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Hoops a lifeline for Most Courageous Dowd

By **SETH DAVIS**

Sam Dowd is used to hearing snickers. At 5-foot-7, 167 pounds, he hardly cuts an imposing figure on the basketball court. Yet, once the snickering is done and the game begins, Dowd is usually the one who gets the last laugh.

"I've never been discouraged by my height," he says. "It's funny because guys automatically think, 'I'm gonna post up this little guy,' but they find it difficult. I love to compete with the big boys, and I've never backed down from a fight."

That fighting spirit has enabled Dowd to overcome adversity that dwarfs anything he has seen on a basketball court. When Dowd was around 12 years old and growing up in Tacoma, Wash., his family life disintegrated as his parents fell prey to addictions. By the time he was 13, he was turned out of his own house and was living on the streets while trying to attend school and play some AAU basketball.



Sam Dowd

His basketball relationships literally saved his life. He slept wherever he could – on coaches' couches, with friends' families or occasionally outside the school when there was nowhere else to go – and was eventually taken in by a teammate whose family lived in Spokane. They enrolled Dowd at Gonzaga Preparatory School, where he befriended an older student named Matt Miller. Miller's parents, Ron and Jill, agreed to bring Dowd into their home and later adopted him. Despite those humble beginnings and his diminutive size, Dowd flourished on the court, playing two years at North Idaho Junior College and earning then a scholarship to Idaho State, where is currently a junior and the team's backup point guard.

For his big-hearted resilience, his oversized spirit, and his larger-than-life determination, Dowd is the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's choice for the 2018 Most Courageous Award.

"It's amazing he has the enthusiasm for life that he has, but I think the challenges that he faced growing up have molded him into something that's pretty special," Idaho State coach Bill Evans says. "He might be small, but he's got great intangibles. Some guys don't play the game for the right reasons, but Sam really does play for the program and his teammates."

Though Dowd has occasional contact with his biological parents, he refers to the Millers as Mom and Dad and credits them with giving him a future as well as a home. He is majoring in communications at Idaho State with a minor in management. Dowd has been the subject of several stories in the local media, and though he is wary at times of recounting all that has happened to him, he is also gratified for the chance to inspire others.

"I wake up every day and think, 'Wow, I'm playing basketball at a Division I school,'" Dowd says. "I want people to know that you can overcome any kind of situation in life. I know a lot of people have had it way worse than me. That's why I'm so grateful I have basketball. It's more than a sport for me. It gave me a lifeline."

USBWA can be counted upon in tough times

KANSAS CITY – Gazing out from the city that has hosted more Final Fours (10) than anywhere else, anticipation of the NCAA Tournament is as fevered as ever – especially considering the range of teams that appear capable of winning it.

Just the same, the season is ending much the way it began: under the specter of an FBI investigation of corruption and fraud in the game.

As a source told USBWA member Pete Thamel of Yahoo in mid-February, "Hall of Fame coaches should be scared, lottery picks won't be eligible to play and almost half of the 16 teams the NCAA showed on its initial NCAA tournament show (in February) should worry about their appearance being vacated."

So, as a journalist covering college basketball, exactly what can you count on amid this bubbling chaos?

Answer: The USBWA, in your corner since 1956 and always striving to adapt and respond to member needs for representation.

It has been a privilege to serve as USBWA president the last year and help advance initiatives made possible by the hard work of so many.

People like immediate past president Ed Graney and board member Mark Zeigler, whose words about access and seating issues at last year's Final Four in Phoenix resonated with the NCAA's Dan Gavitt and David Worlock.

That led to a meeting with the NCAA basketball oversight committee in Indianapolis last summer, at which the estimable John Akers of Basketball Times

Vahe Gregorian
Kansas City Star
President



and I presented research and suggested best practices for schools – information developed by the chairmen of USBWA ad hoc committees for access (Kirk Wessler of the Peoria Journal Star) and seating (Luke DeCock of the Raleigh News & Observer).

That in turn led to the unprecedented step of the Oversight Committee following up with a "best practices" memo sent to every Division I school before the season.

The memo provided recommendations to schools, not mandates, which is a little bit like the distinction Bill Murray makes between rules and guidelines in "Ghostbusters."

