

More battles are being lost along press row

Was press row courtside at the last game you covered? Did you come out of the locker room with a quote that practically wrote your lead for you, one that brought a player alive and drew your readers in?

Let's make a point of saying thanks to sports information directors, coaches and athletic directors, and explaining why these kinds of access are so important to performing our jobs well.

It's more effective than complaining after a decision to move press row or close a locker room has been made.

We have lost some valuable ground lately on both of these fronts.

At North Carolina, press seating that had been on the floor in the end zones has been moved up into the stands.

Let's face it: It is easier to convince athletic administrators not to sell media seating *before* they get used to the extra cash on the revenue side of their budgets.

Remember, our coverage has incalculable value, too.

As for locker rooms, be alert that whenever there is a coaching change, it's an important time to make a case for access.

When Ben Howland took over at UCLA last year, the locker room doors closed. The same happened at Stanford when Trent Johnson became coach, and under Mike Montgomery the Stanford locker room had been home to some of the best quotes in all of college basketball.

So let's try to discuss the rationale for closing locker rooms before these decisions are made, and explain why it's important to us.

As I've written before, I truly believe this is no longer a gender issue, but a control issue and sometimes a space issue.

One of our points is that we want access to more informal interviews that produce livelier quotes. We want a chance to talk to a player without giving away the quotes we

elicit and the angle we are pursuing to our competitors. We want chances to talk to players who aren't chosen for an interview room. And we want to conduct these interviews as quickly as necessary for deadlines, not in a drawn-out format that eats up time and produces mundane quotes.

I made a point recently of telling Mike Krzyzewski how much we appreciate the open locker room at Duke, and I was pleased to hear what he said. The Duke locker room is open because he thinks it helps the players mature when they have to compose themselves to answer questions, sometimes while dealing with difficult emotions.

There are other benefits to programs and players. I genuinely believe such players as Shane Battier at Duke and Mark Madsen at Stanford became emblems of the ideal student athlete not only because they merited that recognition, but because reporters were able to talk to them casually and often enough to be able to capture those qualities.

While we're discussing Duke—and what coach shouldn't want to model his program after the one at Duke?—consider that there is still courtside seating in Cameron Indoor Stadium, where certainly those seats could be sold at a premium.

So a nod of appreciation to Athletic Director Joe Alleva

and the administration for keeping the students and media where they are.

Let me offer some of the reasons courtside seating is important to us.

We need to be accurate, and trying to see over a tuba or a fan who quite reasonably leaps up to see the final play interferes with accuracy.

We want to add something to our coverage that might not be evident to people in the stands or watching on television—and yes, that includes things the coaches and players say. It should, for good or ill.

And here's one other thing that hadn't occurred to me until, oh, about the time the Pacers played the Pistons in November:

We provide a buffer, or at least a speed bump, between those inclined to misbehave on either side of the sideline.

I've heard from some of you on these issues, so thank you for that, and Tom Shatel continues to champion the cause of press seating.

Please continue to e-mail, call us, or tell us in person what is going on in your part of the country, and let's continue to build a case for being in the best places to do the best job possible.

President's Column

By **ROBYN NORWOOD**
 Los Angeles Times



USBWA, Marriott reach deal

The USBWA has struck a deal that will be good for its members' travel budget – and for their Marriott points totals.

After several months of negotiations, USBWA Executive Director Joe Mitch has secured a relationship with Marriott to provide members with access to the chain's Athletic VIP program, which provides significant discounts on room rates.

The USBWA will mail Athletic VIP cards to members who are listed in the current USBWA directory.

This card will entitle each member to a sports rate of 50 percent off the regular room rate on a space-available basis at Marriott and Renaissance hotels and 25 percent off the highest mid-week rate on a space-available basis at Courtyard, Fairfield Inn, Residence Inn, Springhill Suites and TownePlaces Suites hotels. It is not applicable for

conventions, playoffs or bowl games.

For reservations at U.S., Canadian and participating international properties, members are asked to call 1-800-228-9290 or the hotel directly. Request the Athletic VIP rate or to visit Marriott.com and type in VIP in the corporate/promotional rate box.

Members must show the Athletic VIP card at check-in. The rate is given only when space is available and might not be offered if the hotel is sold out or anticipates being sold out.

The Athletic VIP rate also is not available when there is a negotiated group rate. But the Athletic VIP rate should be a boon for travel in many other situations.

For Marriott Rewards members, this card does not replace Marriott Rewards cards, though it should help in continuing to collect those precious Marriott points.

