Bill Hancock of the NCAA and current Big East Commissioner Mike Tranghese.

Finally, the USBWA honors past and current members who have excelled in their field as sports journalists covering college basketball. Some 38 individuals have been inducted into the USBWA Hall of Fame that first began in 1988. To be eligible, an individual must have 20 years of service as a sports writer and considered to have made a significant contribution to the USBWA and the sports journalism profession.

Nominations for all three awards should be sent to Joe Mitch via e-mail at mitch@mvc.org or faxed to (314) 421-3505.

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2000-01 USBWA Writing Contest Winners

Gene Wojciechowski, Gene Sapakoff and David Teel are double winners in the USBWA Writing Contest for stories submitted for the 2000-01 NCAA basketball season.

Wojciechowski, of ESPN The Magazine, was the biggest winner with two first place entries, one in the columns category for his piece on Al McGuire, and another for his magazine length piece story on a young basketball player named Luke Axtell.

Sapakoff, of the Charleston Post & Courier, took a second place in the moderate length features category and fifth place in columns. Teel, of the Newport News Daily Press, won second place in the enterprise/investigative category and a fifth in the magazine length features category.

Plaques and cash prizes are awarded to each of five winners in five categories. First place winners receive \$200, second place \$175, third place \$150, fourth place \$125 and fifth place \$100.

Following are the results of the writing contest and a summary of the winning entries:

COLUMN

1. Gene Wojciechowski, ESPN The Magazine

Last Call (Al McGuire)

He captured the very essence of Al McGuire without pulling emotional strings at a time of death.

2. John Clay, Lexington Herald-Leader

Basketball in Kentucky is never going to be the same

Great insight into what it means for a former Kentucky basketball coach to change sides and become the head coach at Louisville.

3. Sam Amico, The Observer Reporter

Duquesne, Nee Come Away Bloodied

Here is a column: Opinionated. He took a side, and allowed the reader only two choices: Agree or disagree, which likely rose the passions on both sides.

4. Vahe Gregorian, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Arizona Players Tire of Questions About Bobbi Olson

Hooray, this writer dared to be different, and went down a path far less traveled when it came to what turned out to be this tiresome tale.

5. Gene Sapakoff, Charleston Post and Courier

The real shame for Clemson

Way to take a deeper look, beyond wins and losses, and say something while doing so.

MODERATE LENGTH FEATURE

1. Randy Holtz, Denver Rocky Mountain News

More Than A Coach

Wow, great job of bringing me inside this coach's life, capturing every U-turn and getting two people to open up so the story could be told.

2. Gene Sapakoff, Charleston Post and Courier

State's Shortest Basketball Player ...

How wonderfully portrayed this story about a physically-handicapped player; the writing and reporting inside the already made-to-order tale brought this piece above the usual human interest

tale.

3. Michael Perry, The Cincinnati Enquirer

Domino effect

Now this one took some time, piecing together the lives of these men and their families, and stepping outside the box to do so.

4. Pete Thamel, Syracuse Newspapers

Best of Buffalo

Nice, easy-flowing piece on how a young man beat some long odds, and nice insight into why the kid's environment increased these odds.

5. Rob Daniels, The News and Record (Greensboro, N.C.)

Games Draw "First Rounders"

Finding this story was half the battle, but we were presented with something different than just the run-of-the-mill player feature during the NCAA tournament.

MAGAZINE LENGTH FEATURE/TAKEOUT

1. Gene Wojciechowski, ESPN The Magazine

The End of The Line (Luke Axtell)

Gene's style and depth of research made me feel as if I was living inside this kid's story.

2. Blair Kerkhoff, Kansas City Star

The Last Hours of 10 Lives

I'm sure hundreds of stories were written on the crash of the Oklahoma State charter flight, but I bet no one else did it in this unique style which required exhausting research to reach the depth this did with the 10 people who lost their lives.

3. Dan Wetzel, CBS Sportsline

Amid fading dreams, hoops prospect faces rape charges

While this unique story was captivating enough, the writer's research, and ability to exhaust every possible social angle to the story made this one a winner.

4. Pete DiPrimio, Inside Indiana

End of an Era (Bobby Knight)

The writer took a chance with an unconventional approach, and pulled this off throughout the piece while humanizing the tale of a man hired and a man fired.

