

Bozich, McCann, Axthelm feted

The next three inductees into the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's Hall of Fame have covered much of basketball's most hallowed ground – New York City, Kentucky, Indiana and North Carolina.

Rick Bozich of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Gary McCann of *The Herald* of Rock Hill, S.C., and the late Pete Axthelm of *Newsweek* and ESPN will be honored at the USBWA's annual awards breakfast at the Final Four in Detroit, on April 6.

Axthelm wrote for the *New York Herald Tribune* and *Sports Illustrated* but was best known for the 20 years he spent at *Newsweek*, first as sports editor and then as a columnist and contributing editor. He was also a sports television commentator for NBC and later ESPN.

He authored "*City Game, Basketball in New York*," the first book to seriously explore recruiting.

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Most Courageous is cancer survivor

Kelvin Davis, a San Diego State senior, has been named the 2009 recipient of the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's Most Courageous Award.

Davis will donate a \$1,000 check to a charity or scholarship fund.

"I'm humbled to have been selected for this honor," said Davis, who has appeared in eight games this season for the Aztecs and has averaged 2.5 points and 1.8 rebounds in 10.4 minutes. "I want to thank the USBWA for recognizing me and the Aztec basketball program."

San Diego State coach Steve Fisher said, "He is a great example of what a person should be. He's been through a rough stretch but there was never a whimper out of Kelvin. He's out there every day, working hard. He's an inspiration to all of us."



Kelvin Davis

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Paquette receives Katha Quinn Award

By Dick Jerardi

When Mike Tranghese became the Big East commissioner in 1990, his first hire was John Paquette. They had so much in common, it was a natural. They understood the role of the media. They wanted to make it as easy as possible for us to do our jobs. And they knew Katha Quinn.

It was 1989 when Katha, the beloved St. John's sports-information director, died of cancer. Paquette could not attend the funeral because he was out west at-

tending to the media needs during Seton Hall's run to the national-title game.

It was 2001 when the USBWA honored Tranghese with our Katha Quinn Award. The winner is defined as somebody who, like Katha herself, "has either excelled at servicing the media or provides an inspiration to those in the sports journalism profession."

Tranghese and Paquette now have one more thing in common. They are Katha

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John Paquette

Closing out the decade with plenty of issues to discuss

Not certain where the year has gone, but it's almost time to turn the presidency over to Steve Carp. From the time I took over in San Antonio on the morning that Kansas took Memphis' title away, it has been my privilege.

Thankfully, there were no impeachment proceedings. Or at least none than I knew about.

I did find out a lot about our organization that I never knew. I also found out there is still much I do not know.

In the past year, we were able to change a few things, follow through on a few initiatives and get a sense of what needs our attention in the future.

We did some redistricting, making District I strictly New England and including Pennsylvania and West Virginia in District II. It made it especially difficult to make the 10-player District II team, because there were so many good players in the district. But those things are cyclical.

We initiated a plan to expand our membership, get younger and get more diverse. This will be an ongoing process that Steve and his successors will oversee.

As of March, we had 105 new members. We are still getting them. But we had issues with the renewal system. I wish I could explain what happened and why, but I can't.

Suffice it to say, many members never got a renewal notice. Naturally, many of them did not renew, though they undoubtedly would have if had they gotten a notice.

Through the efforts of Joe Mitch and Helen Huegel,

we reached out to those who did not renew. Helen is persistent and organized. Former member by former member, she is tracking those people down to explain that we are sorry if we missed them at renewal time and how much we value their membership.

As of March, Joe said we have approximately 650 members – 100 fewer than a year ago. We lost 200 members at renewal time.

Once Helen gets all those former members back in the fold, along with the new members we have gotten, the membership number will grow.

One of the many benefits of being a member is that we get to vote for All-District and All-America teams, along with Player of the Year and Coach of the Year. Sadly, very few of us voted this year.

On the conference call to finalize our awards, some district reps reported that they received only 10-15 votes. We have nine districts. Let's say it was 15 votes per district. That is 135 votes from 650 members. That is sad.

Again, part of it could be a communication issue.

Dick Jerardi
Philadelphia Daily News
President



Not all members got ballots.