Sapakoff wins scholarship

Christie Lee Sapakoff, daughter of *Charleston (S.C.) Post and Courier* sportswriter Gene Sapakoff, will receive a \$1,000 college scholarship awarded annually to a son or daughter of a USBWA member.

Sapakoff is a freshman at Wofford College majoring in biology. She was an honor roll student at the prestigious Academic Magnet High School in Charleston and co-captain of the tennis team. She also worked over 250 volunteer hours at the University of South Carolina's Children's Hospital. She will continue to receive \$1,000 scholarship for each year up to four that she is a full-time student at Wofford.

Sapakoff wrote in her application: "With the aid of this scholarship, I will further my education and plan to contribute optimism to others in need."

Sports-writing workshop is on again at Final Four

After a one-year hiatus, the USBWA sportswriting workshop held annually at the NCAA Final Four is back in business.

The workshop for aspiring journalism students looking to pursue careers in sportswriting will be held at this year's NCAA Final Four in St. Louis on Thursday, March 31.

Canceled last year due to a lack of funding, the seminar is being held in conjunction with the Final Four once again after the St. Louis-based Pulitzer Company agreed to sponsor this year's event.

Past board member and St. Louis Post-Dispatch sportswriter Vahe Gregorian spearheaded efforts that led to the USBWA getting a commitment from the Pulitzer Foundation, the charitable-giving division of Pulitzer, Inc.

Gregorian initially contacted Post-Dispatch Editor Ellen Soeteber, who pitched the sponsorship opportunity to the Pulitzer Foundation.

"In our efforts to support worthy causes, it is with great pleasure that we can contribute to the success of this program," said Alan G. Silverglat, secretary-treasurer of

Executive Director

BY JOE MITCH
MVC



the Pulitzer Foundation.

The Pulitzer's sponsorship will provide funding for a three \$1,000 scholarships to be awarded to students who participate in a seminar and then submit stories in a writing contest of events they'll be assign to cover at the Final Four. The Pulitzer Foundation will also serve as sponsor of the USBWA's annual board of directors and past presidents' dinner during the Final Four weekend.

The scholarships will be awarded in the name of the late *Basketball Times* publisher and USBWA president and Hall of Famer Larry Donald, who died unexpectedly four years ago at the age of 55.

The workshop will begin with a seminar in the morning, where several USBWA members will serve on a panel and speak to students about their experiences in the sports-writing profession.

The workshop will be aimed primarily at college journalism students from the St. Louis metropolitan area. The University of Missouri School of Journalism has agreed to host the seminar and promote the workshop to their students.

Credit for Missouri's involvement in the workshop should go to Jack Watkins, associate commissioner of the Missouri Valley Conference, a past winner of the Katha Quinn Award and a Mizzou J-School graduate. Through his many contacts at Mizzou, Jack was able to get the university to participate in the program.

Besides Missouri, journalism students from other universities in the St. Louis area, including Washington University, St. Louis University, Missouri-St. Louis and Southern Illinois University Carbondale and Edwardsville campus will be invited to attend the workshop.

Following the seminar in the morning, students will receive credentials to cover various events at the Final Four in St. Louis.

One lucky student will be given the opportunity to cover the national championship game Monday night.

Other events the students will be able to cover that weekend include:

- NABC all-star game at Savvis Center matching the Harlem Globetrotters against a team of college all-stars
- Friday practices of the four Final four teams and their press conferences at the Edward Jones Dome
- Friday press conference of NCAA President Miles Brand
- NCAA Hoop City, an interactive fan festival involving basketball competitions and clinics
- March to the Arch where 3,000 fans will dribble basketballs on a downtown street in St. Louis for several blocks ending at the Arch.

Nominations are still being accepted for several USBWA awards, including Hal of Fame, the Katha Quinn service award and the Most Courageous award. Send all nominations to mitch@mvc.org.

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USBWA Membership 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 \$40 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 _____

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City _____ STATE _____ Zip _____

Office Telephone _____ Home Telephone _____

Fax _____ Email Address _____

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1818 Chouteau Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63103**

Let's help stop violence before it reaches college level

In February of 2003, I was asked to represent the national media in the NCAA's first-ever "Sportsmanship Summit." In the wake of fan violence at college sporting events, some of the biggest names in college athletics gathered in Dallas to ask two basic questions: 1) Why does this kind of behavior happen? and 2) What, if anything, can be done to prevent it?

I was taking part in a panel discussion about the causes of fan violence. Excess testosterone combined with large amounts of alcohol seemed to be the consensus culprits.