5. David Teel, Daily Press (Newport News)

He Whistles While He Works

Great idea to follow the nomadic life of college basketball officials and expose the readers to what mostly is an unknown world on and off the court.

SPOT NEWS/GAME COVERAGE

1. Pete DiPrimio, Fort Wayne News-Sentinel

A New No. 1 At Indiana

What a nicely spiced up news story, giving me all the information I needed, yet weaving some human emotion into the unique insight the writer had with Mike Davis and his family.

2. John Feinstein, Washington Post

Burnishing Images for a Lifetime

Basketball, after all, is about people and characters, not just about baskets and assists, and this was a wonderful way to cover

a game, and yet give me all the essentials I'd ever want.

3. Lee Barfknecht, Omaha World-Herald

OSU's Loss 'Felt Through Our Whole Family'

Great reporting, and use of resources for an out-of-town writer dispatched to write a tough, emotional story on someone else's turf.

4. Lori Nickel, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Packing Them In One Last Time

This was more like on-the-spot news, writing a comprehensive account of Al McGuire's funeral services on deadline, answering all my questions of the day while pumping me with some emotion.

5. John Bohnenkamp, The Hawkeye (Burlington, Iowa)

Recker's Revenge

Again, this was only a game, but the writer took us inside one man's gripping tale and turned these 40 minutes of basketball into a saga worth reading.

ENTERPRISE/INVESTIGATIVE PIECE

1. Michael Dobie and Arthur Staple, Newsday

Summer Madness (Seven-part series)

Now here we have enterprising investigation by two reporters who did the work of 10 people, thoroughly exposing the world of summer basketball, the corruption and how adults can certainly mess up a kids' world.

2. David Teel, Daily Press (Newport News)

Case #3881: A Special Report

The headline tells it all: This was an extra-special report in which the writer dug deeper than the public-record papers to tell us this story in great detail, leaving little unturned.

3. Ken Davis, Hartford Courant

If The Shoe Fits

What a package, another expose of what goes on with summer basketball leagues, giving everything I need to know nicely wrapped into a one-day section.

4. Steve Wieberg, USA Today

Players Want a Cut of \$6 Billion TV Contract

What a splendid idea, taking advantage of a big event to write something meaningful, going beyond what normally is expected when covering The Final Four.

5. Lew Freedman, Anchorage Daily News

Shootout at the NCAA Corral

No stone was left unturned in what surely was a meaningful, high-profile story in a community deserving the well-rounded truth on such an important event.



The 3rd annual USBWA Sports Journalism Seminar will be in Atlanta, site of the 2002 NCAA Men's Final Four. Pictured are John Rawlings of The Sporting News and Alex Wolff. See back page for more info.

Steve Richardson: Coaches of the Year



Surveying the first half of the college basketball season, it's time to start thinking about potential coaches of the year.

And one name that is popping up is Texas Tech's Bob Knight.

Knight won the USBWA's Henry Iba Coach of the Year Award in 1989. Thirteen years later he might be doing one of his best coaching jobs after a year absence from the college scene following the ugly ending to his long and highly successful tenure at IU in September 2000.

At Texas Tech, Knight entered conference play with just one loss at the beginning of January. He appeared to be squeezing every bit out of the limited number of players he has in Lubbock. The holdovers from the previous regime of James Dickey and the junior college talent he was able to scrounge up when he took the job last March were playing surprisingly well.

Make no mistake about it, Knight has not lost his crustiness towards the media. He has not exactly extended open invitations to some of college basketball's best writers, many of whom are USBWA members, to visit him on the plains of West Texas. The fact that Lubbock is so isolated – five hours by car from Dallas – probably plays into some of Knight's success this season.

He can coach, and hasn't, except on brief occasions, had to answer questions about his team, his behavior, the ending at IU, etc. What Knight does best, though, is just plain coach. And he has proven through all these years, that's an attribute people at least have to acknowledge.

Anyway, he's one coach who will have to be considered for our coach of the year Award. He's probably the top choice in the Big 12 right now. If Knight merely breaks even in conference play, the Red Raiders will win 20 games and probably qualify for the NCAA Tournament.