District II rep Dave Jones made a terrific suggestion. In the future, each rep should have a list of every district member. That way, the rep could e-mail to make certain everybody in the district is aware when end-of-the-year votes are on the immediate horizon. Jones does something similar as a Heisman Trophy rep, and he usually gets 100-percent participation from his group.

We will discuss these issues and many more in Detroit. Then, it will be Steve's turn to take over on the Monday morning of the championship game. He will have his own ideas and agenda. With all of our support, he will take the USBWA into a new decade.

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Demise of newspapers sure to be hot topic in Detroit

What is sure to be a major topic for discussion at the USBWA sportswriting workshops held in conjunction with this year’s men’s and women’s NCAA Final Fours is the future of newspapers.

Over the last several months, the newspaper industry has suffered some serious blows. The *Rocky Mountain News* closed, and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* shut down and will now only publish online. The parent owner of the *Philadelphia Daily News* recently filed for bankruptcy, and the Hearst Corporation, parent company of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, has apparently set a deadline for closing the paper if it cannot find a buyer or make significant cuts in expenses.

An online service called “24/7 Wall St.” wrote that, based on its analysis, “eight of the 50 largest daily newspapers in the U. S. could possibly cease publication in the next 18 months.”

It went so far as to create a list of the 10 major dailies that are most likely to close shop and only publish online. They included the *Philadelphia Daily News*, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *Miami Herald*, *Detroit News*, *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *New York Daily News*, *Fort Worth Star-Tribune* and *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*.

The current state of affairs has filtered down to many in the sports journalism profession and affected, not surprisingly, several members of the USBWA.

Past presidents Robin Norwood of the *Los Angeles Times* and Tony Barnhart of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* took buyouts from their papers. Other writers have lost their jobs. Some have had to go on unpaid furlough.

All of this is certainly not good news for the students attending the workshops and looking to pursue careers as sportswriters.

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



But interest in the workshops has been relatively high, both among college and high-school students.

Dave Dorr, a past president of the USBWA and member of the USBWA Hall of Fame, headed up the workshop in St. Louis at the women’s Final Four. He worked with Jason Young, an Associated Press stringer and adviser for Saint Louis University’s student newspaper, and Mel Greenberg of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to line up writers to serve on the seminar panel.

Coordinating the workshop at the men’s Final Four in Detroit was Tom Stanton, a former sportswriter and author of several sports books, including “The Road to Cooperstown.”

Both workshops allowed students to listen to writers talk about their experiences as sportswriters, then take what they heard and apply it in the field.

Each student was assigned an event to cover at the Final Four, and one student at each site was granted a credential for the Final Four games.

Students were asked to submit stories on the events they covered. The USBWA then selected one winner at each workshop to receive a \$1,000 scholarship from the association.

One graduate of the first USBWA workshop held many years ago who was a recipient of a scholarship is now covering college sports for the *Detroit Free Press*.

“I can’t thank the USBWA enough for the opportunity I had,” said Shannon Shelton.

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
- seven issues of *Basketball Times*;
- Marriott Athletic VIP Card
- access to USBWA website (usbwa.com)
- voting for All-America team and player and coach of year
- eligibility for Best Writing Contest, with cash prizes

Send a check for \$40 and let the USBWA make your job of covering college basketball easier.

Name _____

Newspaper/Publication/Website/College _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Office Telephone _____ Cell Phone _____

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Negate networks' special access by outworking them

When it comes to the business of sports journalism, one of the most valuable assets to our jobs is access.

The most annoying fact of life is that some people get it and others don't. It is one of the biggest and most annoying issues in our business because too often, that access is dealt to reporters on an unbalanced and not so arbitrary scale.

The fact of our lives is that TV networks are going to get things given to them. They will get players who are supposed to be unavailable. They are going to talk to people who don't usually talk. A reporter from a network is going to make a phone call to talk to a big whale, and the whale will prefer their brand name over the unknown newspaper guy with no national profile.

And every time something like this happens, it frosts every ink-stained wretch who ever sat in front of a laptop to do their job instead of standing in front of a minicam.