But then one of the gentlemen sitting at the table looked directly at me and said:

"What about the media's role in all of this?"

I babbled some response, which I'm sure made no sense. But the look I gave the guy basically said: "Are you out of your &^%\$#@ mind? The media is just there to report the news. We don't *make* the news!!"

The look he gave me said: "Yeah, sure. You guys *love* it when this kind of stuff happens. And you don't do a damned thing to prevent it."

The tragic brawl in Detroit on Nov. 19 made me think of that exchange again. Other than reporting it, the media had no role in that awful moment. But it did make me, as someone who loves college basketball, pause and think.

The NBA will survive that dreadful night in Detroit. David Stern will make sure of it. But I'm not sure the NBA will ever fully get over it. There a lot of people who already had their doubts about the NBA before the fight. Those people are gone and will never come back.

Could such a thing ever happen in college basketball? And if it could, does the media have any role in trying to prevent it?

The answers are yes and yes.

It could absolutely happen in college basketball because at some arenas, the intent is still to provide a hostile, intimidating atmosphere for opposing teams and their fans.

Now, intimidation comes in many forms.

Some schools purposely put the home students right on top of the opposing bench. Sometimes they are simply loud.

Vice President

By **TONY BARNHART**
Atlanta Journal-Constitution



That's OK. That's part of playing college basketball on the road.

But sometimes they are profane. Other times, they are worse than profane. And the home school tolerates it in the name of giving their team every possible edge.

A year ago at Maryland, students were wearing obscene T-shirts and directing every manner of crude speech toward Duke's J.J. Redick. Maryland officials wondered if clamping down on such behavior would be an infringement of the students' right to free speech. Such a notion would be a laughable if it didn't have the potential to be so tragic. Give Maryland credit, however. Since then, athletics director Debbie Yow and her staff have worked hard to get the problem under control.

Obviously, this is a scene that is played over and over throughout college basketball as fans want to show the folks watching ESPN that *they* can be just as entertaining as Duke's Cameron Crazies. Only they lack the creativity of the Duke students. They get drunk and shout things at players that, if it happened on the street, would get them hauled into jail. They storm the court after a big victory.

But after all, it makes for great TV.

It also has to stop. And here's where the media comes in.

How your local university handles crowd control and the kind of atmosphere it creates at basketball games is a

legitimate news story. Does it create the kind of hostile atmosphere that could potentially lead to violence between players and fans? Does it keep fans off the floor or does it allow a stampede that could cause serious injuries to fans and athletes alike?

Last season, after a big win at home over Florida, Georgia fans stormed the floor of Stegeman Coliseum. One fan was caught on camera delivering a perfectly executed right cross to the head of Matt Walsh. Walsh, to his credit, got off the court as fast as he could. Another player might have laid waste to several students on his way to the locker room.

Is it going to take an NBA-like episode for people to take this problem seriously?

Be it college basketball or state government, the media has an obligation to recognize potential problems in the institutions they cover and to report on what could happen if those problems continue to be ignored.

Given what happened in Detroit last November, we in the media have an obligation to be honest with the public on the potential for a similar event in college basketball. We also have an obligation to hold athletics officials' feet to the fire to do everything in their power to make sure it doesn't happen. Not after the fact. Now.

It might not make for great TV. But it just might save some kid's life.

Taking inventory of our cherished press-row seats

Hello again, it's me. PressBx. Or, maybe it should be PressRw.

Anyway, I polled the six BCS leagues, just for starters. We'll get to several of the mid-majors next time (this accomplishes two things; 1, it's good information for USBWA and 2, it give me a Tipoff column).

I received responses from the Big East, Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac-10. I found the results very interesting, and a little surprising that so many schools are going away from courtside. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. I just don't get out much any more.

Here are some responses I received from SIDs:

In the Big East, Boston College, UConn, Notre Dame and Syracuse are all courtside. Georgetown and Providence both have TV and a few spots midcourt, with the rest in end court. Rutgers has print at courtside, TV and radio upstairs. St. John's (Madison Square Garden) has some courtside, some end court and an auxiliary area in the corner in the seats. Seton Hall is mostly courtside with a spillover area halfway up the main arena level at midcourt. Villanova: campus is all courtside, Wachovia Center is TV midcourt and the rest is end court. West Virginia: TV is midcourt; print in main arena level at midcourt.

Big Ten:

Ohio State's press row is located in the southeast end zone at Value City Arena, five rows that span half the length of the end zone. There are 45 seats of overflow in the hockey press box.