But it made for a fine start to a dialogue, a beginning we are making efforts to accelerate by surveying members about the degree to which the "best practices" are being adhered to in terms of seating, access and security. And we have every reason to believe the Oversight

Committee will continue to work with us to try to improve these conditions.

Also in the embryonic stage: discussions with the Division I men's basketball committee to make the case for a pool reporter in the room during bracketing and seeding to lend more transparency to the process.

In November, past president Malcolm Moran and I went to San Antonio to meet with the committee.

We left with the jarring knowledge of how far we have to go to get the committee to lower the bridge and let us in, information that in some ways was frustrating but nonetheless vital in itself.

Six of the 10 committee members were clearly against the idea, and no one advocated for it. The biggest obstacle as we understood it: Our presence in the room would "modify behavior" by suppressing candor.

Still, in follow-up conversations with Worlock, it's evident that this was the start of a process – truly – with potential to come to fruition one day.

It has been an honor to try to help facilitate these and other initiatives in the last year – and to get to work with relentless executive director Joe Mitch, who has been the heart of this organization since 1983.

It also will be a pleasure to make way in April for incoming president David Teel, a USBWA Hall of Famer who will lead us with grace and passion.

That's more that you can count on from the USBWA at a time of so much uncertainty in what we cover.

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USBWA awards event is moving to St. Louis

After a one-year hiatus, the USBWA is once again hosting a college basketball awards function honoring the organization's player, coach and freshman of the year. It's an event the USBWA has organized for 12 of the last 13 years.

The USBWA is partnering with the Missouri Athletic Club on an awards dinner, slated for April 9 in St. Louis, to present the Oscar Robertson Trophy to the player of the year, the Wayman Tisdale Award to the freshman of the year and the Henry Iba Award to the coach of the year.

The USBWA also plans to present lifetime achievement awards to two basketball legends: former Missouri and Hall of Fame coach Norm Stewart and retired referee and educator Ed Hightower.

All of the player and coach awards are voted on at the end of the regular season by the USBWA membership.

"The MAC was the first to host this celebration in 2005," said USBWA president Vahe Gregorian, columnist for the Kansas City Star. "We are delighted to renew a partnership with the MAC and look forward to sharing this occasion with them."

Kevin Cantwell, the MAC basketball chairman, added: "Hosting the USBWA awards fits perfectly with our club's long history of celebrating excellence in amateur athletics.

"It's a tradition that goes back to the inception of our club when MAC athletes participated in the 1904 Olympics, and it continues today with our annual presentation of college soccer's Hermann Trophy. It's an honor that the USBWA has chosen the MAC to host the top awards in college basketball."

The USBWA awards dinner comes a week after the Final Four. It's a great way to end the college basketball season by honoring the nation's best players and coach.

The first USBWA awards event was held in St. Louis during the 2005 Final Four and was held for the next six years where the Final Four was played. Oklahoma City hosted a dinner for four years but canceled it last year. For a while, it looked like the event might not be held this year, either.

But the MAC was contacted and decided to host a dinner for the USBWA, similar to what they've done hosting the presentation of the Hermann Trophy to the top male and female players in college soccer.

The awards dinner could become an annual event in St. Louis. The USBWA and MAC will meet after the event to talk about future years.

The USBWA player of the year award is named after one of college basketball's greatest players, Oscar Robertson. The Robertson Trophy is the only college basketball player of the year award named for a player. "The Big O" was the first player of the year selected by the USBWA in 1959. The USBWA named the award after Robertson in 1998.

Previous player of the year winners include

Anthony Davis, Kentucky (2012), Blake Griffin, Oklahoma (2009), Kevin Durant, Texas (2007), Michael Jordan, North Carolina (1984), Ralph Sampson, Virginia (1981-83), Larry Bird, Indiana State (1979), Bill Walton, UCLA (1972-74) and Lew Alcindor, UCLA (1966-67).

The freshman of the year award honors the late Oklahoma standout, Wayman Tisdale. Tisdale was a three-time USBWA All-American and was the first freshman ever to be named a first-team All-American by the USBWA. Tisdale passed away in 2009 following a courageous battle with cancer.