Well, let me be the first to deliver some bad news:

When it comes to access, TV is king, and no amount of complaining about it is going to drastically change that unbalanced hand.

Broadcast partnerships are going to have privileges, and one of them is going to be the easy instant access that print foot soldiers will always have to fight for. That's not going to change, no matter how many angry letters, emails for formal protests the USBWA writes to the schools, the coaches or the NCAA. When CBS, ESPN or any of the regional networks write large checks to broadcast college basketball, they are going to get that special access.

And while our organization will and should continue to fight to narrow the gap in the access between TV and print, here's something we need to stress with equal zest to our membership.

Don't forget to do your part in this battle to narrow the access gap.

The old-school members of our organization already know this. Before TV was the beast that ate our access, it was the dreaded "national media."

Or maybe it was the old guy on the beat who knew all the coaches and ADs, or it was the guy who worked for the major newspaper in the area. In our business, someone is always going to get more access. That's just how it works.

I am the perfect guy to have this conversation, because I have worked in print, TV and radio. I have written for papers as large as *USA Today* and the *Sporting News* and as small as the *Manassas (Va.) Journal-Messenger*. I've been a young beat guy and an old columnist, a "national media guy" and a local grunt working for a 15,000-circulation daily. I have gotten the perks of media access that comes with working for HBO, CNN, TNT and ESPN. Trust me, I have been on all sides of this access dilemma.

I have benefited grandly from it and suffered greatly because of it. And here's the best bit of advice I can offer from all these experiences.

Ultimately, you have more control over this than you might believe.

Work on your relationships. Figure out what your advantage is as a reporter and work it hard. Everyone has an advantage if they're only smart enough to figure out what it is.

I am an old veteran in the business now, so I get good access. When I worked for TNT as a TV sideline reporter

Bryan Burwell St. Louis Post-Dispatch Vice President



on the network's NBA telecasts, Michael Jordan would be escorted into a reserved room in the United Center before a big playoff game and sat down to tape a pre-game interview. MJ didn't make it a habit of doing pregame interviews for the most part, but the power of TNT's brand had special powers.

But I got similar access before I was a TV guy, too.

It's because I worked those relationships and worked them hard.

If you can't get it from the sports-information guy, then get it directly from the source. The battle for access versus television is no different than the battle an inexperienced beat writer faces when going against an established veteran with a ton of well-developed sources.

If you feel like TV is getting special treatment from the school, the conference or the NCAA, find another way to get the information. If you're a beat writer worth anything, you should have already established some sort of relationship with the players. Text them, call them, call their parents, their girl friends, their cousin's barber.

Just get the damned information.

No one said it was going to be easy or fair.

USBWA Hall of Fame

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The book covered the glory and tragedy of New York basketball. It combined an account of the championship season of the New York Knicks with a study of those who played in ghetto playgrounds and became neighborhood legends but never played professionally.

Axthelm died in 1991 of liver failure at the age of 47.



Pete Axthelm

Bozich is in his 31st year at the *Louisville Courier-Journal and Times*. He replaced USBWA Hall of Fame member Dick Fenlon as sports columnist at the *Times* in 1981 and became a *Courier-Journal* columnist in 1986. He has covered 27 of the last 28 Final Fours and seven NCAA championship teams at Kentucky, Louisville and Indiana.

Bozich served as USBWA president in 2003-04 and has won more than 20 USBWA writing contest awards and six from APSE. He has also been a college basketball correspondent for *Sports Illustrated* since 1986.



Rick Bozich

McCann is in his 38th year as a sportswriter. Since 1998, he has been sports editor of *The Herald*. He started his career at the Burlington Times-News in 1971 and moved to the *Greensboro News & Record* in 1981 before leaving to replace the legendary Bob Hammel as sports editor at the *Bloomington, Ind., Herald-Times* in 1996.

McCann has covered 17 Final Fours and numerous ACC tournaments and has won 10 USBWA writing awards and more than 20 other state and national writing awards.