Minnesota: Two levels, one courtside with 26 seats.

Another upstairs ("radio row") with 35 seats.

Michigan: Press row is located in three sections at mid-level of the arena. There are two levels up on the concourse level for radio, auxiliary and student papers.

Wisconsin: Courtside, with 54 seats. Also, auxiliary in the hockey press box, mainly for radio reporters not doing live broadcasts.

Indiana: Two press rows. One, an elevated area behind the scorer's table that seats one writer each from the main area outlets. Due to the addition of courtside premium seating, IU moved 42 press seats to an area in the southeast bleachers.

Northwestern: 52 seats courtside, another 16 halfway up the bleachers on the south side that go to "TV personalities."

Illinois: Three rows, on the floor, behind benches and scorer's table.

Big 12:

Kansas: Writers on the floor courtside and in both end zones.

Missouri: Northwest Corner of the new Mizzou Arena, just off the court and close to the Missouri locker room, and Mizzou SID Sam Fleury wanted to point out it's one of the few locker rooms in the Big 12 that is open during post-game.

Oklahoma State: Courtside.

Oklahoma: Southwest corner on the floor, two rows (elevated) behind boosters.

Kansas State: Courtside. Donor seating is behind the press. Yes!

Baylor: Courtside.

Colorado: Moved from courtside into the stands, next to the CU band. Boosters are where press row used to be.

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Vice President

By **TOM SHATEL**
Omaha World-Herald



A writer's guide to NCAA Final Four credentials

The NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Committee has reiterated its opposition to all forms of sports wagering and encourages the media to assist in the education of the public with regard to the hazards of sports wagering.

Agencies shall direct requests for working media credentials for first/second rounds and regionals to the host media coordinator. Requests for the Final Four shall be directed to the NCAA national office. If space is limited at preliminary-round sites, preference will be given to applications received before March 1. Deadline for submitting 2005 Final Four applications will be Feb. 18.

A "media agency" for purposes of these criteria shall mean a daily or weekly publication, cable system, radio or television station and network requiring immediate news coverage. "Immediate news coverage" for purposes of these criteria shall mean that the editorial, audio and/or visual deadline for the tournament action being documented occurs no later than 48 hours after the competition at the site has been completed.

Any agency that has been certified for a Final Four credential shall receive a first-/second-round and/or regional credential upon request.

Agencies that do not meet the criteria for circulation (for print media) or designated market area (for electronic media), but represent the geographic area of a participating institution, must staff each of the participant's previous tournament games in order to receive credentials to each subsequent game.

A press agency or television or radio station in the immediate geographic area and/or locale of a participating or host institution that has staffed its games on a regular basis throughout the season and does not otherwise meet the criteria may be designated by the participating or host institution as a "minority media enterprise." A "minority media enterprise" shall mean a business enterprise involved in the dissemination of sports news to individuals socially or economically disadvantaged from cultural, racial or chronic economic circumstances or other similar cause. Such persons include, but are not limited to, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Spanish-speaking Americans and American Indians.

Except for television photographers, a credential may be issued only to an authorized full-time, salaried representative of, or a representative who regularly and

customarily performs services for, the agency submitting the request. Credentials are not transferable.

Membership in a writers' or broadcasters' association (e.g., United States Basketball Writers Association) does not automatically qualify an agency for credentials.

Subject to limitations of space, credentials at all sites shall be assigned in accordance with the following priorities:

Separate publications sharing common ownership may not be combined for purposes of meeting circulation or other criteria.

PRINT

1. A daily agency with circulation greater than 60,000, a weekly with circulation greater than 500,000 or a monthly with circulation greater than 750,000 will be identified as "national media" and will qualify for credentials even if it does not meet the provisions in No. 1 or No. 2 above. Press agencies may receive credentials according to the following

(Note: A limited-access credential only permits access to the media workroom, locker rooms and interview room.)

2. An agency that does not meet Criteria No. 1 qualifies for credentials if a full-time staff member has covered at least 90 percent of the participating institution's regular-season home games and each of its games in the NCAA championship. (Covering all of the institution's competition in a different NCAA championship fulfills the latter requirement.) Such an agency can receive one more than the number of credentials it used for a majority of the institution's home games.

3. An agency that does not meet Criteria No. 1 qualifies for credentials if a full-time staff member has covered at least 90 percent of the host institution's regular-season home games.

4. A publication that covers college basketball exclusively and is distributed on a national basis—but does not meet Criteria No. 1 – qualifies for one credential if space is available.