There are several other coaches who might be considered for the award as well based on the jobs they have done during the first half of the season:

- **Georgia's Jim Harrick:** The Bulldogs are rolling in the SEC. They upset Kentucky in Lexington in early January to break a long losing streak against the Wildcats. The Bulldogs weren't expected to do much in the SEC.

- **Pittsburgh's Ben Howland:** The Panthers are having one of their best runs since the mid-1980s and the days of center Charles Smith.

- **Ohio State's Jim O'Brien:** With the loss of center Ken Johnson, many media observers believed the Buckeyes wouldn't be back in the NCAA Tournament this season. They should not only make the tournament, but they will be in the thick of a wide open Big Ten race because of great guard play.

- **Marquette's Tom Crean:** He's only in his third season with the Golden Eagles. But in early conference action, Marquette, which had a spectacular non-conference run, already had won at Louisville.

Steve Richardson, the USBWA's First Vice-President, covers college basketball for The Dallas Morning News.

USBWA Journalism Seminar set for Men's Final Four in Atlanta

Plans are under way for the 3rd Annual USBWA Sports Journalism Seminar to be held during this year's NCAA Men's Final Four in Atlanta.

The seminar will be co-sponsored by the University of Georgia's Grady College School of Journalism and will be held on Thursday, March 28, at UGA's Alumni Association offices in Buckhead, Ga.

The USBWA and the Grady College will each contribute \$3,000 for scholarships that will be awarded to students participating in the seminar and entering stories about the Final Four in a writing contest.

Spearheading the efforts in Atlanta on behalf of the USBWA is Atlanta Journal-Constitution staff writer Tony Barnhart, a member of the USBWA board of directors. Barnhart, a graduate of the Georgia School of Journalism, worked with John Soloski, dean of the Grady School, to have the university host the seminar.

Professor Conrad Fink, director of the university's James M. Cox Jr. Institute for Newspaper Management Studies, is contributing the \$3000 for Georgia's share of the scholarships that will be granted. Professor Fink is author of a recently published book on sportswriting and will serve as moderator of the panel discussion of sports writers at the seminar.

Representing the USBWA on the panel will be Barnhart, President Bob Ryan of the Boston Globe, past president John Feinstein of the Washington Post and a fourth writer to be named.

Some 100-plus students are expected to attend the seminar and participate in the discussion about the sports writing profession. Students will also be given press passes to attend NCAA Final Four activities that will include team practices and press conferences on Friday before the semifinals, NCAA President Ced Dempsey's press conference and the NABC all-star game with the Harlem Globetrotters. One lucky student will be given a press pass to cover the championship game Monday.

Students will be asked to write stories about their experiences and the events they cover during the Final Four and enter the stories in a writing contest. Three winners will be selected, with

EDITOR'S NOTE

As we turn the corner into the heart of conference play and get ready for the madness that will be the 2002 NCAA Tournament, the USBWA is also turning the corner.



In this year of transition for the organization, the first phase of the new website is completed. You can now go on line to access the "Tipoff" and both a geographical and alphabetical listing of the membership.

In time, the website will assist the USBWA in soliciting new membership, promoting its awards and programs and expand its presence within the college basketball world.

Following the lead of the Football Writers Association of America (FWAA) and the National Collegiate Baseball Writers of America (NCBWA), the USBWA's new site, www.usbwa.com, is part of www.sportswriters.net. Many of you who are also members of the other organizations have witnessed the substantial growth of the sites over the last two years.

The FWAA site also houses the official sites for the FWAA All-America team, the Outland Trophy and the Eddie Robinson Coach of the Year. Now, on the USBWA website, you can access the areas that cover the USBWA's awards, the Henry Iba Coach of the Year and Oscar Robertson Player of the Year among them.

As we continue to grow the site and offer new features, all we ask is that you continue to give your input. The only way we can make the site more useful is through the feedback of the organization's membership.

Ted Gangi, webmaster@sportswriters.net
HiTEX! Enterprises, Dallas, TX (214-823-7992)

each winning a \$2,000 scholarship.

Students interested in attending the seminar should contact Barnhart via e-mail at thebarn@mindspring.com.

The USBWA started the journalism seminar three years ago in St. Louis prior to the start of the NCAA basketball season. Last year it was held for the first time in conjunction with the NCAA Final Four on the campus of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.



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