Gary McCann

Most Courageous

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A 6-foot-3 shooting guard from Waterbury, Conn., Davis was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma last spring. However, he was able to overcome the cancer and returned to the Aztecs while still undergoing his chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

Davis' saga began last spring when he felt fatigued while playing. Originally, it was thought he may be coming down with mononucleosis. However, there was a lump developing on Davis' neck. He knew about it but he didn't say anything because he didn't want to jeopardize his spot on the team.

His condition grew worse, and a trip to the doctor revealed Davis had cancer. He underwent a series of 12 chemotherapy treatments over a five-month span. He was still undergoing his treatment when fall practice began, and it wasn't unusual to see Davis arrive straight from the doctor to the gym and spend the last 20 minutes in drills.

"I never felt sorry for myself because I'd see people who were a whole lot worse than me," Davis said. "Plus, the doctors said I had a good chance to beat it."

Davis originally started his college career at Texas-El Paso, then transferred to College of Southern Idaho before moving on to San Diego State in 2007. He appeared in 18 games during the 2007-08 season, averaging 5.0 points and 2.7 rebounds.

He was expected to see more minutes as a senior before he took ill late last spring. He is contemplating petitioning the NCAA for a sixth year of eligibility.

Griffin wins Oscar Robertson Trophy

The U.S. Basketball Writers Association has named Oklahoma sophomore Blake Griffin the winner of the prestigious Oscar Robertson Award winner, adding to his long list of accomplishments this season.

Griffin, a 6-foot-10 forward, also was named the Big 12 player of the year and was a unanimous first-team all-Big 12 choice. He led the Big 12 in scoring (22.1) and the nation in rebounding (14.1) and set a Big 12 record by finished 13 games with at least 20 points and 15 rebounds.

Griffin also posted the first 40-20 in Big 12 history, scoring 40 points and grabbing 23 rebounds in a Valentine's Day game against Texas Tech. That was one of his school-record 22 double-doubles during the regular season.

In his next game, Griffin's streak of eight consecutive double-doubles was interrupted when he suffered a concussion against Texas. Griffin sat out one more game, against Kansas, and came back to score 20 points and grab 18 rebounds in his next game, again against Texas Tech. If there were any concerns about his health, Griffin quickly answered them by diving



Blake Griffin

over the scorer's table in pursuit of a loose ball.

Griffin also overcame injury twice as a freshman. The medial collateral ligament in his left knee was strained in a Jan. 14 game against Kansas. He missed just one game and came back to score 17 points and grab 15 rebounds against Baylor.

About six weeks later, cartilage was torn in Griffin's right knee during a March 1 game against Texas A&M. Griffin underwent arthroscopic surgery the next day but was back again after missing just one game, this time scoring 14 points and grabbing eight

rebounds against Missouri.

Home-schooled until the seventh grade, Griffin won four state titles and was twice named Oklahoma state player of the year while playing at Oklahoma Christian School, coached by his father Tommy. Griffin also played two seasons in both college and high school with his older brother, Taylor.

Griffin and Sam Bradford, Oklahoma's Heisman Trophy winner, are the first national award winners in basketball and football in the same academic year.

Kansas' Self wins Henry Iba Trophy

Bill Self has been named the winner of the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's Henry Iba Award – given to the nation's top coach – after leading Kansas to the Big 12 Conference regular-season title in what was believed to be a rebuilding year for the defending NCAA champions.

Self lost all five starters from last season's team. A Big 12 preseason coaches poll predicted the Jayhawks to finish in a tie for third with Baylor. Despite fielding his youngest team in six seasons in Lawrence, the Jayhawks finished 14-2 to the Big 12 title and 25-6 overall. They have won or shared five consecutive Big 12 titles.

Self's rotation included only one player – scoring leader Sherron Collins – who averaged more than 10 minutes during the 2007-08 season. Self also had to rely on two five freshmen, a junior-college transfer who missed half the season and a deep reserve from last season.

Self is a particularly fitting winner of an award named for the man still respectfully referred to as "Mr. Iba." Self is a member of Iba's legendary coaching tree and considers him among his greatest influences. Self played from 1982-85 at Oklahoma State – where Iba coached from 1936-70 – and was an assistant coach for Eddie Sutton, who played for Iba.