Past freshman of the year winners include Lonzo Ball, UCLA (2017), Anthony Davis, Kentucky (2012) and Larry Hughes, Saint Louis (1998).

The coach of the year award is named for the legendary Henry Iba, who is recognized as one of the top college coaches of all time. Iba won 655 games in his career and led Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State) to NCAA championships in 1945 and 1946. He also coached the U.S. Olympic teams to gold medals in 1964 and 1968 and a silver medal in 1972.

Coaches who have won the award in the past include Bill Self, Kansas (2009), Roy Williams, with North Carolina (2006) and Kansas (1990), Charlie Spoonhour, Saint Louis (1994), Bob Knight, Indiana (1989 and 1975) and John Wooden, UCLA (1967, 1970-73).

Stewart, a cancer survivor, is credited with creating the Coaches vs. Cancer charity. Stewart started the program that evolved into a nationwide effort to fight cancer and promote cancer awareness and prevention. Since 1993, the charity has raised over \$100 million for the American Cancer Society.

Stewart is a coaching icon. He coached 32 years at Missouri (1967 to 1999) and posted a 634-333 career record. He led the Tigers to eight Big Eight Conference regular-season championships, six tournament titles and 16 NCAA tournament appearances. He was elected to the College Basketball Hall of Fame in 2007. A bronze statue of Stewart was erected last year on campus. The basketball court at Mizzou Arena is also named in his honor.

Hightower is regarded as one of the best referees ever to work college games. He was voted the Naismith Division I Men's College Basketball Official of the Year in 1992. He worked 12 Final Fours and was assigned to some of the biggest games in the country for nearly every major conference. Hightower retired from officiating in 2013.

A lifelong educator with 41 years of service in education, Hightower was superintendent of Edwardsville (Ill.) School District No. 7 before retiring in 2015.

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



Another Auerbach finding basketball success

When your last name is Auerbach, you *should* be involved in basketball.

Nicole Auerbach is not only still involved, she is this year's winner of the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's Rising Star award.

Though Auerbach switched jobs over the summer, she earned the honor through her body of work at USA Today and because she will continue to write about college basketball for the Athletic's college basketball wing, the Fieldhouse. While she was the primary college basketball writer for USA Today, her emphasis at the Athletic is on college football for the All-American.

"I love college basketball and the relationships with coaches in March, but it's tough sometimes ..." Auerbach said.

"I used to get so frustrated trying to pierce through the football wall.

"I wanted to do football, but I didn't want to abandon my roots. So I ended up joining it and doing both football and basketball. I think I was able to get the best of both worlds."

Auerbach really hadn't considered any of these worlds – basketball, football or journalism – when she entered the University of Michigan as a New Jersey kid who avidly followed pro sports. She was strongest in math and science and played sports in high school rather than write about them. Her dad, a New York Jets season-ticket holder, owned his own business and Auerbach figured she would follow that route.

Fittingly, an upset of epic proportions led her to such an unexpected career choice.

The first college football game Auerbach ever attended was Appalachian State's stunning 34-32 upset over the fifth-ranked Wolverines in 2007. In her first few days on



Nicole Auerbach

campus before that, Auerbach had met in her dormitory hallway a sophomore, Alessandra Boufford, who aspired to become a surgeon. Boufford, who later fulfilled her dream, asked Auerbach what her dream job would be. Auerbach said she would love to write for Sports Illustrated. Boufford put Auerbach in touch with an editor at the Michigan Daily, and Auerbach was invited to join a planning meeting for the Daily's first issue on the following Sunday.

"I walk into this meeting, wondering what it was going to be like," Auerbach said. "I watched them completely scrap this special section they had in place, because they hadn't published yet. They completely scrapped it and tried to figure out what went on (in the Michigan loss), piecing together this special section."

Auerbach was hooked. She got her start on the club-frisbee beat and went on to cover all the major sports at Michigan, including the beginning of the John Beilein era in basketball. She became a sports writer at a school that doesn't offer a journalism major.