5. The Associated Press and the primary newspaper(s) that provide daily coverage for the host institution each may receive a maximum of four tabled seats, four non-tabled seats and two limited-access credentials.

At the media coordinator's discretion, one credential may be issued to a reporter representing the "news

side" of the major newspaper of the participating and/or host institution.

7. A print agency included on a team's local media list may receive additional

credentials at a regional site not to exceed the total number of credentials it received covering first-/second-round competition at all sites.

8. Credentials may be issued to two individuals, certified by the director of athletics or designated representative of each participating and host institution, who will be the sole representatives of all print media organizations (e.g., student newspapers, yearbooks) affiliated with any such institution.

9. One credential may be assigned to SportsTicker.

Online

1. One credential may be issued to an Online agency that (1) registers at least one million unique users per month in each of the 12 months before the tournament and (2) covers college basketball daily.

2. One credential may be issued to an Online agency that does not meet Criteria No. 1 if it covers (i.e., full-time staff members filed reports) at least 90 percent of the participating or host institution's home games.

3. The official Web site of a competing institution, as approved by that school's sports information department, may receive a maximum of two credentials in addition to the two credentials noted under Print, No. 8.

4. A print, radio or television agency will not receive more credentials than the number provided for elsewhere in this document. An agency may allot one (or more) of its credentials to its online entity.

5. An online entity may receive a credential only if its own full-time staff writes an overwhelming percentage of that site's material.

6. Online entities will not receive photography credentials.

7. Any online service that is recognized as an outlet intended primarily for the purpose of delivering news related to the recruitment of student-athletes will not qualify for credentials.

8. SportsTicker and Sports Reporting Network are eligible for one credential for a full-time staff member.

Media teleconference schedule:

Wednesday, Feb. 23, 3 p.m. ET, selection committee chairman Bob Bowsby, pass code 281934, replay box 1.

Wednesday, March 9, 3 p.m. ET, Bowsby, pass code 165444, replay box 2.

Sunday, March 13, 6:30 p.m. ET, Bowsby, pass code 697447, replay box 3.

Monday, March 14, 3 p.m. ET, Bowsby, pass code 521443, replay box 4.

Wednesday, March 30, 1 p.m. ET, Final Four coaches, pass code 744832, replay box 5.

The call-in number for all of the teleconferences is 913/981-5507; the number to hear a replay is 402-280-9026, plus the box number above. The first two are the chair's traditional pre-selection calls; the third is Selection Sunday.

circulation requirements:

<u>Daily Circulation</u>	<u>Credentials</u>
60,000 - 99,000	one seat
100,000 - 249,999	one seat, one limited access
250,000 - 349,999	two seats, one limited access
350,000 - 449,999	three seats, one limited access
450,000 - 649,999	four seats, one limited access
650,000 - 999,999	five seats, two limited access
1 million and above	six seats, two limited access
<u>Weekly Circulation</u>	<u>Credentials</u>
500,000-3 million	two seats, two limited access
3 million and above	four seats, two limited access
<u>Monthly Circulation</u>	<u>Credentials</u>
750,000-3 million	two seats, two limited access
3 million and above	four seats, two limited access

Shatel

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Texas A&M: Courtside and end zone.

Iowa State: Courtside.

Texas: Corner of the arena, five rows that begin at floor level near the baseline and go up.

Nebraska: Twelve rows up, opposite team benches.

Pac-10:

Arizona: Courtside, between team benches. Some tables on the baseline and overflow in the stands for TV and radio.

Arizona State: Home beat writers on the floor opposite scorer's table; all other media sit in "bunker" in the corner behind visiting team bench, 12 rows up.

California: Twelve rows up, opposite team benches.

Oregon: Twelve rows up, behind the team benches.

Oregon State: Courtside.

Stanford: New setup this year, with renovation of Maples Arena; home beat writers on the floor (at scorer's

table). Rest of the media opposite scorer's table, 30 rows up.

UCLA: Twenty rows up, opposite scorer's table.

USC: Some media at scorer's table, most in corner up from baseline at the end of the home team bench.

Washington: Twelve rows up, opposite team benches.

Washington State: Courtside.

That's it, for now. I will contact several "mid-major leagues" and contact the ACC and SEC again. If anyone covering a beat has any thoughts, or corrections, about any of the above locations, or the team they cover, please email me at tomshatel@cox.net. We might or might not form a committee. I think this would make for a good discussion at USBWA's annual meeting at the Final Four in St. Louis. We can decide if we want to try to set guidelines for schools to go by, etc.

See you on press row.