Michigan State's Izzo is fitting Good Guy Award winner

By Rick Bozich
Louisville Courier-Journal

This might be the first Final Four played at Ford Field, but it isn't the first college basketball game played at the immense domed facility in downtown Detroit.

The inaugural game was the BasketBowl game that Kentucky and Michigan State played not long after the place opened. The idea was to attract the largest crowd ever for a college basketball game.

They placed the court in the middle of the field and considered it a dry run for bringing future big-time college basketball events to the facility. They worked on the lighting, the seating, the sound. Everything seemed just right to Michigan State basketball coach Tom Izzo.

Except for one thing. Much of the media seating for the event was placed at the 88th level, about as close to

the court as downtown Flint.

That won't work. That was Izzo's opinion. The folks covering the games need to be close to the action where they can hear every squeak of the sneakers, see every grimace and grin, smell all the courtside smells and interpret how the game unfolds.

So Izzo made certain that the press seating was moved down to courtside. That's not the only reason Tom Izzo deserves the Good Guy Award from the US Basketball Writers Association. But it's certainly a start.

Izzo understands that the media is a direct link between basketball programs and basketball fans. He knows that it is important that writers have legitimate access to coaches and players. He takes time to explain things. He doesn't sense a conspiracy behind every question.

Need an example? For the last two seasons, Izzo has

accommodated folks who cover the Spartans with their own taste of Michigan State practice. They're invited to East Lansing for a 2½ hour session. They're issued jerseys, they watch film, they run drills and they finish it off with a post-game meal.

I've been fortunate to cover teams coached by Denny Crum, Rick Pitino, Joe B. Hall, Eddie Sutton, Tubby Smith, Bob Knight and many others. Never had an offer like that. Most coaches these days put you behind the curtain and keep you there.

But I can believe that Izzo wants people to have a greater understanding of what he's trying to accomplish because I've watched film with him and his assistant coaches prior to several NCAA Tournament games.

Tom Izzo is more than simply a Good Guy. He's a guy who's good for the game of college basketball.

Paquette

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Quinn Award winners. In Tranghese's final year as commissioner, we honor the man he brought with him when he got the job.

"I actually had met Katha before I got to Seton Hall," Paquette said, "but I really got to know her better when I was at Seton Hall and she was at St. John's."

"A lot of people maybe saw the rough exterior with Katha, if you didn't know her. But I knew her. Once I got to Seton Hall, she could not have been more accommodating and helpful to me."

Seton Hall and St. John's were rather serious rivals back then. It was never an issue between John and Katha. They did their jobs and helped each other.

"She loved the school, she loved her coach and she loved working at St. John's," Paquette said. "And she was

also very effective with the media."

Anybody who knows John knows he is understated, but willing to help in every way. Ask him a question, you will get an answer. Nothing is too difficult.

I asked him if he could get the commissioner on the phone so he could talk about the newest Katha Quinn Award winner. In very short order, Tranghese called me.

"I think the whole world has changed, but John still is old school," Tranghese said. "He relies tremendously on relationships and on service. That's what I think this job is all about. He has enormous respect from people across the country that have to deal with him and our conference. I think (the award) is an acknowledgement from the people he's had to serve that he's done a great job. I know it means a great deal to him. It's as excited as I've seen John in a long time."

Anybody who knows John knows he really does not do excitement. He just does his job.

"In 19 years, it's the one area I've never had to worry

about," Tranghese said of the department Paquette runs at the Big East. "John's got an incredible relationship with the media. He understands what the job is. And on a personal basis, I've won the award, and John and I and Katha were pretty good friends. And I know that if she were looking at this, she'd have a big smile on her face, because I know how much she liked and respected John."

During the 1989 Big East Tournament, friends asked if they should see Katha in the hospital. When they were told no, Paquette said they knew "the end was near."

Katha died on March 17, 1989, two days after St. John's began its 1989 NIT title run. She was 34.

"They dedicated it to her," Paquette remembered. "You know what? I don't know how many SIDs get stuff dedicated to them by teams. She had a presence. It was a professional and personal presence."

John Paquette has a presence, too. He is dependable, approachable and professional. The USBWA is thrilled that he's the winner of the 2009 Katha Quinn Award.