"We're very proud of learning by the seat of our pants," said Auerbach, who majored in public policy. "We had to teach ourselves how to report and write and get better. It's wild, now that I have so many friends who went to Northwestern and Syracuse and all these J schools, to think about that. We just learned from those above us."

She met influential contacts along the way. Andy Staples and Stewart Mandel encouraged her to pitch a story for Sports Illustrated. She wrote a cover story on Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson for USA Today on a day's notice. She landed internships at the Boston Globe and USA Today.

Before that, there was an unpaid internship as a 17-year-old at the Trentonian, occasionally covering the

New York Yankees and having to fight her way into the Double-A Trenton Thunday locker room. She thanks Trentonian editor Matthew Osborne for taking a chance on her.

There were many other influences. Her editors at USA Today included Tom O'Toole, Joe Fleming and Dan Uthman, whom she followed to the All-American. Among writers, she lists USA Today columnist Nancy Armour, Michael Rosenberg of Sports Illustrated, Pat Forde of Yahoo Sports and, in particular, Dana O'Neil.

"One of the best parts of stumbling into this college basketball world has been that I've gotten to know Dana," Auerbach said. "She's the gold standard, so it's great to be around her and learn from her. Now I'm thrilled that we're on the same staff."

Her internship at USA Today led to a job as the paper's digital editor of college basketball. A year later, at the age of 23, she began writing about college basketball full time for USA Today.

"I feel very fortunate that the door that was opened to me was for college basketball," Auerbach said. "I love the coaches. They're so accessible. They're so candid and interesting. There's nothing better than having a first-round upset at your (NCAA Tournament) site and going into the Stephen F. Austin lockerroom and looking for the best story after they beat West Virginia."

"I didn't want to lose that."

Auerbach was also intrigued by the new journalistic model that the Athletic offered and the opportunity to take deep dives into stories.

"I just really liked the vision. It's worth a shot."

As for her last name, Auerbach, who named her dog Red, but is typically coy about whether she is related to the Boston Celtics legend. Now, her secret is revealed.

"For a long time, my grandma was telling people we were related, but then my dad and uncle looked into it, and no, we're not," she said. "But I have fun just nodding and going with it."

Nevertheless, she has done her last name proud.

Survey says: Some schools fall short of best practices

Thanks to USBWA members who responded to a recent survey and to the NCAA's basketball oversight committee for creating a best-practices memo for member schools, the USBWA will be able to identify those schools that are failing to meet those standards and encourage them to do better.

Members were asked to provide detailed responses, if possible, to three questions, the first two of them regarding the NCAA's best-practices memo:

- Media seating should be reasonably close to the court, and with an unobstructed view (no standing fans or overhanging roofs). If seats are not near courtside, monitors should be provided for replays. All media seating should have power and working wireless. The media room should be reachable following the end of the game before postgame interviews begin. Secured areas should be provided to store belongings and media parking should be in a safe locations with a security escort available as needed. Please identify any venues that do not meet the standards and provide details of the problem area(s). This includes any seating or access issues at neutral venues or tournament sites.

- Schools should provide an open locker room period (or alternate area) for at least 15 minutes following each game, to include players who are not brought to the formal interview podium. Also, players should be made available for at least 15 minutes one day a week, and the coach available to beat writers at least one day between

scheduled games beyond the league teleconference. Please address the access standards specifically with regard to the school you cover.

Also, the survey sought to learn what schools are shining examples to others:

- Please identify any schools that have done a particularly good job of meeting the new standards or generally excel in these areas.

The survey was opened by 133 USBWA members through mid-February, though about 30 percent of those did not respond to any of the questions. About half of the responses were brief and addressed only one or two of the questions – hopefully a sign that seating and access are at least adequate at many or most schools.

The remaining 20 percent revealed problem areas at schools – some of which are mentioned multiple times – and provided details that will be useful when the USBWA's ad hoc committees for seating and access contact those schools during the offseason.

One school, for example, provides media seating that is in such a dark and remote area of the arena that "it is difficult to see a notepad." Another writer, citing the same school, said he is forced to use his cellphone as a flashlight to read his notes. "Worst situation I've ever seen," he wrote.

Another school recently moved the media to an area that a writer said was "further away from the action than any media seating area for basketball I've been in during

35 years of covering college basketball games." Another reporter noted that the seating was so high in that arena, he moved into an empty seat in the stands for the remainder of the first half – "hardly an appropriate setting for working journalists on a tight deadline."

Another school moved the media from courtside to a corner area *after* the NCAA released its best-practices memo.

At a few schools, obstructed views make it difficult, if not impossible, to write an informed story.

"If the fans in front of you stand up," wrote one, "you might as well put a period on it and send it in."

One writer noted that media parking "continues to be a joke at most places."

While access to coaches and players is apparently adequate at many schools, it "falls depressingly short" at a couple of schools in one state – "It's hard to know who might have a unique story worth a column or a feature," wrote a columnist from that area – and "gets worse every year" in a particular conference.

The ad hoc committee seeks to receive additional information from writers, as it can only attempt to help where it knows there is a problem. Writers who would like to provide additional information can still do so by March 1 by completing the survey or sending their responses to John Akers at johna19081@gmail.com, Luke DeCock at ldecoc@newsobserver.com and Kirk Wessler at kwessler@pjstar.com.

Haverbeck Award goes to WBCA's Donehew

By MEL GREENBERG

The USBWA's Mary Jo Haverbeck Award is going to a person who wears several hats but is known primarily as the executive director of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association – Danielle M. Donehew.

Donehew, a native of Atlanta and former women's star at Georgia Tech, is also the current president of the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Tenn. Prior to her hire on July 2, 2014, she served as the associate commissioner over women's basketball with the American Athletic Conference, having taken the job when it was formed after the breakup of the old Big East, which she also served from 2009-2013.

She also worked several seasons with the WNBA's Atlanta Dream and was a director of operations on the staff of the late Tennessee Hall of Fame legendary women's basketball coach Pat Summitt.

She is also an official of the Pat Summitt Foundation.

In working all these jobs, which involves interaction with the media, Donehew has been instrumental in making sure media needs are helped and served.



Danielle M. Donehew

She has also made it a part of her job to urge continued cooperation between WBCA members of the coaching community and the beat writers who cover their teams.

When major announcements have had to be made, Donehew has been helpful to get the word released in the hands of appropriate media members so we are prepared to roll with our stories once the embargo is lifted.

"Thank you to our friends at the United States Basketball Writers Association for recognizing me with the Mary Jo Haverbeck Award," Donehew said upon receiving the news of her selection.

"I am proud of the strong relationship between the USBWA and WBCA. Our community of coaches appreciates the important role the media has played and continues to play in chronicling the game of women's basketball in real time throughout its history.

"We are thankful for everything you do to promote our sport."

Says John Altavilla of the Hartford Courant, who was a beat writer for the Connecticut women when

Donehew was with the American: "There was always one thing you could count on when Danielle was working for the AAC and that was she would always make herself available if a question needed to be asked - and she would do her best, even if it was touchy or controversial, to give you an honest answer.

"Those of us who have covered women's basketball for a long period of time really depend on those like Danielle to help us tell the stories that should help to grow the game. I am really happy for her and consider her deserving of any award she may receive for as long as her career carries on."

Jack Watford, the WBCA communications director, notes: "I have worked for a lot of people and have never seen anyone like Danielle who is ready to engage and to talk to anyone, anytime, anyplace."

The Mary Jo Haverbeck Award, which is the equivalent of the men's Katha Quinn Award, is named for the pioneering Penn State women's sports information, herself a USBWA member, who passed away in January of 2014 after a short illness.

Having worked 25 years for the university until 1999, she was the first official to publicize Penn State women's sports teams and served as a mentor for students interested in pursuing a career in athletic communications or the media.

Villanova teammates named to USBWA watch list

Villanova teammates Jalen Brunson and Mikal Bridges headline a list of 14 standouts for the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's midseason watch list for the Oscar Robertson Trophy, to be presented to college basketball's national player of the year.

Balloting for the USBWA's All-America Team and the association's individual awards will take place in March. The Oscar Robertson Trophy will be announced at a news conference on Friday, March 30, at the Final Four in San Antonio. The Robertson Award, the Henry Iba Coach of the Year and the Wayman Tisdale Freshman of the Year will be presented at a college basketball awards dinner in St. Louis on April 9.

Here is the midseason watch list:

2017-18 OSCAR ROBERTSON TROPHY MIDSEASON WATCH LIST

F – DeAndre Ayton, Arizona (7-1, 250, Fr.);
F – Marvin Bagley III, Duke (6-11, 234, Fr.);
F – Keita Bates-Diop, Ohio State (6-7, 235, Jr.);
G – Trevon Bluiett, Xavier (6-6, 198, Sr.);
G/F – Mikal Bridges, Villanova (6-7, 210, Jr.);
F – Miles Bridges, Michigan State (6-7, 225, So.);
G – Jalen Brunson, Villanova (6-3, 190, Jr.);
G – Jevon Carter, West Virginia (6-7, 205, Sr.);
F – Mike Daum, South Dakota State (6-9, 250, Jr.);
C – Angel Delgado, Seton Hall (6-10, 245, Sr.);
G – Devonté Graham, Kansas (6-2, 185, Sr.);
G – Tra Holder, Arizona State (6-1, 180, Sr.);
C – Jock Landale, Saint Mary's (6-11, 255, Sr.);
G – Trae Young, Oklahoma (6-2, 180, Fr.).

By conference: Big East 4, Big 12 3, Big Ten 2, Pac-12 2, ACC 1, Summit 1, West Coast 1.

By class: Seniors 6, Juniors 4, Sophomores 1, Freshmen 3.

USBWA schedules busy week during San Antonio Final Four

The USBWA will present an award to a young sportswriter for writing excellence, honor a student-athlete with a courage award, induct four new members into the association's Hall of Fame and recognize an administrator for service to the media at the USBWA's annual awards luncheon during this year's men's Final Four in San Antonio.

The luncheon will be held Monday, April 2, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in downtown San Antonio, just a short distance from the media hotels.

The luncheon will feature the presentation of the following awards:

- Katha Quinn Award to Oklahoma athletics director Joe Castiglione for his years of service to the media as a member of the Division I men's basketball committee.
- The Rising Star Award to Nicole Auerbach of the Athletic for excellence in sportswriting for writers under 30.
- Most Courageous Award to Idaho State junior guard Sam Dowd for the courage he's shown dealing with adversity and for overcoming all odds to earning a Division I scholarship.
- Induction into the USBWA Hall of Fame of Lew Freedman, Cody Enterprise; Charles Pierce, Esquire Magazine; Dave Jones, PA Media Group; and Kirk Wessler, Peoria Journal Star.
- Ray Marquette Award to Vahe Gregorian of the Kansas City Star for his leadership this year as USBWA president.

ESPN serves as the main sponsor of the luncheon and has been the major sponsor dating back to the mid-1980s.

Other luncheon sponsors include the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, USA Basketball,

NABC and the American and Pacific 12 conferences.

The luncheon and short business meeting to follow conclude a busy weekend for the USBWA.

The USBWA's schedule of events starts with the Larry Donald sportswriting seminar on Friday, March 30, and the presentation of a \$1,000 scholarship from the Steve Guback scholarship fund to the winning student in a sportswriting contest at the Final Four.

The seminar will be followed by a press conference announcing the winner of the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year Trophy. On Monday prior to the awards luncheon, the USBWA board of directors will meet in executive session before meeting with the Division I men's basketball committee.

Weiss named to NSMA Hall of Fame

Dick Weiss was elected to the National Sports Media Association Hall of Fame and will be inducted this June. USBWA members who were named their state's sportswriter of the year include: Steve Carp of the Las Vegas Review-Journal; Paul Doyle of the Hartford Courant; Vahe Gregorian of the Kansas City Star; Doug Haller of the Arizona Republic; Joe Rexrode of the Tennesseean; and David Teel of the Newport News Daily Pilot. Luke DeCock of the Raleigh News & Observer shared the honor with co-worker Andrew Carter.

Former District VII representative Carlos Mendez is longer with the Fort Worth Star Telegram. His replacement will be announced at the Final Four.

Lodge Notes